

China's Belt and Road Initiative and Strategic Policy Alignments with Sub-Saharan Africa.

Orakwe, Arinze Malachy¹ Alexander Nnaemeka Agbaenyi²

^{1,2} Department of Political Science
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Corresponding Author

Alexander Nnaemeka Agbaenyi, PhD
Department of Political Science,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria
Phone: +2348034078102
Email: an.agbaenyi@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a cornerstone of its foreign policy, has significantly reshaped engagement with Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). While promising infrastructure development and economic growth, the BRI's strategic alignment with Sub-Saharan Africa national policies remain complex and contested. This article employs a double-theoretical lens (Realist Theory of Power, and Complex Interdependence Theory) to analyze the contentious debate about BRI projects in Nigeria, Ethiopia, and South Africa. Through qualitative case study analysis, it finds that BRI alignment varies significantly, driven by recipient countries' specific developmental needs, governance structures, and bargaining power. Benefits include critical infrastructure and plugging of funding gaps, while concerns exist on governance challenges, and questions regarding long-term sustainability and local capacity building. The article concludes that realizing mutually beneficial outcomes requires enhanced transparency, robust African agency in negotiations, stronger institutional frameworks for debt management and environmental safeguards, and a conscious effort to foster deeper integration of BRI projects into local industrial and development strategies.

Keywords: China, belt and road initiative, strategic policy alignments, sub-Saharan Africa

Keywords: China Belt and Road Initiative, Strategic Policy, Alignment, Sub-Saharan Africa, Foreign Policy

Introduction

China, as an economic superpower today mainly started with the economic reforms of the late 1970s with President Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, which entailed opening up to foreign investments, joint venture regulations, and general engagement with the global economic system. The integration of China into the international economic system brought enormous wealth to China, helping the country eliminate poverty; build up its infrastructure; and built a modern industrialized society. China being the manufacturing capital of the world; likewise, the most economically engaged nation on earth, accumulated excess capital; hence, upgraded her status to a donor and investor nation.

While relations between China and Africa can be traced back to the 1950s, for Tang (qtd. in Demissie et al., 5), this period is marked by the need of struggle against occidental imperialism for both China and Africa. In consequence, an ideological affinity and mutual diplomatic support constituted the defining characteristics of the relations between China and African countries. However, this politics-oriented feature did not exclude activities in economic domain. The Chinese government provided considerable

economic aids to many African countries before the 1980s, which contributed significantly to the development of these countries. In furtherance of the evolving relations between China and Africa, and in accordance with the changing socio-economical and geopolitical realities, the relations between both parties evolved into its golden era, with the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 and has continued until now, marking an unprecedented level of multi-facetted engagement between China and African countries. Aiming to build a new type of bilateral relationships, China and African countries decided to set up a comprehensive mechanism to better communicate and cooperate. The first Ministerial Conference of FOCAC took place in Beijing in October 2000 (Demissie et al., 9). According to Ajah & Onuoha (3), since the inauguration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, China has become Africa's major trading partner, providing technical assistance and loans, often in exchange for resources. Between 2001 and 2012, Nigeria for instance, signed multiple memoranda of understanding and commercial contracts with Chinese companies either bilaterally or under the FOCAC.

China's continuous expansion and opening up culminated in the launch of One Belt One Road initiative, also known as Belt and Road initiative in 2013 by the Chinese President Xi Jinping. The initiative adopted during the 19th National Party Congress in 2017; China's Government formally incorporated the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) under its Communist Party constitution as part of a resolution to achieve "shared growth through discussion and collaboration." China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) represents one of the most ambitious global infrastructure and economic diplomacy programs in history. Huang (qtd. in Ige & Akingbesote, 2) considered it as the largest project of the century, which involves building a network of railroads and shipping lanes linking itself with more than 70 countries across Asia, Africa, Europe, Oceania, and Latin America. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), with its vast infrastructure deficit, resource wealth, and growing markets, has become a primary theatre for BRI engagement. Framed by China as a "win-win" partnership fostering connectivity and shared prosperity, the BRI promises to address critical development bottlenecks through financing and constructing roads, railways, ports, and energy projects. (Ajah & Onuoha, 6) avers that within the BRI infrastructure agenda, some contend that

Africa has received significant attention and active involvement to complement its development objectives outlined in the African Union Agenda 2063. The initiative has sparked intense debate regarding its underlying strategic objectives for China and the degree to which it genuinely aligns with and advances the long-term development policies and sovereignty of SSA nations. Nevertheless, critics point to potential debt traps, resource extraction patterns, governance challenges, and the advancement of Chinese geopolitical influence. Despite the inquest and scrutiny of the growing economic, social, and cultural relations between China and Sub-Saharan Africa. Xinhua, reported that the economic and trade cooperation between China and Africa is gaining momentum, with trade volume recording a 6 percent year-on-year increase to 295 billion U.S. dollars in 2024. China has been the primary source of trade, infrastructural investment, loan, and aid in Africa for over 15 years.

Yet, the debate over its strategic alignment with the stated national interests of Sub-Saharan African countries continues to be regurgitated. It is consequent upon this problem that the study seeks to examine the contentious concerns about China's Belt and Road Initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa

and evaluate its potential for Africa's advancement.

Literature Review

The existing literature on China-Sub-Saharan Africa's relations and the BRI presents diverse perspectives, but this review looks at the major variables of infrastructure building, loans, and commerce as indicators of China Belt and Road Initiative.

a. Infrastructure Development:

The major indicators of infrastructure development include, building of roads, railways systems, airports, seaports, power stations, etc. The central goal of BRI is connectivity through linkage via rail, sea, and road. For Sub-Sahara Africa, it is addressing massive infrastructure deficit. From the review, scholars highlights significant activity but also raises concerns about quality, local participation, and strategic intent. Studies focus heavily on transport sector like rail projects: the Lagos-Ibadan and Abuja-Kaduna lines (financed by Chinese loans via Exim Bank) and port upgrades (Lekki Deep Sea Port). Alden and Alves note these projects aim to enhance connectivity for resource

extraction (especially oil) and market access but often face delays and cost overruns (Alden and Alves 78). Ogunleye et al. (15) argue that while addressing critical gaps, concerns persist about technology transfer, local content utilization, and environmental/social safeguards during construction. However, for Ezeani & Ngoka (15) Nigeria participation in BRI initiative have led to improvement in transport infrastructure in Nigeria, especially in terms of modernization, and expansion of rail and road networks; likewise seaports and airports. Ajah & Onuoha (16) alluded to that, noting Nigeria engagement in BRI afforded the country opportunity to secure funds for rehabilitation and expansion of her railway infrastructure.

Ethiopia: Ethiopia often cited as a BRI "showcase," considering the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway (AADR), indispensable for landlocked Ethiopia's access to the sea. Chen and Lin (112) emphasize its transformative impact on transport efficiency, in terms of cargo movement, and economic integration along the corridor. However, Chellaney (95) criticises the project's exorbitant cost and debt sustainability, questioning its long-term economic viability for Ethiopia. Other projects such as Industrial parks, like the

Eastern Industrial Zone, are also important BRI-linked infrastructure project, though studies like Adisu (43) suggest mixed success in attracting sustainable foreign investment beyond Chinese firms.

South Africa: South Africa seems to represent a different path. Unlike Nigeria and Ethiopia, it has not embraced large-scale BRI-branded infrastructure megaprojects to the same degree, because of its more advanced infrastructure base vis-à-vis other Sub-Sahara African countries. Corkin (67) notes that South Africa leverages its membership of BRICS and relatively developed economic to engage China on its own terms, directing the engagement to specific areas of national interest, like port modernization (e.g., Durban) and renewable energy projects, often through joint ventures rather than pure Chinese monopolization of the relations. The emphasis is more on technology transfer and industrial cooperation within existing frameworks like the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC).

Generally, existing literature concurs BRI has significantly addressed infrastructure funding gap in Sub-Sahara Africa. However, critiques focus on project selection (often prioritizing Chinese contractor access and resource corridors over broader national development plans),

transparency in bidding, environmental standards (Sun et al. 210), and limited spillovers for local construction industries (Brautigam, Debt Trap 132). Other literature focuses on how BRI projects fit within national development plans (e.g., African Union Agenda 2063, Ethiopia's GTP) and local contexts, highlighting both alignment in stated infrastructure goals and misalignments regarding local content, employment, environmental standards, and debt management (Geda & Meskel; Ogunleye).

b. Debt Sustainability

The BRI is essentially based on Chinese lending, which has become the most contentious issue among scholars looking at the initiative. Noise about "debt traps" - a situation where loan terms are untenable, increasing the risk of default by recipient countries - dominate the discourse, though nuanced analyses challenge parochial narratives.

Nigeria: Nigeria's increasing debt profile, partly fueled by Chinese loans for infrastructure, is a major concern. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has repeatedly flagged Nigeria's debt sustainability risks. Hurley et al. (28) highlight that while Chinese debt is a significant portion of external debt, Nigeria's overall debt burden stems from

multiple sources, including Eurobonds and internal borrowing. However, the opaque terms of some Chinese loans and collateralization patterns (e.g., oil sale proceeds) remain problematic, limiting fiscal space (Brautigam, A Critical Look 5).

Ethiopia: Ethiopia exemplifies the debt sustainability concern. Huge infrastructure investments like the AADR significantly raised its debt to China. The country faced severe debt distress, necessitating a G20 Common Framework debt treatment request in 2021. Gelpern et al. (12) avers that unsustainable borrowing practices, including from China for large infrastructure projects, led to Ethiopia's crisis, forcing painful debt restructuring negotiations. This case and other examples are central to the arguments about BRI's potential to create unsustainable debt burdens for low-income countries.

South Africa: South Africa is less vulnerable to Chinese debt distress compared to Nigeria or Ethiopia. Its debt profile is primarily domestic and owed to traditional multilateral/bilateral creditors. While engaging China for funding (e.g., Eskom loans), it has generally been more cautious about large-scale sovereign borrowing under BRI. Moreover, South Africa uses its relative strength to negotiate better terms and seeks more Foreign Direct

Investment (FDI) and joint ventures rather than pure debt, mitigating immediate debt trap risks but facing other challenges like deindustrialization concerns (Carmody and Owusu 89).

In conclusion, existing literature debunks the blanket "debt trap" narrative (Brautigam, Debt Trap) showing cases like, the 2017 Sri Lanka handover of Hambantota port to China on a 99-year lease as outliers. However, it buttresses serious risks. On the matter of sustainable borrowing, key concerns include: lack of transparency in loan terms, collateralization (especially resource-backed loans), project feasibility overestimations leading to low returns, currency risks, and the impact on countries' overall debt sustainability and sovereignty, particularly when restructuring is needed (Gelpern et al. 15; Hurley et al. 32). The minimal role of Chinese lenders in multilateral debt restructuring frameworks (like the Common Framework) remains an evolving area of concern and study.

c. Trade Patterns and Industrial Capacity Building

The goal of BRI is to enhance trade connectivity. However, existing literature questions whether it fundamentally alters the long-standing trade pattern between China and Sub-Sahara Africa, where the

former exports manufactured goods, while the later exports primarily raw materials to China and excessively import manufactured goods. Scholars questions the chances of this trade pattern in fostering local industrial capacity in sub-Sahara Africa.

Nigeria: for Nigeria, trade with China remains heavily skewed: Nigeria primarily exports crude oil and imports manufactured goods, machinery, and electronics. Studies from Oyejide and Adewuyi (102) find limited evidence that BRI infrastructure has significantly diversified Nigeria's exports to China beyond hydrocarbons or boosted value-added exports globally. While Special Economic Zones (SEZs) like Lekki Free Trade Zone are promoted, their success in attracting diverse manufacturing and enabling technology transfer for local firms is still debated and faces internal challenges like epileptic power supply, and poor governance and institutional capacity.

Ethiopia: part of Ethiopia's BRI engagement is it is pursuit of Chinese-led industrial parks (e.g., Hawassa), which is at the core of its national development strategy to move up the value chain into light manufacturing (textiles, apparel). Chen and Lin (118) point to initial success in job creation and export growth. However, challenges remain, such as heavy reliance on imported inputs, limited linkages to the

local economy beyond low-wage labor, vulnerability to global market shifts, and questions about environmental standards and labor practices within these zones (Adisu 47). Concerns for Ethiopia as well include, the issue of sustainability beyond tax holidays.

South Africa: South Africa with a relatively developed economy has a more diversified trade relationship with China, it's exports goes beyond the normal low value added mineral exports of most countries in Sub-Sahara Africa. It export manufactured goods (automotive components, agricultural products). Corkin (72) notes that South Africa leverages BRI/FOCAC frameworks strategically to push for greater market access in China for value-added products, particularly agricultural goods. Industrial cooperation focusing on higher-tech areas like renewable energy, automotive manufacturing (e.g., BAIC plant), and technology transfer, reflecting South Africa more advanced industrial base. However, competition from competitive Chinese imports continues to poss an enduring challenge to local industries.

The review suggests BRI has not yet fundamentally transformed the core China-Sub-Sahara Africa trade dynamics. While infrastructure improvements facilitate trade, they do not automatically lead to diversification or value addition. Industrial

capacity building through SEZs shows mixed alignments, often creating enclaves with limited spillover effects and facing sustainability challenges. Genuine technology transfer and fostering competitive local industries remain a mirage (Taylor 184; Adisu 50). Studies suggest the mixed outcomes of BRI in Sub-Saharan Africa are due to internal shortcomings, as a developed economy like South Africa demonstrates more potential for leveraging BRI for value-added trade and industrial cooperation due to its existing capabilities.

Theoretical Framework

This analysis employs an integrated theoretical approach. Realist Theory of Power, the Realist strand by Hans Morgenthau sees states as being motivated by a drive for *power* and pursuit of the *national interest*. Therefore, Realist Theory of Power views the BRI through the lens of power politics and national interest. In the context of this study, it assumes China seeks to enhance its relative power, secure resources, and expand its sphere of influence in Sub-Saharan Africa, challenging traditional Western hegemony. Sub-Saharan African states engage to access resources and bolster their own position, but power asymmetry between both sides

do shapes outcomes and direction of the engagement. Complex Interdependence Theory (CIT). This theory is also employed to explain the mutual benefits of China's BRI and how it helps address the bottlenecks of funding and inadequate technical capacity of Sub-Saharan Africa. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye popularized the theory in their work *Power and Interdependence*. It is predicated on the postulation that states are interconnected through various channels, and this interconnectedness creates a network of interdependence that goes beyond traditional state values. Hence, through the Belt and Road Initiative, China and Sub-Saharan Africa have created a network and strands of interconnectedness that transcends state actors, to private corporations, interagency institutions, and special purpose arrangements. Despite the power asymmetry, the interconnectedness and interdependency benefits both parties, as the acute financing and infrastructure gap in Sub-Saharan Africa is addressed through Chinese funding; China's insatiable appetite for raw materials to power its huge manufacturing sector is satisfied with raw material exploration in Sub-Saharan Africa. This allows for a nuanced analysis of power dynamics, and mutually beneficial potentials of the Belt and Road Initiative program.

Methodology

The article utilizes qualitative comparative case study analysis, which enables in-depth exploration of context-specific dynamics and processes. According to Yin, case study research is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context. It is essential when the research is dealing with complex and broad variables. The study selected three Sub-Saharan African countries, namely: Nigeria, Ethiopia, and South Africa. The BRI in these countries were juxtaposed after using multiple case studies to identify nuances, patterns and common themes. In ensuring a comprehensive analysis of Belt and Road Initiative program in Sub-Saharan Africa, the countries used as case studies are active participants in the program and as well, the major economies of their sub-regions. With Nigeria (major recipient of BRI loans, significant infrastructure funding), Ethiopia (symbolizing state-led development, strategic location), South Africa (major tourism industry, developed economy). This approach makes for a comprehensive analysis of the variations in socio-political economies of the selected countries, BRI project types, and engagement history. The study relied on published data: Policy

documents (National development plans, BRI MoUs), Internet and Journal Articles, Reputable international news sources and databases (World Bank, IMF, China-Africa Research Initiative - CARI), Government statements and reports. Thematic analysis was adopted to focus on identifying the major themes, patterns and nuances of the phenomenon under investigation. Focus is on alignments or misalignments of BRI projects with stated national policies (infrastructure, industrialization, debt management) of the three case study countries, namely: Nigeria, Ethiopia, and South Africa. Under investigation also is evidence of power play behind the Belt and Road Initiative, and interdependence dynamics or African agency in the analysis of the program.

Findings

a. Infrastructure: There is significant progress in building transport and energy projects across the case countries, but concerns over cost, quality, local participation, and environmental impacts persist. Awarding of construction and maintenance contracts often favors Chinese interests. From available evidence, the BRI creates long-term economic interdependence and locking of Sub-Saharan countries into Chinese technological/operational ecosystems.

Nevertheless, for the Sub-Saharan region, the BRI afforded the region opportunity to access technology penetration through affordable (but high-quality) networking gears provided by Chinese firms (Huawei, ZTE, etc.). Without which, the level of internet connectivity in the sub-region will be minimal. Through various training programs from Chinese companies like Huawei, China helps build up the technical expertise of the sub-region. In the transport sector (Nigeria's Lekki deep Seaport, Murtala Mohammed Airport terminal expansion, Kaduna-Abuja rail system, etc), all funded through BRI, and manufactured by Chinese firm enables economic growth, while serving China's strategic interest as maintenance contracts are locked on by original manufacturers.

In the case of Ethiopia, there is a high-level alignment with state-led industrialization and infrastructure goals (e.g., Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway). Driven by strong central government vision. However, concerns over debt sustainability post-conflict, limited local job creation at skilled levels, and questions about industrial linkage effectiveness. There is strong alignment on stated infrastructure goals, but weaker on broad-based industrialization and debt management integration. South Africa with a relatively developed infrastructure tailored its BRI engagement not solely on

infrastructure funding, nevertheless, the solar energy and Durban port expansion projects are testaments to the benefits of the BRI involvement.

b. Debt: While the "debt trap" is overstated, serious sustainability risks exist due to opaque terms, collateralization, and feasibility issues. Among the case study countries, Ethiopia paints a grimmer picture in terms of debt default risk. Nigeria on the other hand, faces rising debt burdens, while South Africa is less exposed and manages risks better. Importantly, the study found that Chinese loans along the Belt and Road Initiative helped bridge acute funding gap required by the Sub-Sahara region to meet its developmental needs. The program helps the region to diversify its borrowing option, which aids in negotiating favorable loan terms. The debt trap narrative is a subterfuge designed to deceive, discourage and undermine the BRI, judging from the fact that Chinese loans represent a smaller fraction of the Sub-Sahara Africa's debt portfolio.

Most Sub-Saharan African countries suffers from political instability (Ethiopia, Trigayan civil war; Nigeria, contested elections, terrorism; South Africa, high murder rate). Weak institutional capacity led to poor debt management and negotiation outcomes. Decades of

instability of various kinds have made most countries in the region weak institutionally. Therefore, governance capacity of Sub-Saharan Africa is less developed, that, in addition with dictatorial (personalised) tendencies of most governments in the region makes for the pursuit of self-serving interest in negotiations. To further hamstring the BRI, opaque processes, limited parliamentary oversight, environmental and social impact assessment weaknesses, and vulnerability to corruption hinder effective project implementation, equitable benefit-sharing and true alignment with public interest. However, South Africa demonstrated relatively stronger agency in its engagement due to coherent strategy; while, Nigeria and Ethiopia showed weaker negotiation capacity and vulnerability to elite capture, affecting alignment quality.

c. Commerce and Industry: Despite the promises of economic developments associated with the BRI, the core extractive-import trade pattern remains largely intact. Industrial capacity building (SEZs) shows promise but struggles with limited local linkages, sustainability, and genuine technology transfer. However, South Africa shows more potential for value-added engagement. Focusing on

market access and exporting capacity: Market access for China is a major driver across all case studies. While China has a large market potential, the asymmetry power of the industrial bases between itself and Sub-Saharan Africa puts the later at disadvantage. BRI infrastructure projects (ports, railways, etc.) facilitates access to Sub-Saharan Africa markets for Chinese goods. Nevertheless, these infrastructures helps drive economic growth and expansion in the Sub-Saharan region. Furthermore, China's strategic interest of employment and revenue for its populace is evident in BRI projects built by Chinese firms using Chinese materials/workers. Although, some Sub-Sahara African countries through conscious effort and capacity building are leveraging this encounter to upgrade their own manufacturing capabilities. The BRI is helping China build strategic partnerships with the sub-Saharan region, with (Ethiopia as an anchor state), gaining diplomatic support, expanding presence, and challenging Western norms and influence. The BRI partnership moreover, aids the Sub-Saharan Africa in diversifying its geostrategic options, ensuring the region does not get beholden to one power block. In addition, the lessons of the partnership helps the Sub-Saharan region in institutional and governance capacity

building. In the case of Nigeria, there is strong alignment with mining sector support and infrastructural needs. Development of Free-Trade Zones also aligns with the nation's essential economic goals. However, high debt concerns exist due to loans collateralized against mining revenues. Projects sometimes seem to prioritize Chinese interests due to low involvement of local firms in execution and subsequent maintenance. The BRI aligns perfectly with Nigeria's stated national objectives, in terms of plugging funding gap. However, there is misalignment in the areas of technical support, as the wholly utilization of Chinese manufacturing companies - and excessive imports - runs against the stated national interest of building up the industrial base of the country. Other than Nigeria, this is a dominant theme across all cases.

Conclusion

The Belt and Road Initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa is not a monolithic project but a complex tapestry of engagements driven by multifaceted Chinese strategic interests – economic, geopolitical, and long-term influence building. The initiative matches the various developmental projects of Sub-Saharan African countries, although it sometimes varies. While BRI projects address critical infrastructure gaps aligned

with stated national goals (especially in transport, resource exploration, and energy), this study finds levels of misalignments concerning fundamental aspects of sustainable development:

a. Debt Sustainability: Financing models sometimes generate unsustainable debt burdens, undermining macroeconomic stability and long-term development prospects, and project viability issues.

b. Localization and Capacity Development: The failure to systematically integrate local content, employment, skills transfer, and technology sharing limits structural economic transformation and project sustainability.

The findings underscore the critical role of African agency and institutional capacity. Countries with stronger, more coherent development strategies and negotiation capabilities (like South Africa) fared better in directing alignment, though challenges persist. Weak governance and capacity (Nigeria and Ethiopia) exacerbate risks of misalignment. The theoretical lenses confirm that Realist power dynamics and Interdependence patterns are evident, but outcomes are significantly mediated by the quality and capacity of local governance.

Recommendations

To foster genuinely beneficial and aligned BRI partnerships, the study makes the following recommendations:

a. Sub-Saharan African Governments:

Make efforts to strengthen negotiation capacity: governments in the region must invest in specialized units with financial, legal, and technical expertise for BRI (and all major infrastructure) negotiations. In addition, enhance transparency and oversight through mandating full public disclosure of loan terms, contracts, and environmental impact assessments, and strengthen parliamentary and civil society oversight. Furthermore, Sub-Saharan Africa has to integrate BRI into coherent debt strategies, through rigorous assessment of debt sustainability before signing loans, using tools like IMF DSA frameworks. Prioritize concessional finance and grants where possible, and negotiate clear collateralization terms. The Sub-Saharan region must imbibe local content and skills transfer policy, by legislation and enforcement of stringent requirements for local employment (including skilled positions), subcontracting, and technology transfer within BRI contracts. Finally, governments in Sub-Saharan Africa have to align BRI with Industrialization Plans, by actively steering BRI projects towards sectors and

locations that maximize linkages with local industries and value chains. More so, strengthen environmental and social safeguards, through enforcement of robust national standards and independent monitoring for all BRI projects.

b. China

China as a matter of urgency, and due to clear efforts to undermine the Belt and Road Initiative, has to adopt transparent lending practices; by publishing detailed loan terms and project agreements. In addition, engage more systematically with existing multilateral debt frameworks. China also have to prioritize debt sustainability; by offering more grants and concessional loans, especially to low-income countries. In addition to actively participating in multilateral debt relief efforts when needed. Furthermore, China needs to mandate high environmental and social standards; by applying stringent, internationally comparable environmental and social safeguards uniformly across all BRI projects and enforcing them rigorously. Then, the promotion of genuine local partnerships, by incentivizing Chinese firms to form joint ventures with local companies and significantly increase local hiring and skills development. Finally, China have to engage with local stakeholders through proactive consultation

with communities, civil society, and local businesses during project planning and implementation.

c. International Community

Instead of viewing the Belt and Road Initiative through the lens of geopolitical competition, the international community should rather complement the Chinese effort towards sustainable development in the Sub-Saharan Africa. The International community instead of peddling the "debt-trap narrative" - disregarding defaults associated with lenders outside China - should offer practical solutions to the perceived issues with the BRI. Moreso, the International community can provide technical assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa governments in infrastructure planning, project appraisal, negotiation, contract management, and debt sustainability analysis. As well as, promote transparency initiatives, through support for platforms for sharing contract data and best practices in infrastructure governance.

References

- Amin, Samir. *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*. Monthly Review Press, 1976
- Brautigam, Deborah. *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa*. Oxford University Press, 2009
- Brautigam, Deborah. *Will Africa Feed China?* Oxford University Press, 2015
- Brautigam, Deborah. *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa*. Oxford UP, 2009.
- Carmody, Pdraig. *The New Scramble for Africa* (2nd Ed.). Polity, 2016
- Evans, Peter. B. *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation*. Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Frank, Andre. Gunder. *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*. Monthly Review Press, 1967.
- North, Douglass. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Yin, Robert. Kuo-zuir. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 3rd ed.; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2003.
- Journal Articles:**
- Acker, Karel, Brautigam, Deborah, & Huang, Yufan. *Debt Relief with Chinese Characteristics*. SAIS-CARI Working Paper. 2020
- Adisu, Kinfu, Sharkey, Thoma, & Okoroafo, Sam, C. *The impact of Chinese investment in Africa*. *International Journal of Business and Management*, vol. 5, no. 9, 2010, pp. 3-9.
- Adisu, Kinfu. *"Chinese Industrial Parks in Ethiopia: Spurring Industrialization or Creating Enclaves?"* *African Studies Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2018, pp. 41-54.
- Ajah. Anthony, Chinonso & Onuoha, Issac, Jonah. *China's Belt and Road*

- Initiative and Infrastructure Development in Nigeria: A Paradigm Shift or Failed Ventures Repackaged? *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2024, pp. 2-3. DOI: 10.1142/S2377740023500100
- Alden, Chris, & Alves, Ana. China's regional forum diplomacy in Africa: Follow-up, implementation and effectiveness of FOCAC. *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 26, no.103 2017, pp.142-156.
- Alden, Chris, and Ana Cristina Alves. "China's Regional Forum Diplomacy in Africa: FOCAC and BRI in Comparative Perspective." *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 30, no. 127, 2021, pp. 77-92. doi:10.1080/10670564.2020.1766908.
- .Brautigam, Deborah. Aid 'With Chinese Characteristics': Chinese Foreign Aid and Development Finance Meet the OECD-DAC Aid Regime. *Journal of International Development*, vol. 23 no. 5, 2011, pp. 752-764.
- Carmody, Pádraig, and Francis Owusu. "Neo-imperialism or Deimperialisation? China, Africa and South Africa." *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2022, pp. 80-97. doi:10.1080/01436597.2021.1992340.
- Chellaney, Brahma. *China's Debt-Trap Diplomacy*. Project Syndicate, 2017
- Chellaney, Brahma. *China's Creditor Imperialism*. Centre for Policy Research, 2020.
- Chen, Yuan, and Justin Yifu Lin. "The Belt and Road Initiative in Africa: Lessons from Ethiopia." *China Economic Journal*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2021, pp. 105-125. doi:10.1080/17538963.2021.1891472.
- China-Africa Research Initiative (CARI), Johns Hopkins SAIS: Data on loans, projects, trade.
- Chipaike, Ronald, & Bischoff, Philip. Chinese engagement of Zimbabwe and the limits of elite agency. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol. 53 no.2, 2018, pp.233-248.
- Corkin, Lucy. "South Africa and the Belt and Road Initiative: Seeking Strategic Leverage." *South African Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2020, pp. 61-78. doi:10.1080/10220461.2020.1732291.
- Demissie, Alex et al. *China's Belt and Road Initiative & Its Implications for Africa*. WWF Kenya, 2016.
- Ezeani, Emmanuel, Onyebuchi. & Ngoka, Ruth, Obioma. *Nigeria-China Relations and Infrastructural Development in Nigeria*. University of Nigeria *Journal of Political Economy*: Vol. 12, no. 2, 2022, pp. 246-275 10.5281/zenodo.7484424
- Geda, Alemayehu, & Meskel, Atnafu (2020). *The Belt and Road Initiative and Africa: Lessons from Ethiopia*. *Journal of African Development*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2020, pp. 1-21.
- Gelpern, Anna, et al. *How China Lends: A Rare Look into 100 Debt*

- Contracts with Foreign Governments. Aid Data, 2021. www.aiddata.org/publications/how-china-lends.
- Hurley, John, et al. Examining the Debt Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a Policy Perspective. Center for Global Development Policy Paper 131, 2019. www.cgdev.org/publication/examining-debt-implications-belt-and-road-initiative-a-policy-perspective.
- Ige Ayokunle O. & Akingbesote A.O. Belt and Road Initiative: Analysis of Possible Effects on Nigeria's Economy. International Journal of Contemporary Research and Review, vol. 9, no. 06, 2018, pp. 1-2. <https://doi.org/10.15520/ijcrr/2018/9/06/536>
- IMF Country Reports (Ethiopia, South Africa, and Nigeria): Debt Sustainability Analyses (DSAs).
- Mohan, G., & Lampert, B. Negotiating China: Reinserting African agency into China–Africa relations. African Affairs, vol. 112, no. 446, 2013, pp. 92-110.
- Naim, Moises. Rogue Aid. Foreign Policy, vol.159, 2007, pp. 95-96.
- Ogunleye, A. Aligning the Belt and Road Initiative with African Priorities: The Case of Nigeria. South African Journal of International Affairs, vol. 28no. 1, 2021, pp. 1-22.
- Ogunleye, Oyinkan Tasie, et al. "Infrastructure Development under China's Belt and Road Initiative in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges." Journal of Contemporary African Studies, vol. 40, no. 1, 2022, pp. 1-18. doi:10.1080/02589001.2022.2030798.
- Oyejide, Ademola, and Adeolu O. Adewuyi. "Nigeria-China Economic Relations under the Belt and Road Initiative: Trade, Investment and Infrastructure Dimensions." Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies, vol. 62, no. 1, 2020, pp. 95-116.
- Sun, Yun, et al. Environmental and Social Risks of Chinese Overseas Investments: A Study of the Belt and Road Initiative. World Resources Institute, 2019. www.wri.org/research/environmental-and-social-risks-chinese-overseas-investments.
- Taylor, Ian. Africa Rising: BRICS - Diversifying Dependency. James Currey, 2014
- Taylor, Ian. "Understanding the Belt and Road Initiative in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia." African Affairs, vol. 119, no. 476, 2020, pp. 176-195. doi:10.1093/afraf/adz036.
- Newspaper and official document:**
- A Critical Look at Chinese 'Debt Trap' Diplomacy in Africa." China-Africa Research Initiative (CARI) Policy Brief, no. 5, 2020, pp. 1-8. www.bu.edu/gdp/files/2020/05/GCI-PB-005-Debt-Trap.pdf.
- China remains Africa's largest trading partner, key contributor to development: officials. Xinhua 2025 <https://english.news.cn/20250417/2a10d6dbda13437ba2370395076f24a0/c.html>