

China's Aid policy approach to Poverty Alleviation in the recipient country: A Case study of the Republic of Guinea

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Abstract

This paper examines the extent to which China's aid policies integrate poverty alleviation as a goal of their aid in general, particularly in Guinea. More specifically, the paper analyzed how aid donors focus on poverty alleviation and which policies and mechanisms are in place to address poverty in the countries receiving aid. Regarding the methodology, the author collected data from secondary sources, including government declarations of donors, policy documents at both the donor and recipient levels, as well as from scholarly publications. The following findings resulted from study: China's aid policies have progressively incorporated poverty alleviation objectives and identified sectors for intervention against poverty. However, the limitations of China approach to poverty is that China adopts a top-down approach to poverty reduction and lacks of an impact evaluation mechanism based on poverty alleviation.

Keywords: Aid policy, China, Guinea, Poverty alleviation, Strategy.

Introduction

Today, the rise of China has sparked a heated debate about the threat it poses to the traditional donors' aid policies and practices. Since the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation in 2006, China's renewed interest in Africa has generated significant attention and debate (Omoruyi et al., 2017).

Western media have criticized China for engaging in debt trap diplomacy by increasing the debt burden of many low- and middle-income countries in exchange for gaining resources (Woods, 2008; Berthelemy, 2011; Were, 2018; Financial Times, 2018, IMF, 2018). In addition, China has been criticized for supporting countries unwilling to undertake macroeconomic reforms deemed necessary by the West to reduce poverty (Woods, 2008; Bräutigam, 2011).

This debate has reached a point where the topic of aid effectiveness has taken over the discussion of development aid.

Due to criticisms regarding the role played by foreign aid in low- and middle-income countries in the early 1990s, the donor community has shifted its goal from solely focusing on economic growth to focus on poverty alleviation. Since then, there has been considerable pressure from the doctrines and the recipient countries to make poverty alleviation an overarching goal of aid donors.

Following the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, the Monterey Conference in 2002, the Paris Declaration in 2005, the Accra Action Agenda in 2008, and more recently, the sustainable development goals in 2015, the role of aid as a tool for poverty alleviation has been recognized by the donor community. Notably, the ability of the donor to alleviate poverty has been considered a criterion for distinguishing traditional from emerging donors.

Regarding aid policies and practices, donors have approached this issue of poverty alleviation in quite different ways. In this regard, the following questions require scholarly attention: To what extent does poverty

alleviation appear to constitute an overarching goal of China's aid policies, and how, from a strategic standpoint, are the policies addressing the causes of poverty in general and particularly in Guinea?

Literature Review

Sino-Guinean Relationships

Guinea receives assistance from several development partners. Bilaterally, this includes France, the United States (USAID), Japan (JICA), Germany (GIZ/KFW), Belgium, Spain (AECID), Morocco, and Saudi Arabia, and emerging donors such as China, India, and Brazil.

In addition to these bilateral donors, there are also multilateral and regional donors such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Union, the United Nations Development Program, the African Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank (IDB), Arab funds, etc. (CIP 2016-2020). Approximately 85% of the Guinean economy is financed through official development assistance (Diallo, 2014).

Following its brutal break with colonial power from 1958 to 1975, Guinea began collaborating with new financial partners who agreed to support the country in its development efforts (Diallo, 2018). Examples of such partners for Guinea include the Soviet Union (USSR) and China¹. The Soviet Union financed several industrial projects in Guinea, such as the Mamou food processing plant and the N'Zérékore sawmill. It also funded the construction of a hotel, cattle breeding programs, the creation of the Polytechnic Institute of Conakry, and various other projects, including a stadium.

Guinea has been a partner of China ever since the country declared independence from France and, more importantly, during the suspension of Franco-Guinean diplomatic relations in 1965. There have been economic, commercial, and cultural ties between Guinea and China since 1959.

Among the other projects that China has financed are the cigarette and match factories and tea processing plants, the construction of a hydroelectric plant in Conakry, and the construction of the office building in Conakry, such as the Peoples Palace, which hosts the National Legislative Assembly of Guinea. China has become one of Guinea's principal economic partners after France since 2003 (Doumbouya et al., 2008).

China's Aid and Projects in Guinea

China's aid to Guinea is challenging to quantify with certainty at present. Due to the absence of a central open database regarding China's assistance to Guinea, we cannot trace the aid flow. Therefore, it isn't easy to aggregate the amount of aid that Guinea has received at the beginning of their relationship. Moreover, the difficulty of estimating China's aid has to do with the methods used to deliver it (in kind or grant, China's resource for infrastructure aid R4I) and the instruments used (project aid).

In contrast with other donors, such as France, the website of the Chinese Embassy in Guinea does not provide any precise amounts of aid other than listing the projects. The only sources of information regarding China's aid are online media and a few publications pertaining to China's aid to Guinea. For instance, some studies provide data from 1959 to 2008. Among others, Guinea has received USD 440 million in free-interest loans from China, USD 374 million in technical assistance, and USD 100 million in commercial loans (Doumbouya et al., 2008).

Guinea received few in-kind aids after independence. For example, China donated 5000 tons of rice to Guinea after France departed the country in 1959 (Keita, 2019).

Information from the media about the individual projects financed by China but not considered development aid by the OECD/DAC can supplement the abovementioned data. Among these is the agreement on resources for infrastructure (R4I) signed between China and Guinea in October 2016. The amount of the project was USD 20 billion. As a quid pro quo, the Guinean government will grant mining licenses to Chinese

¹ Further, other donors, including Germany (the Federal Republic of Germany), the former Yugoslavia, the United States, and Great Britain, were also present in Guinea after independence.

mining companies (Barma, 2017). Thus, the loan is expected to be reimbursed from the revenues of the mining exploitation.

On the other hand, it is essential to recall that the nature of this loan (resources for infrastructure, R4I) remains unclear. There is no indication of whether the loan is concessional or commercial.

Additionally, other projects have benefited from the Chinese grant of USD 100 million. These projects include the construction of the Sino-Guinean hospital and the Parliament building and supporting the National Adaptation Program to Climate Change (Barma, 2017). During the FOCAC in 2018, China committed USD 6 million to finance the Guinean government's food security program and the water supply project (Diallo, 2018).

Table 1. Grant and Interest free loans

Designation	Date and signature
Economic and technical cooperation agreement	13/09/1960
Economic and technical cooperation agreement	16/11/1966
Cultural project agreement	26/08/1968
Economic and technical cooperation agreement	09/10/1969
Interest free loan	13/12/1972
Interest free loan	20/08/1980
Interest free loan	25/03/1985
Interest free loan	10/07/1988
Interest free loan	11/01/1992
Interest free loan	24/09/1993
Economic and technical cooperation agreement: Grant	03/11/1995
Economic and technical cooperation agreement: Grant	17/06/1996
Economic and technical cooperation agreement: Grant	28/12/1997
Economic and technical cooperation agreement: Grant	11/06/1998
Economic and technical cooperation agreement: Grant	09/10/1999
Economic and technical cooperation agreement: Grant	14/09/2000
Economic and technical cooperation agreement: Grant	13/02/2001
Economic and technical cooperation agreement: Grant	18/11/2002
Economic and technical cooperation agreement: Grant	16/05/2003
Interest free loan	09/12/2003
Interest free loan	26/10/2004
Economic and technical cooperation agreement: Grant	26/10/2004
Interest free loan	18/11/2005
Aid in kind	18/11/2005
Grant	25/08/2006
Interest free loan	25/08/2006
Aid in kind: Medical equipment	25/08/2006
Grant	14/12/2006
Grant	05/07/2007
Grant	05/07/2007

Source: L'économie Guinéenne No 24/25

Table 2. Projects financed by Chinese aid in Guinea.

	Project	Years	Amount
China's aid projects in Guinea	The People's Palace	1966-1967	RMB 11.5 million
	Construction of National Tobacco and Match factory	1963-1964	NA
	Construction hydroelectric dam	1964-1966	RMB 21.990 million
	Macenta Thea Factory	1968	NA
	Oil mill of Dabola	1970	NA
	Construction of industrial brickyard	1970-1972	NA
	Agriculture equipment factories	1974	NA
	Sugar and Alcohol production factory	1976	NA
	The presidential palace	1996-1997	USD 7 million
	The construction of the National Radio and Television (Koloma 2)	2000	RMB 60.5 million
	The emission centers of Labé, Kankan, and N'Zérékoré	2001	RMB17 million
	Condeyah Health Center	2001	RMB 5 million
	Equipment of the Koloma 2	2004	RMB16.7 million
	Technical Assistance to Koloma 2	2006-2007	RMB 4.7 million
	The reconstruction of the road between Coyah, Mamou, and Dabola	NA	USD 1.2 billion
	The rehabilitation of roads and sanitation in the capital (Conakry)	NA	USD 200 million
	The reconstruction of four universities	NA	USD 300 million
	The interconnection of the power grid in Upper Guinea	NA	USD 250 million
	Construction and equipment of Sino-Guinean Hospital	2013	USD 10 million
	Construction of Nongo's stadium	2007-2011	USD 50 million
Grant to the fight against Ebola	2014	USD 5 million	

Source: Adapted by author from media report.

In addition to supporting the infrastructure sector, China has provided technical assistance to various government sectors. Several technical assistance projects have been implemented in the agriculture, energy, and health sectors. The Chinese have sent 27 medical teams to Guinea, totaling 660 personnel, since 1968. Around 700 Guinean students have been awarded scholarships from the Chinese government to study in China since

1973.

We can round the total amount of Chinese aid projects in Guinea between 1960 and 2009 (infrastructure and technical assistance) to hundred six (106) (Diallo, 2009).

Review of scholarly work relating to the nexus between China's aid and poverty reduction.

In recent years, a number of studies have been conducted regarding China's aid to African, Asian, and Latin American countries. Scholars, however, differ on the role played by China's aid in reducing poverty in its partners' countries. According to skeptics, China's aid has other goals than poverty reduction, whereas optimists believe that China's aid has contributed to poverty reduction in some areas.

a. Skeptics Views

There are several critiques made by the skeptics of China's aid, mainly about its effectiveness in reducing poverty. When analyzing China's aid allocation, Kapchanga (2013) concluded that the aid does not aim to reduce poverty. Rather than providing aid to the poorest countries, China's aid is provided to authoritarian regimes and resource-rich countries. Despite the autocratic nature of their regimes, Zimbabwe, Angola, and Sudan, for instance, continue to receive Chinese assistance. Consequently, Kapchanga's study concluded that poverty reduction is not the overarching goal of China's aid. In the author's opinion, the primary purpose of China's aid is to obtain natural resources from the recipient (Kapchanga, 2013, para 9). The findings of this study align with those of Cabestan (2013) regarding the economic motives of China. The author argues that China's aid-giving is motivated by its desire to gain access to raw materials, agricultural products, and markets for its manufactured goods. In addition, China is using aid as an instrument to internationalize its firms in the infrastructure sector in Africa (Cabestan, 2013, p.152).

In her study, Sun (2014) pointed out that the intention of China's aid to Africa is not entirely altruistic. She added that Chinese projects create access to Africa's natural resources, local markets and business opportunities for Chinese companies, and employment for Chinese laborers. The author pointed the following:

“When Chinese officials emphasize that China also provides aid to countries that are not rich in natural resources to defuse international criticisms, they often forget to mention that China may have its eyes on other things which these countries can deliver, such as their support of Beijing's “one China” policy, of China's agenda at multilateral forums, and of China as a responsible stakeholder” (Sun, 2014, para.17).

Will (2012) and Lum et al. (2009) also consider that projects such as cultural centers, government buildings, and stadiums offer limited or transitory economic benefits for the beneficiary (Strange et al., 2013, p.11).

b. Optimists views

Among the optimists is Brautigam, who has conducted extensive research on China's aid. In her book *Dragon Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa* (2010), Brautigam compares China's aid to that of the European Union. The author believes that China's development aid has contributed to poverty reduction by supporting economic growth through infrastructure and human development projects in education, health, and training.

During 2010 and 2013, studies were conducted on the impact of China's aid on Sudan (Nour 2010), Uganda (Guloba et al., 2010), and Cameroon (Doggima, 2013). The focus of all of these studies was to determine how China's aid enhanced the self-reliance capabilities of recipients. The results of the studies conducted on Sudan and Uganda indicate that Chinese aid has enhanced capacity in both countries. The results of the study about Cameroon, however, indicate that China's aid has a minor impact on capacity building.

In his study, Banik focused on Malawi. The author examined China's infrastructure development, employment creation, and support for agriculture, health, and education sectors. The author assessed the

contribution of China's aid to poverty reduction by focusing on the perceptions of donors and beneficiaries.

The study found that the Chinese intervention aligned with the six priority areas outlined in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS), which include: agriculture and food security; irrigation and water development; transport and infrastructure development; energy generation and supply; integrated rural development; and, prevention and management of nutrition disorders and HIV/AIDS. The study also concluded that China had created about 3,000 jobs for Malawians through infrastructure projects.

c. Conclusion

As a result, we can divide the literature on China's aid and poverty reduction into two categories. First, studies led by the American writer Brautigam and followed by others such as Guloba et al. (2010), Doggima (2013), and Banick (2013) found positive links between China's aid and poverty in some African countries.

Alternatively, some scholars believe that China's aid impact on poverty is quite questionable for three main reasons: the wrong allocation of aid, the limited employment opportunities that are created for the beneficiaries, the negligible impact of the aid on capacity building, the nature of some projects which may be irrelevant for poverty reduction and finally the adverse environmental effects of China's projects. It must be noted, however, that most of the criticisms have been countered by arguments that diminish their substance. However, most of the criticisms have been countered by arguments that undermine their validity.

Accordingly, based on the findings from the literature, this paper will analyse from a comparative perspective the approach used by China and OECD/DAC donors, specifically France, to alleviate poverty in the Republic of Guinea. This study will conduct a policy-level analysis rather than a project-level analysis.

Methods

This paper analyze China's policies regarding poverty alleviation in general and particularly in Guinea. In that regard, this study gathered data primarily from the aid policy documents of China, the policy documents of the recipient government, and scholarly publications. The study made extensive use of secondary sources.

The review of China's aid policy documents included the declarations and commitments made by China in FOCACs between 2000 and 2021 and the White papers on foreign assistance (2011-2014-2021). More specifically, the following China's aid policy documents were analyzed: (the White Papers on China Foreign Aid 2011, 2014, and 2021; China's Eight Principles on Foreign Aid 1964; and the Exim-Bank Concessional Loan Regulation of 1995) and declaration of authorities (the China Premier's declaration in Addis Ababa in 2014 and Xi Jinping declaration in 2021 at Dakar forum).

For the recipient country side, the publication, *Journal de l'Economie Guinéenne* titled: 50 ans de coopération exemplaire (2009) was explored as well. The purpose of this document was to clarify and identify China's aid projects in Guinea.

Findings

In this study, the main questions are to what extent poverty alleviation is taken into account in China's aid policies, and what strategies have these two donors implemented to address poverty in general and particularly in Guinea. The following findings can be drawn in light of data collected.

Poverty Alleviation in China's aid policies

The analysis of this research revealed that China has integrated poverty into its aid policies from the beginning. Some aid policy documents make indirect references to poverty as a goal of China's aid and while other set poverty alleviation as one of the goal of China's aid primarily in Africa (Fig.1).

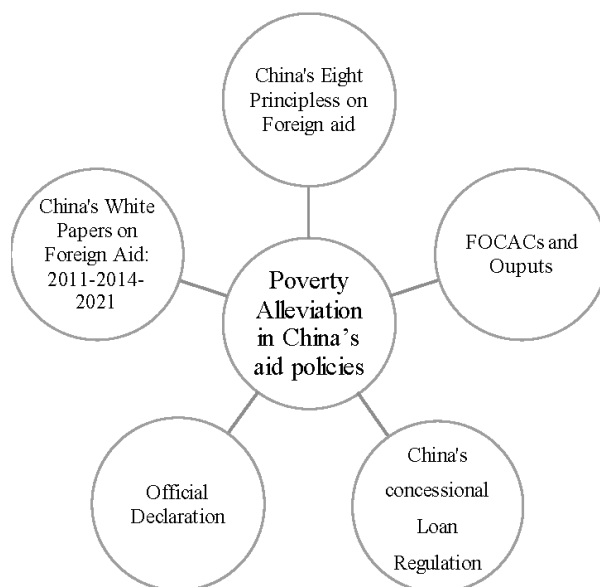


Figure 1 List of China's aid policy documents.

a. China's Eight Principles:

In the earlier policy documents, such as China's Eight Principles on Foreign Aid, poverty alleviation in the recipient country was addressed through the promotion of capacity building and economic development. Although China does not explicitly state that poverty alleviation is one of its goals in this policy document, some aspects of poverty are addressed by the concept of economic development. Fitzgerald and Leigh (2002) define "economic development as the preservation and raise of the community's standard of living through a process of human and physical infrastructure development based on principles of equity and sustainability." This definition addresses some causes of poverty, such as the lack of income, education, health, and the basic infrastructure necessary to live a better life.

The only shortcoming of this aid policy is the lack of clear strategic guidelines regarding how China's assistance can address and the support the various components of economic development. In addition, this policy document combines two interests: those of the recipient country and those of China. As a result, it is important to emphasize that China's aid does not exist in a vacuum from an economic, political, or strategic perspective (Pan, 2015; Diakite and Phillips, 2019).

Although the economic development of the recipient country is a stated objective of China's foreign aid, China's economic development remains its top priority. In China, this strategy is referred to as a win-win approach to development, combining the interests of donors and recipients.

b. China's Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCACs): 2000 to 2021

Since 2000, several FOCACs have been organized between China and Africa regarding various topics, including aid, investment, trade, etc. Some sections of the FOCACs devoted to aid have approached poverty alleviation differently. In this regard, the FOCACs can be categorized in the following ways:

The first category recognized poverty as a challenge for development in Africa and identified sectors for China's intervention without explicitly referring to them as a means of reducing poverty. The 2000 FOCAC is a good example. The Chinese government and its partners acknowledged that "aggravated poverty has hindered the development of Africa" (FOCAC, 2000, p. 8). The declaration did not state whether poverty alleviation was the primary objective of China's intervention (aid, investment, and trade) in Africa.

In the second category, China and its partners focused on strengthening their cooperation in poverty alleviation. Consequently, in the 2009 FOCAC, a section was devoted to cooperation on poverty alleviation.

Both China and its partner acknowledged in the declaration titled "Cooperation in Poverty Reduction" that the task of eradicating poverty is a challenging one. In paragraph 5.5, they (China and Africa) emphasize

the urgent need for Africa to accelerate the process of poverty reduction through cooperation and exchanges in this area.

As a result, China committed to continue sharing its poverty reduction experiences with its African partners through seminars and training sessions that would build the African partner's capacity and make poverty alleviation efforts more effective (FOCACs, 2009 and 2012).

At the 2015 FOCAC, China reiterated poverty alleviation as an objective of its presence and, more specifically, its aid to Africa. As a result, a number of actions need to be taken, including a deepening of the exchange of experiences regarding poverty eradication strategies². To implement such initiatives, some tools have been developed.

These include the China-Africa Poverty Eradication and Development Conference, the establishment of multilevel inter-governmental and inter-society dialogue mechanisms for poverty eradication, as well as workshops and training sessions in poverty eradication and development (FOCAC, 2015).

Earlier conferences from 2010³ also examined the link between poverty alleviation and agricultural development, poverty alleviation and infrastructure, and poverty alleviation and special economic zones.

The Africa-China Poverty Reduction and Development Conference, held as part of the 2018 FOCAC, focused on poverty alleviation, sustainable development, technology transfer, and agricultural exchanges within the Belt and Road Initiative.

To date, these conferences have been limited to sharing experiences on strategies used by China and its African partners. A total of nine meetings related to poverty alleviation have been held between China and Africa.

Another tool for alleviating poverty is training, which is mentioned in most FOCACs' declarations. They primarily target African government officials who are involved in poverty alleviation.

We can highlight the following training that took place between China and Africa since the aftermath of 2009 FOCAC:

- Seminar held in 2011 for Nigerian middle-rank officials on "Management of Development Aid";
- A seminar held in 2012 on the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Poverty Reduction for Developing Countries;
- A series of seminars was organized in 2012 for Officials from Francophone African countries on Development-oriented Poverty Alleviation and Practice, Rural Development and Poverty Reduction for Developing Countries, and Rural Public Service and Comprehensive Poverty Reduction for Officials from Francophone African countries.
- Two majors' seminars were held in 2013. In the first, the topic was the implementation of the UN Millennium Development Goals for Francophone African officials, and in the second, the theme was the Poverty Reduction Strategies for Nigerian officials in 2013.⁴
- Conference on China-Africa partnership for poverty reduction held in Uganda between 28 and 29 November 2019.
- The 2021 FOCAC Africa-China Poverty Reduction and Development Conference was held On December 7. It targeted all the participants to FOCAC.
- Seminar was held on July 22, 2022 on Development and Poverty Reduction for Government Officials from Belt and Road Countries Ends in Beijing. Nigeria was the major participant.

China has held 133 poverty reduction seminars and shared its experience with 3,587 practitioners from 133 countries and regions, including 2,122 representatives from 52 African countries (Lei 2018).

² The theme of the 2015 FOCAC was "Towards Post-2015 Africa-China Sustainable Cooperation on Poverty Reduction and Development". It was intended to explore an innovative means of reducing poverty.

³ The Africa-China Poverty Reduction and Development Conference Held in Addis Ababa in 2010

⁴ See the list of training at <http://www.iprcc.org/Index/skip/lid/146.html>

During the 2018 FOCAC, capacity building and other FDI and trade tools were considered tools for alleviating poverty. Agriculture, infrastructure development (rural public services), industrialization, health, education, and the environment were identified as potential intervention areas. However, it is essential to emphasize that aid was not the only instrument used to intervene in the sectors. Foreign direct investment and trade were also considered effective tools.⁵

In order to address poverty, a number of actions were identified. Among them are collaborations with African countries and relevant institutions to launch joint research projects, policy consultations on poverty alleviation, and sending experts and volunteers to provide technical assistance. Providing support to young entrepreneurs was also considered a means of addressing poverty (FOCAC, 2018).

The 2021 FOCAC was organized under the theme “Deepen China-Africa Partnership and Promote Sustainable Development to Build a China-Africa Community with a Shared Future in the New Era” (Figure 2).

China and its partner approaches toward poverty was not much different from the previous ones. China’s poverty alleviation still focuses mainly on sharing experience on poverty reduction (through technical assistance) and building infrastructure⁶.

Under the section 12 of the declaration, both China and Africa reiterated the collective needs to reduce poverty in order to meet the same SDGs through sharing experiences “on governance, poverty alleviation and development” (FOCAC, 2021).

In addition to China’s traditional focus, President Xi emphasized China’s commitment to supporting Global Development Initiatives, including the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As a result of the forum, the Dakar Action Plan (2022-2024) was adopted (Fig. 2).

In conjunction with the same forum, the Africa-China Poverty Reduction and Development Conference took place online on December 7, 2021⁷.

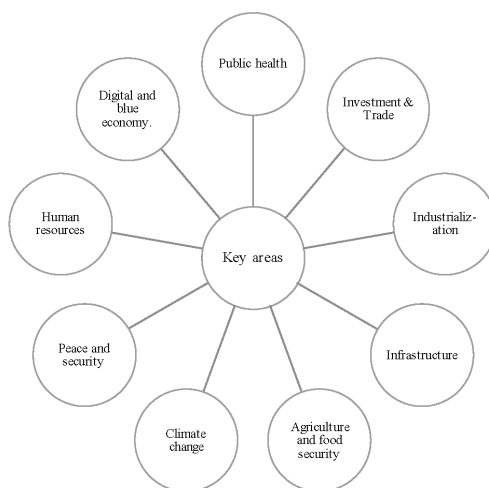


Figure 2 Dakar Declaration of the Eighth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2021.

⁵ https://focacsummit.mfa.gov.cn/eng/hyqk_1/t1594297.htm

⁶ Among other commitments taken by Xi announced that China will undertake 10 poverty reduction and agricultural projects for Africa, and send 500 agricultural experts to Africa. China will set up a number of China-Africa joint centers for modern agrotechnology exchange, demonstration and training in China, encourage Chinese institutions and companies to build in Africa demonstration villages for China-Africa cooperation on agricultural development and poverty reduction, and support the Alliance of Chinese Companies in Africa for Corporate Social Responsibilities in launching the initiative of “100 Companies in 1,000 Villages”.

⁷ <https://www.iprcc.org/article/45yvBpz3rEm>.

c. Dakar Action Plan (2022-2024)

Dakar Action is one of the outputs of the Forum of China Africa Cooperation. It highlights nine majors program guiding China-Africa Relations in the next two years (Fig.3).

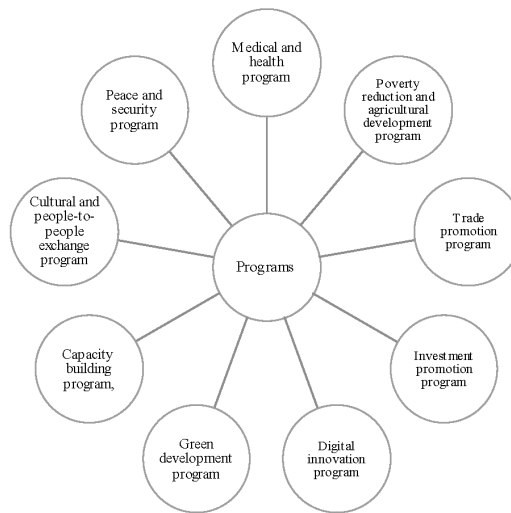


Figure 3 Nine majors’ programs were identified as part of China’s strategies.

In the Dakar Action Plan, various areas were identified for China’s interventions in Africa in terms of political, economic, and social cooperation (Fig. 4).

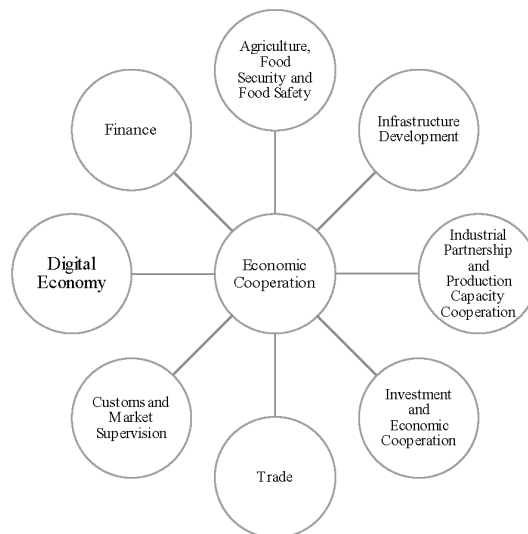


Figure 4 Economic cooperation⁸.

In these areas, financing tools include concessional loans and other financial support, such as a special loan for the development of African SMEs and Panda bonds. Though the focus on these eight areas does not express much about China’s poverty reduction strategies, some do address the underlying causes of poverty. In this context, poverty-related areas include:

- Agriculture.
- Food Security and Food Safety.
- Employment creation through infrastructure projects.
- Support for local exports to China through duty-free export policies.

⁸ See, FOCAC 2021 at http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/202201/t20220124_10632444.htm

Figure 5 below provides an overview of China and Africa's social cooperation which appears to be centered around poverty alleviation (Fig. 6).

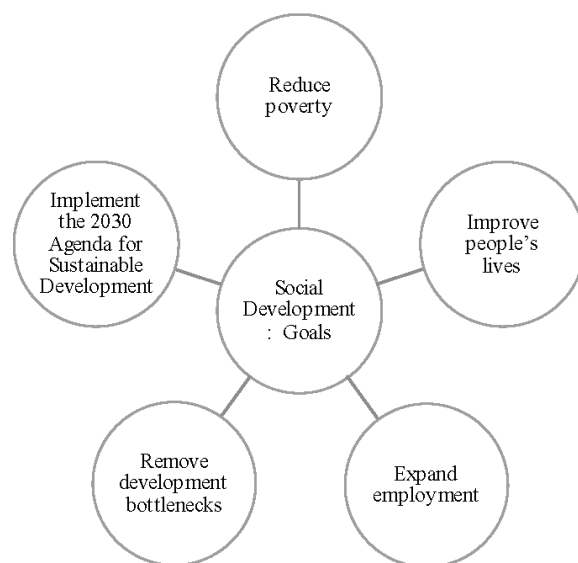


Figure 5 Goal of Social Development policy strategy in Africa

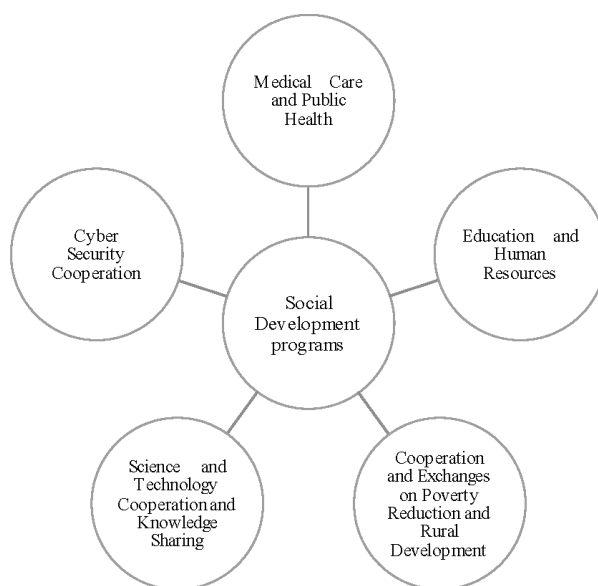


Figure 6 Areas of intervention for Social Development in Africa

There are a number of ways that China may intervene in each of these areas, including aid in kind (such as equipment), infrastructure development, technical assistance, regular policy dialogue, technology exchange (health sector), vocational and technical training, scholarship programs, capacity building in poverty reduction, and technology transfer (Education and Human Resources).

In addition, the intervention has focused on organizing workshops on poverty reduction policies and rural development tailored to the needs of African countries, as well as organizing Poverty Reduction and Development Conferences.

Additionally, other fields have been explored, including poverty-oriented agricultural assistance (Cooperation and Exchanges on Poverty Reduction and Rural Development), technology-supported poverty reduction, and the establishment of a Joint Research Center in the fields of modern agriculture, biodiversity, eco-

environmental protection, and public health (Science and Technology Cooperation and Knowledge Sharing). As far as cyber security cooperation is concerned, its relation and approach to poverty reduction has not been outlined in the FOCAC.

d. China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035

This document aims to establish the direction and objectives of China-African cooperation in the medium and long term.⁹ The vision was developed in accordance with the Chinese Vision 2035, the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the African Union Agenda 2063¹⁰, as well as the national development strategies of the African countries. In this regard, the noble question is, to what extent have the national development strategies of the 53 African countries been incorporated into this vision document? In addition, how were all the foundational visions (from China, the United Nations, the African Union, and partner countries) integrated into one?

Out of the eight objectives of the future cooperation between China and Africa, objective five (improving the well-being of people) is focused on poverty alleviation (Fig. 7).

Figure 8 illustrates the strategy designed by China and its African partners to improve the well-being of their citizens. In section 5.2 of the vision, a list of ingredients that can be used to combat poverty is provided (Fig. 9).

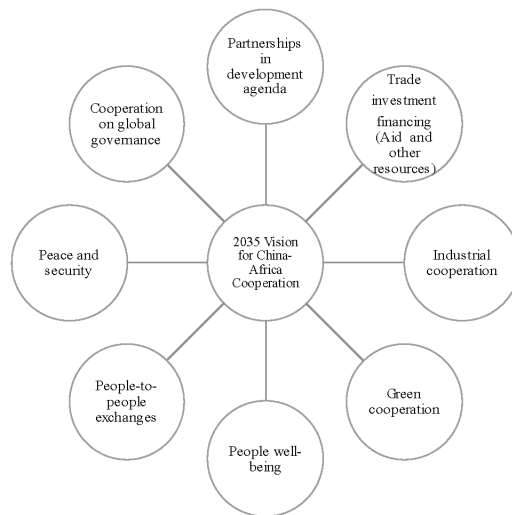


Figure 7 2035 Vision for China-Africa Cooperation

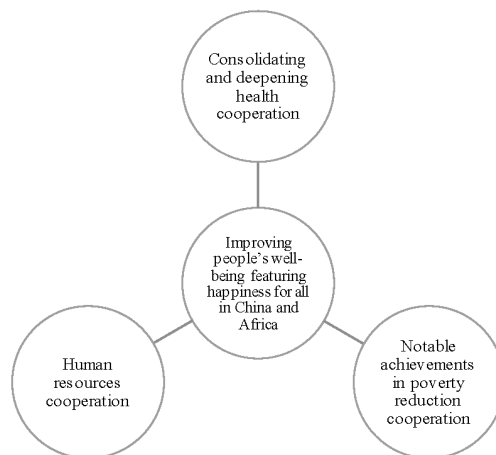


Figure 8 Improving people's well-being featuring happiness for all in China and Africa

⁹ Some critics consider the 2035 Vision for China-Africa Cooperation as a vision aligned with China's own 2035 Vision for development, and is a clear continuation of the trends, evolution, and adjustments in China's Africa strategy (Sun, 2021).

¹⁰ <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/goals>



Figure 9 China and Africa Agreed poverty Reduction strategies

Thus, regarding China's forum with African countries, it is essential to point out that poverty alleviation is at the center of the discussion. There are, however, notable differences between the FOCACs in the way they address poverty, either directly (through pro-poor targeting and projects) or indirectly (through sectoral targeting with a trickle-down effect). Poverty alleviation was not a focus of the FOCACs in 2000, 2003, and 2006 but was addressed indirectly through sectoral strategies. The focus of China's commitments was on some aspects of poverty alleviation, such as improving the living conditions of the partner countries in Africa by providing them with education, health care, water, and basic infrastructure. Specifically, there was a lack of differentiation between what action falls under China's aid domain and what falls under China's investment domain. 2009, 2012, 2015, 2018, and 2021 FOCACs, incorporated poverty alleviation into the discussion between China and its partners. The FOCACs identified a more straightforward strategy for addressing poverty reduction through aid. As a result of the 2021 FOCAC and its outputs (2021 Dakar Action Plan and China-African Vision 2035), China's aid is expected to be aligned with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the national development strategies of the partner countries. Poverty alleviation has been at the forefront of China-Africa relations over the last decade. However, its weight in the overall relationship remains unclear. This is explicit both in the FOCACs and its various outputs such as the 2021 Dakar declaration and the China-Africa vision 2035.

In addition to examining FOCACs, this paper analyzes other aid policy documents in order to determine to what extent they focus on poverty alleviation.

e. China's Concessional Loan and poverty alleviation

China's concessional loan regulation's focus on poverty alleviation remains debatable. According to the Concessional Loan Regulations of 1995, the project seeking financing should generate "promising economic returns or good social benefits" for the recipient country. However, there was no clear definition of "economic return" and "good social benefits" and whether these benefits should accrue to the poor or the non-poor. Apart from this lack of clarity, it is important to highlight a limited correlation between China's concessional loans and poverty alleviation. Generally, such loans are not provided to poor countries due to the requirement that the country's creditworthiness is established. Consequently, poor countries with little

or no solvency are excluded and not eligible for participation.

Consequently, we can draw the following conclusions. First, poverty alleviation cannot be viewed as an overarching objective of China's concessional loans. It targets creditworthy countries and is less likely to benefit overburdened poor countries in Africa due to their inability to honor their debts.¹¹ In addition, China has shown a preference for addressing poverty through grants and, to some extent, interest-free loans (to finance public facilities) in poor African countries.

f. China-AU Joint Programme on Poverty Reduction and China White Papers on Foreign Aid¹²

This study also examined other policy documents, such as the China-AU Joint Programme on Poverty Reduction and China's White Papers on Foreign Aid. The two policies illustrate a significant change in China's approach to alleviating poverty in its partner countries. Poverty became a clear focus of China's aid, with concrete strategies to address the problem.

The joint program emphasizes sharing experiences related to poverty alleviation and providing technical assistance in critical sectors for poverty alleviation, including health care (including the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases), agriculture (technology transfer), and the water sector. Comparatively to China's Eight Principles, the China-AU Joint Programme demonstrates a greater level of clarity and commitment from China to alleviate poverty in Africa. In comparison to the FOCACs, the sectoral intervention has remained consistent. Most of the sectors identified by the FOCACs appear in the joint strategy. It should also be noted that the strategies for addressing poverty, such as sharing of experiences and providing technical assistance, are similar to those outlined in the FOCACs of 2009, 2012, 2018, and 2021.

As a final point, this is the first time that both Chinese and African partners have decided to take poverty alleviation to an international level in contrast to the previous FOCACs.

In this regard, we can view the joint program as an innovative tool that placed poverty alleviation at the center of China and Africa's cooperation. It also identified the means, strategies, and principles that guided China's intervention.

The 2014 White Paper on foreign aid complements China's poverty alleviation initiative in Africa¹³. In the preamble of the White Paper, China states that China :

“will provide aid to the best of its ability to other low- and middle-income countries, especially the least developed countries (LDCs), to reduce poverty and improve livelihood” (State Council 2014, Para, 1).

Furthermore, the paper mentions that:

“One of the important objectives of China's foreign assistance is to support other low- and middle-income countries to reduce poverty and improve the livelihood of their peoples” (State Council, section 2, para 1).

China is committed to addressing poverty through developing the agriculture sector, improving education levels, improving health and medical services, and providing emergency humanitarian assistance when severe disasters occur. A number of these interventions are similar to those mentioned in previous aid policies, such as the FOCACs.

Similar to the China-African Union (AU) joint program on Poverty Reduction, the 2014 White Paper

¹¹ In 2013, for example, Lesotho spent \$40 million paying its external creditors. Kenya spent \$620 million, servicing its external debt, which is equal to 20% of the aid it received the same year.

¹² The white paper in 2011 provided a high-level summary of its aid policy (including different historical contexts, rationale and principles), financing (including three financial arrangements and eight patterns), distribution (geographically and sector-wise), management and international cooperation.

¹³ In the 2011 White paper on foreign, besides providing data on China's aid, list the result of China's aid. Among other, the paper considered that China has been doing its best to provide foreign aid, to help recipient countries to strengthen their self-development capacity, enrich and improve their peoples' livelihood, and promote their economic growth and social progress.

on Foreign Aid specifies that poverty reduction is China's primary objective and identifies intervention sectors. The intervention areas are the same as those identified in the FOCACs and the China-AU Joint Programme. In this regard, the sectoral approach of China can be regarded as consistent.

In China's White Paper 2021, also known as China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era, China outlines its comprehensive views on international development cooperation beyond foreign aid. It is stated that eliminating poverty is the "ultimate objective" (Malakala and Ji, 2021).

Donor Tracker reports that "China links its priorities to the Sustainable Development Goals agenda¹⁴ while maintaining a strong foundational cultural principle" (Donor Tracker, 2021).

Among these principles are "universal harmony, return of kindness with kindness, the tradition of internationalism (a sense of justice and empathy), and a sense of responsibility as a major country."¹⁵ The idea that "projects should be proposed, agreed upon, and led by recipient countries" is another fundamental principle of Chinese development cooperation.

The Paper includes eight thematic areas which echo many of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. These include poverty reduction, food security, health, education, gender equality, infrastructure, sustainable and innovation-driven economic growth, and environmental protection.¹⁶

In its White Paper of 2021, China outlined the objectives of its development cooperation.

The first objective is promoting a global community of shared futures, which includes helping other developing countries to alleviate poverty and improve people's lives.

The second objective seeks the greater good and shared interests, including preserving mutual benefit for win-win outcomes.

The third objective integrates the South-South cooperation mindset into China's development strategies.

The fourth one consists of promoting the Belt and Road initiative as a public goods.¹⁷

The Final objective involves assisting partner countries in implementing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (figure 10).

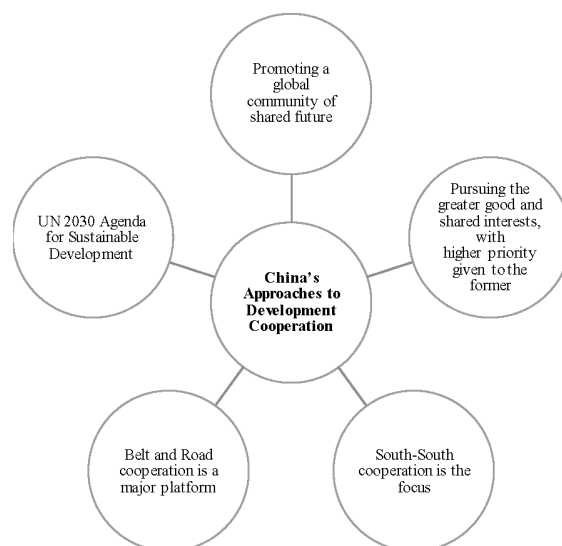


Figure 10 China's Approaches to Development Cooperation

¹⁴ According UNDP Brief (2021) the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is mentioned 16 times.

¹⁵ China considers it a mission to contribute more to humanity. Its wish is to offer more public goods to the international community and join forces with other countries to build a better common future(White Paper 2021).

¹⁶ One of the new aspects of the third WP is the explicit inclusion of the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund (SSCAF) as an emerging and innovative Chinese aid modality, with poverty reduction, agricultural development and food security at its core (White Paper 2021).

¹⁷ It aims at promoting policy, infrastructure, trade, financial and people-to-people connectivity, peace, prosperity, opening up, innovation, green development, cultural exchanges, and clean government.

In addition, the 2021 White Paper outlined eight major principles governing China’s development cooperation. However, not all of them are directly related to poverty.

As a first principle, China views other countries as partners and equal members of the international community. As a result, China is prevented from interfering in partners’ efforts to find a development path that fits their national circumstances, imposing its own will on them, attaching political strings, or pursuing its interests. This principle corresponds to the ownership principle as defined by the OECD/DAC.

The second pertains to “doing the best China can to assist”.

A third principle is to improve people’s lives by coordinating plans and strategies with partner countries, supporting social and economic progress, and investing in poverty reduction, disaster relief, education, health care, agriculture, employment, environmental protection, and climate change response, as well as actively participating in emergency humanitarian relief operations.

The fourth principle focuses on providing a partner country with the means for independent development, including sharing of experiences and know-how, training, and empowering government officials. This principle promotes vocational training and technical cooperation and helps countries to improve the skills of their project management personnel and localize project management.

The fifth one focuses on the methods by which China delivers aid.

The sixth principle provides a framework for ensuring the sustainability of China’s intervention through implementation management, supervision, and evaluation.

The seventh principle is to be open and inclusive. The recipient countries should propose, agree, and lead the projects.

The last principle consists of “advancing with the times and breaking new ground” (figure 11).

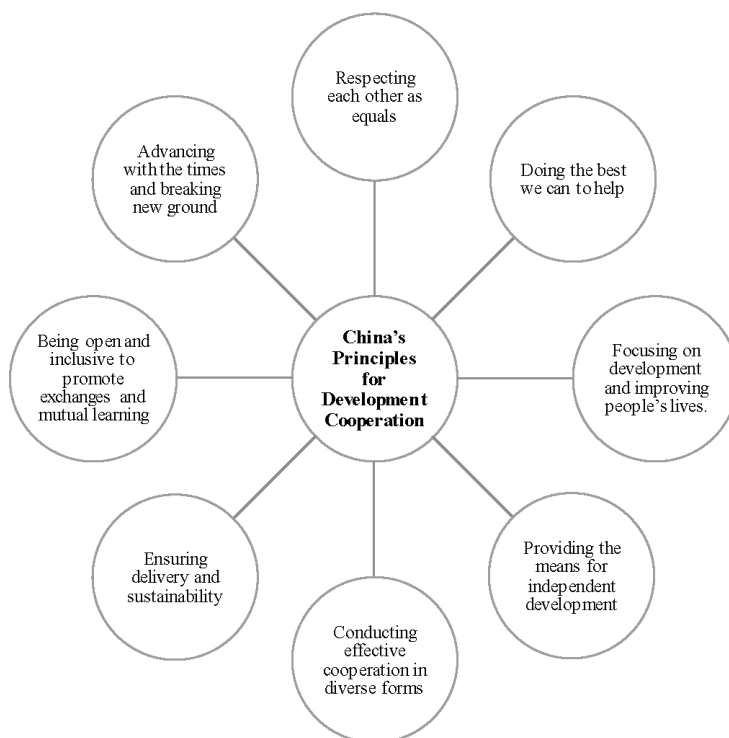


Figure 11 China’s principles related to poverty reduction

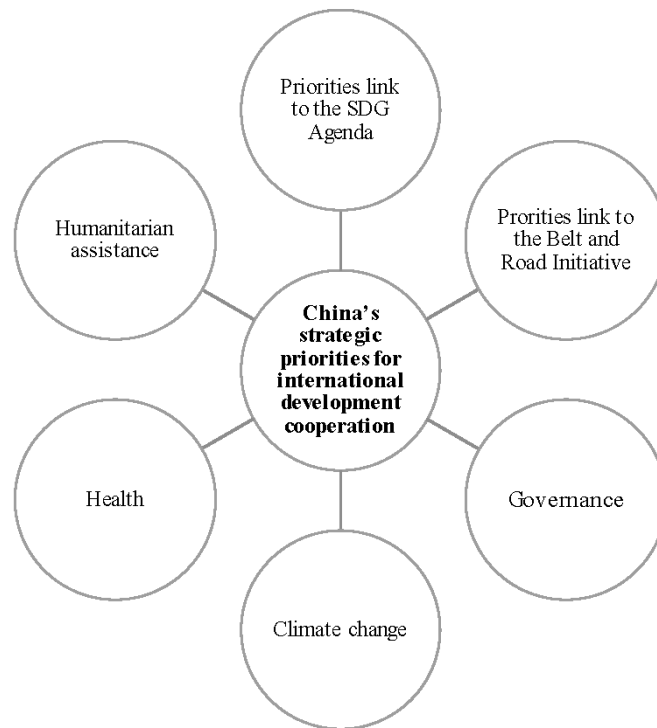


Figure 12 2021 White Paper Priorities

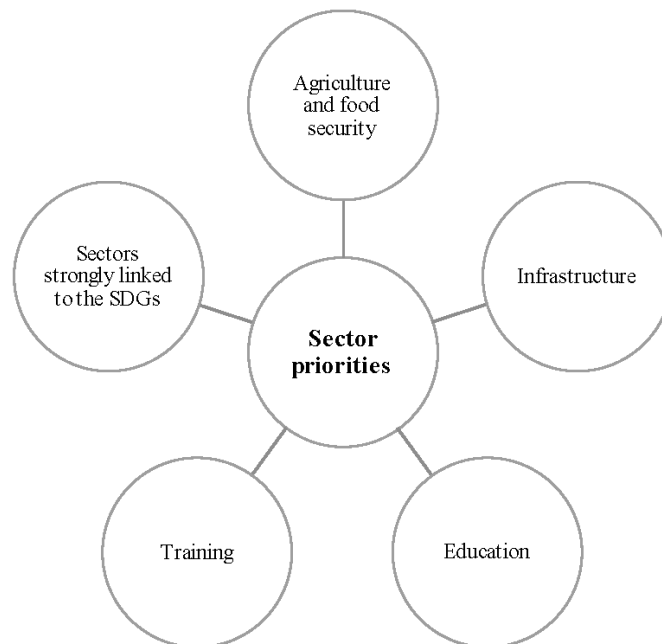


Figure 13 Sector priorities

Table 3: Mapping poverty reduction in China's aid policies

Policies	Indirect approach to poverty alleviation	Direct reference to poverty alleviation as goal of China's aid
Eight Principles on China Foreign Aid	Capacity Building Undefined variables of economic development for alleviating poverty.	
Concessional Loan	Concessional loans is not provided for poverty alleviation/ Grants are considered as an appropriate instrument.	
FOCACs 2000, 2003, 2006	Sectoral approach to poverty alleviation: Agricultural/ Public Health/Education/ Infrastructure.	
FOCACs 2009 & 2012 & 2015		Recognition of poverty as a challenge for the development and identification of tools and sectors for intervention.
FOCAC 2018		Poverty alleviation was clearly mentioned through capacity building and sharing of the Poverty Reduction Experience.
FOCAC 2021 and outputs		Poverty alleviation is considered as one the objective of China's interventions and the tools are experience sharing, training, dialogues and infrastructure building.
Program for Strengthening China-Africa Cooperation on Poverty Reduction (2014)	No indirect mention was made of poverty.	Poverty reduction as one the objectives of China's intervention in Africa and identification of sectors for intervention
China's White Paper on Foreign Aid 2014		Poverty reduction was an important objective of China's aid and identification of sector for intervention.
China's White Paper on Foreign Aid 2021		Recognition of the need to address poverty and reference to SDGs as a guiding goal for China's intervention in Africa. Tool: experience sharing, infrastructure building. Areas of intervention: Political, economic and social sectors.

Source: Author

China's approach to poverty alleviation in Guinea: Approach and limitations

a. China's policy approach to poverty alleviation in Guinea

China's policies toward poverty alleviation in Guinea follow a top-down approach. Chinese commitments

made at various forums (FOCACs) are implemented directly and equally by all members of the FOCACs. The sectors identified and the methods used to combat poverty are the same in all participating countries.

This indicates that China does not have a customize policy and strategy for alleviating poverty in Guinea. Since 2000, most of China's projects in Guinea have been initiated during FOCAC meetings. While most aid decisions are made within the FOCACs, this does not imply that China does not provide aid on demand. Prior to the FOCACs, projects were either delivered on demand or provided at the discretion of China. Furthermore, the embassies also serve as a link between the Guinean government and Chinese authorities. Aside from the general commitment made during the FOCACs, the Chinese Embassy in Guinea assists the central government in assembling requests from the Guinean government. Although the embassy's intermediary role assists both partners (China and Guinea) in identifying and communicating the Guinean authorities' needs, the approach to China delivery remains project-based rather than strategic, program, or issue-based (Donor Tracker, 2021).

For example, as a result of the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, followed by many forums on aid effectiveness, including the Paris Declaration, Accra Action Agenda, and Busan Declaration, aid donors have been expected in general to establish dialogue platforms and program-based interventions with recipient countries to address poverty.

China has not followed the traditional donors' country-based dialogue platform in Guinea. According to a Guinean government official, China has been absent from the negotiations to adopt the Guinean Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper in contrast to Guinea's traditional partners. In some ways, this can be explained by the fact that China places a high priority on non-interference principle stated in China's various policy documents. According to one Chinese official, the partner country should be responsible for its development strategies.

Partner countries are given complete discretion to choose what is appropriate for their particular contexts. China's Eight Principles, Section 5 of FOCAC's 2021 declaration,¹⁸ and Section 3 of China's 2021 White Paper on Foreign Aid reaffirm China's intention not to dictate or prescribe any lesson to partners.¹⁹ From a different perspective, China's non-interference policy reflects, to some extent, the principle of ownership and alignment as recommended by the OECD/DAC. According to Brant (2011), China frequently relies on recipients to select projects, thereby positioning itself as 'recipient-focused' and 'responsive' to the needs of a given country.²⁰

Therefore, instead of prescribing a development formula to the partner countries, China prefers to share its experience. To that end, China launched in 2016 the Global Poverty Reduction & Inclusive Growth (GPIG) Portal, which aims to share best practices and tools for poverty reduction in China, Asia, and worldwide.

Furthermore, before the creation of the portal, China had organized several conferences, workshops, and training sessions on poverty alleviation with Guinea.

The Guinean officials have participated in the following experiences sharing activities related to poverty:

- a) The Seminar on Participatory Poverty Policy and Practice for African Government Officials (IPRCC

¹⁸ 2021 FOCAC (5). "China and Africa will uphold and value the principles of no harm and harmony, sincerity, equality, mutual respect, mutual benefits, amity and good faith and the principle of pursuing greater good and shared interests, and adopt a people-oriented approach in pursuing practical cooperation with efficiency and embrace openness and inclusiveness. China is committed to no interference in African countries' pursuit of development paths that suit their national conditions, no interference in the internal affairs of African countries, no imposition of its own will on African countries, no attachment of political strings to assistance to Africa, and no seeking of political gains in investment and financing cooperation with Africa. China and Africa will follow the principle of common, intensive, green, safe and open development and deepen their friendly cooperation. Africa applauds these principles and approaches, and stands ready to work with China to pass on the traditional friendship from generation to generation".

¹⁹ According to the White paper, "China always supports development cooperation on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. It holds that all countries, regardless of size, strength and wealth, are equal members of the international community. When cooperating with other countries for development, no country should interfere in their efforts to find a development path suited to their own national conditions, interfere in their internal affairs, impose its own will on them, attach political strings, or pursue political self-interest."

²⁰ According to the Chinese President Xi in FOCAC 2018: "China will act in the principles of sincerity, real results, affinity, and good faith, uphold justice while pursuing shared interests, and focus on supporting Africa's capacity-building for internally-driven development in view of Africa's aspiration to reduce poverty, improve people's livelihood" [...] (FOCAC 2018. Para 1.6).

- 2009, June 27).²¹
- b) Seminar on Poverty Reduction and Social Development Policy (IPRCC 2010, June 1).²²
 - c) Seminar on the MDGs and Sustainable Poverty Alleviation for Government Officials from Francophone Africa (IPRCC 2011, April 13).²³
 - d) Seminar on Development-oriented Poverty Alleviation and Practice for Officials from Francophone Africa (IPRCC 2011, May 25).²⁴
 - e) Seminar on Development-oriented Poverty Alleviation and Practice for Officials from Francophone Africa (IPRCC 2012, May 3).²⁵
 - f) Seminar on Rural Public Service and Comprehensive Poverty Reduction for Officials from Francophone Africa (IPRCC 2012, June 7).²⁶
 - g) Seminar on Realization of the UN MDGs for Officials from Francophone Africa Closed in Beijing (IPRCC 2012, November 29).²⁷
 - h) the seminars on the Formulation and Implementation of Development and Poverty Reduction Policies organized to the intention of Officials from Francophone Africa; and
 - i) the Development-oriented Poverty Alleviation Policy and Practice for Officials from Francophone Africa in 2014 (IPRCC 2014, May 27).²⁸

Therefore, China’s strategy in Guinea differs from that of OEDC/DAC donors such as France. The Chinese approach does not prescribe any specific policy recommendations. In the output of the 2021 FOCAC, China committed to “supporting African countries in exploring development paths that are tailored to their national circumstances and supporting their efforts in formulating national development strategies, strengthening governing capacity and improving state governance” (Dakar Action Plan 2022-2024).

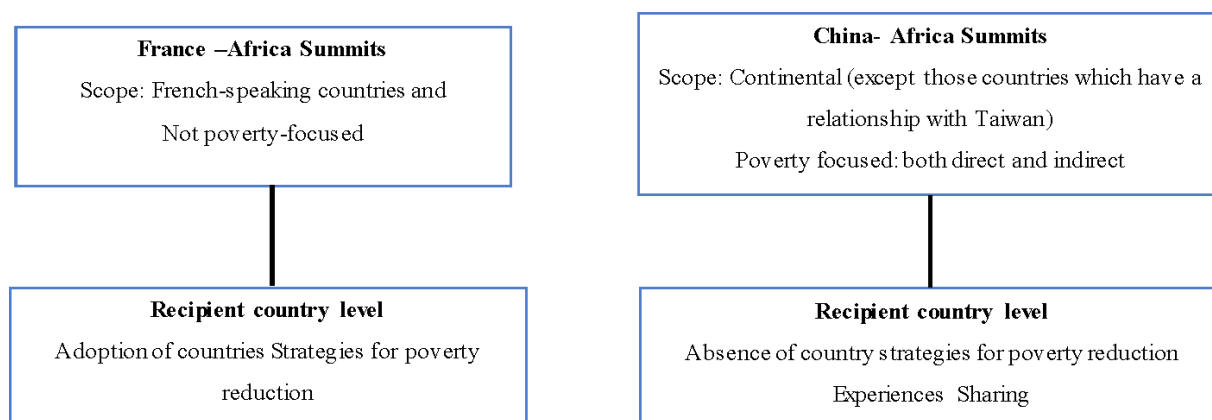


Figure 14 Poverty reduction at forums levels and recipient country level

- b. Limitation: Issues of adaptability, impact evaluation, and delivery mechanisms

China has committed to alleviating poverty in the countries of its partners; however, the strategy has some

²¹ <https://www.iprcc.org/article/40gUgtyAIND>

²² <https://www.iprcc.org/article/40gUnnHhpNz>

²³ <https://www.iprcc.org/article/40gUntV2mM7>

²⁴ <https://www.iprcc.org/article/40gUnw19g6x>

²⁵ <https://www.iprcc.org/article/40gUo9HCGbw>

²⁶ <https://www.iprcc.org/article/40gUoBXPqwg>

²⁷ <https://www.iprcc.org/article/40gUoHUiF9Z>

²⁸ <https://www.iprcc.org/article/40gUoWYs8Iw>

shortcomings. Among others, there is a lack of adaptability and evaluation of the commitments to address poverty.

China's approach to addressing development issues within the FOCACs has been criticized for its lack of "differentiation and adaptability" (An Chunying, 2021). The commitments made to African countries do not consider their different stages of development and national conditions. Besides general strategic guidelines, China's aid policies do not include a country's strategic plan.

Brant's study in 2011 about the effectiveness of Chinese aid also supports this conclusion. Unlike traditional donors, China does not develop specific country strategies or programs that include multiyear plans detailing individual projects and objectives (Brant, 2011, para. 3).

A second limitation is the absence of an evaluation of China's impact at the country level. FOCAC's declarations do not contain poverty alleviation indicators. Therefore, due to the lack of indicators, China's commitments in the FOCACs are difficult to monitor and evaluate. China's commitments toward African countries are currently monitored by the Chinese Follow-up Committee of FOCAC, at least for those pledges made during FOCACs. China's aid impact is primarily evaluated by academia, NGOs, and the media.

It has been confirmed by scholars such as Lancaster that China does not conduct an impact assessment of its aid policies. The author asked the following questions:

Do they [the Chinese government] manage by results? Do they evaluate the outcomes and impact of their aid? 'No' appears to be the answer to all of these questions though they do apparently check to make sure their aid monies were spent in the way planned (i.e., the planned road was constructed) (Lancaster, 2007, p.4).

According to some, China's motivation for providing aid justifies its unwillingness to conduct an impact assessment. We may find a more specific explanation of this situation in the win-win mindset that underlies China's aid program. As a result, it seems unnecessary for both parties to conduct an impact assessment (Grimm, 2011).

In addition, embassies on the ground are not well equipped to carry out such a mission. Furthermore, unlike some traditional donors, such as France, the Chinese Embassy website does not provide any information regarding the amount, type, and impact of the projects financed in Guinea.



Figure 14 Webpage of China's Embassy in Guinea

The Chinese Government established SIDCA during the 13th National People's Congress (NPC) in March 2018 (Zhang, 2018). Among its responsibilities are the design and approval of Chinese aid policies and plans, as well as monitoring and evaluating the implementation of aid projects (Zhang, 2018). With the reform of Chinese aid architecture, it that SIDCA will assess the impact of future aid projects. Time will tell whether this new agency will improve China's aid impact by establishing impact evaluation criteria with recipient countries. In the 2021 White Paper, China promises to enhance the supervision and evaluation of its aid as well as to develop an "impartial and independent project evaluation system".

Last but not least, although China claims to support partner ownership of its development strategy, it is imperative to highlight that it does not provide budget support as a means of supporting local ownership in addressing poverty. According to some, the Chinese cannot contribute significantly to national poverty reduction strategies since they do not offer budget support and provide minimal funding for social sector projects. Thus, their efforts can only be indirect at best (Dan Banik, 2012). In the context of China's aid to Guinea, it has been reported that most of its cooperation frameworks do not align with the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) or sector strategies. A large portion of its assistance is not accounted for in the state budget (Diallo, 2016).

Conclusion

Firstly, poverty alleviation has been at the core of China's cooperation with its African partners. In the late 1950s, China indirectly referred to poverty alleviation in its aid policies (providing aid to support the self-reliance and economic development of partner countries). The previous FOCACs (2000, 2003, and 2006) recognized poverty as an obstacle to partner development in Africa. Additionally, poverty alleviation was not clearly stated as a goal of China's aid. The sectoral strategies developed by China and its partners in the FOCACs (2000, 2003, and 2006) focused on sectors considered conducive to poverty alleviation in development literature (such as MDGs). Among them are the education, health, water and sanitation, agriculture, and infrastructure development sectors.

The FOCACs (2009, 2012, 2018, and 2021) established poverty alleviation as a goal of China's intervention in Africa. The Chinese strategy is geared toward sharing experiences on poverty reduction, organizing seminars, and providing training in order to assist the partner country in addressing poverty. We should also note that other aid policies, such as China's concessional loan regulation administered by the Exim-Bank, do not adequately target poor countries. Poor countries, which cannot prove their creditworthiness, are not eligible for loans since loans are only provided to creditworthy countries.

The "Program for Strengthening China-Africa Cooperation on Poverty Reduction" places poverty at the center of China-Africa cooperation. It emphasizes sharing experiences in poverty alleviation, providing technical assistance in the health care sector, transferring technology in the agricultural sector, and supplying drinking water to the population.

The 2014 White Paper on China Foreign Aid recognized poverty for the first time (compared to the 2011 White Paper) as a goal of Chinese aid. It identified the following actions to address poverty:

- Supporting agricultural development
- Enhancing education levels
- Improving medical and health services
- Building public welfare facilities
- Providing emergency humanitarian assistance during disasters

By aligning China's development cooperation efforts with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the 2021 White Paper went beyond its predecessor's efforts.

To conclude, it is essential to point out that, contrary to criticism, China has made significant efforts to bring poverty alleviation to the forefront of discussions with its African partners. With different intensities,

the aid policies analyzed in this study corroborate China's intention to address poverty alleviation in partner countries. This process began in 2009 and was reaffirmed with the 2018 and 2021 FOCACs.

However, China's commitment to poverty alleviation has not prevented it from integrating non-poverty reduction motives into its aid policies. Many motives can be considered in this regard, including political, strategic, and economic ones.

Although poverty alleviation is mentioned in China's aid policy documents, it has only been primarily discussed at high forums, mainly at FOCACs organized with African countries. Therefore, at the country level, China has followed the commitments made within the FOCACs and hence uses a "One size fits all strategy" with all recipient countries. As a result, China lacks a national strategy for reducing alleviation.

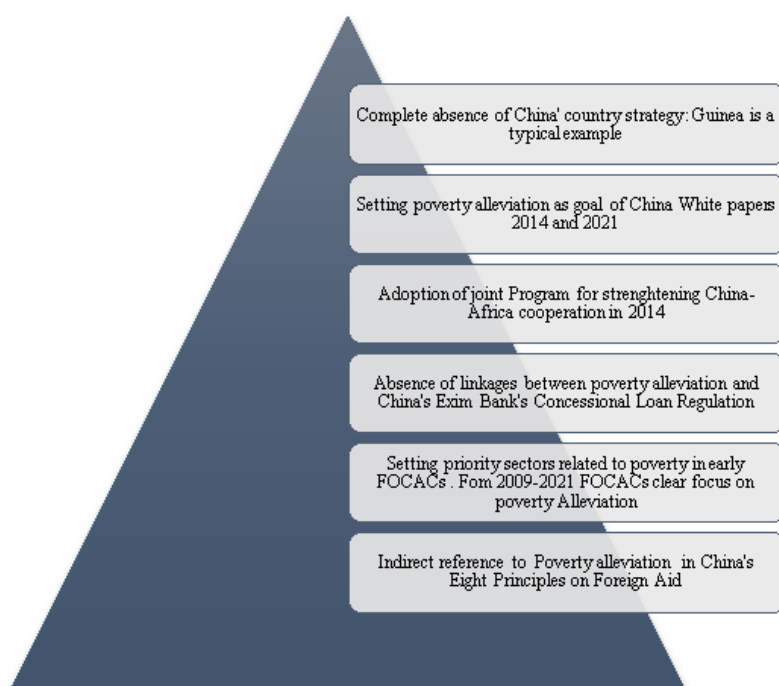


Figure 15 Summary of the evolution of the France's aid focus on poverty reduction in the partner country.

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