

The 20th Anniversary of the Foundation of the FOCAC: Retrospect and Prospect

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The Ninth Meeting of the China-Africa Think Tanks Forum was held offline and online respectively on 5 November 2020 in Beijing. There were more than 200 distinguished guests from different research institutions and government departments in China and Africa attending this conference, including Deng Li, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China; Joaquim Alberto Chissano, Mozambique's Former President; Cai Fang, Vice President of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; Martin Mpana, Head of African Diplomatic Mission to China and Ambassador of Cameroon to China. The Forum consisted of three parts: the opening ceremony, the plenary session and the five parallel panels. In the two-days conference, the participants from both sides exchanged their views on various issues such as achievements of the FOCAC in the past 20 years, the cooperation between China and Africa in fighting against COVID-19 pandemic, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the development of African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), China-Africa cooperation on climate change and poverty alleviation, as well as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and China-Africa relation in the new era.

1. SUMMARY OF THE KEYNOTE SPEECHES

There were four keynote speeches on the relation and cooperation between China and Africa. Deng Li demonstrated that the FOCAC was set up during the time when both China and Africa were burdened with the arduous task of development and the mission of national rejuvenation. It was very urgent for both sides to seek development through mutual cooperation. Over the past two decades, China and Africa have seized the opportunity to pursue economic and social development. In 2019, China-Africa trade volume exceeded US\$200 billion, and China's direct investment stock in the whole industry in Africa reached nearly US\$50 billion. The FOCAC

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can be seen as the banner for international cooperation with Africa and for South-South cooperation.

Joaquim Alberto Chissano pointed out that the FOCAC, which elevated the traditional friendship between China and Africa to a new height, was the first platform for collective dialogue between China and Africa. The world today is witnessing many uncertainties and challenges, especially under the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic exerted negative influence and exacerbated poverty in Africa. Thus, China and African countries should work together to meet these challenges and formulate appropriate strategies for economic recovery under the framework of the FOCAC and the BRI.

Cai Fang mentioned in his keynote speech that poverty eradication was a common goal for mankind, and the international community had new expectations for China's participation in global cooperation on poverty reduction. The poverty eradication and economic and social development in sustainable ways were the top priorities for Africa as the continent with the largest number of the developing countries in the world. China was ready to strengthen experience exchanges and cooperation with African countries in poverty reduction and help to explore a way of poverty eradication adaptive to their national conditions.

Martin Mpana, remarked that China and Africa, over the past 20 years, have worked together to achieve great development within the framework of the FOCAC that has become a model for South-South cooperation since its foundation in 2000, as well as a model for the international relationship in the 21st century.

2. SUMMARY OF PLENARY SESSION

Ten scholars from China, Cameroon, Kenya, South Africa, Morocco, etc., delivered speeches on the themes related to the retrospect and prospect of the FOCAC at the plenary session. Their topics mainly covered bilateral and win-win cooperation, Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, academic and cultural exchanges, and the effect of COVID-19 in the context of China-Africa relations.

As regards the bilateral cooperation between China and Africa, the speakers all thought highly of the role of the FOCAC in strengthening China-Africa bilateral cooperation, and it has laid a solid foundation for building a closer China-Africa community with a shared future. For example, Professor Zhang Zhongxiang, Director of the Center for African Studies of Shanghai Normal University, believed that the FOCAC created the win-win result which has improved China's policy towards Africa, promoted African economic development and rejuvenation, as well as raised African international standing. Professor Zha Daojiong, from the Center for African Studies of Peking University, mentioned that although China-Africa cooperation has yielded fruitful results over the past 20 years, new efforts should be made to strengthen the

building of African public health capacity when considering the impact caused by COVID-19 in Africa.

From the perspective of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, Professor Nkolo Foe, Former Vice President of the Council for the Development of Social Sciences Research in Africa (CODESRIA), expressed that the FOCAC, based on such principles as mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence, played a crucial role in ameliorating a model of South-South cooperation. Professor Zhou Hong, Head of the International Studies Department at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, highly appraised the function of the FOCAC that embodied the spirit of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. The words "Peace, Development, Cooperation and Win-Win" pointed out by President Xi Jinping were highly refined from the principles. Ahmed Ogwel Ouma, Deputy Director of the African Center for Disease Control and Prevention(African CDC), mentioned that China provided a large amount of humanitarian assistance, including technical assistance and medical supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic to the African CDC and other African countries. In the context of the huge impact on global supply chains, African countries have effectively brought the epidemic under the control by learning China's experience in formulating epidemic prevention strategies and deploying epidemic prevention measures.

As for academic and cultural exchanges between China and African countries, Professor Liu Hongwu, Dean of the Institute of African Studies of Zhejiang Normal University(IASZNU), advocated the contribution from the Think Tanks in China and Africa to jointly create a high-level dialogue on the exchange of ideas, such as the FOCAC being an important model of multilateral cooperation and an important example of South-South cooperation. It was moral obligation and responsibility for scholars and academic institutions to utilize the FOCAC Think Tanks Forum as the platform to serve bilateral cooperation.

With regard to the various effect caused by COVID-19 pandemic, Professor Mohammed Tawfik Mouline, Dean of the Royal Institute for Strategic Studies (IRES) in Morocco, showed his concern about the several challenges that the African countries are facing: at the economic level, it caused a sharp economic contraction; at the environmental level, it urgently required African countries to undertake ecological transformation and to effectively improve the relationship between human-beings and nature; at the political level, it exacerbated disorder of political transition for some African countries. To overcome these negative impacts, the better choice was to strengthen cooperation with international partners, especially with China.

3. SUMMARY OF FIVE PARALLEL PANELS

The five parallel panels covered five topics, respectively, including achievements of the FOCAC in the past two decades, bilateral cooperation in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic, the

development of the BRI and the AfCFTA, cooperation on climate change and poverty alleviation, as well as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and China-Africa relation in the new era. Many scholars with different backgrounds exchanged personal views on relevant topics and expressed a common perspective that this conference had theoretical and practical values not only for the academic circles, but also for the governmental agencies.

3.1 China-Africa Solidarity against the COVID-19 Pandemic and Public Health Security

Participants in this panel expressed constructive and forward-looking views on the theme related to China-Africa solidarity against the COVID-19 pandemic and health cooperation. Scholars highly recognized Africa's efforts and achievements so far in combating COVID-19 pandemic. Many African governments took strict measures recommended by the World Health Organization to control the spreading of the disease, which proved to be correct, timely and effective. China has made great efforts to help African countries to fight the pandemic by donating the medical equipment, dispatching medical teams, sharing medical information and so on. Professor Sithembile Mbete, from the University of Pretoria in South Africa, highlighted China's recent collaboration with Egypt in producing the vaccine. According to the statement made by Professor Liu Minquan coming from the School of Economics of Peking University, China's experience in mobilizing national power for supporting Wuhan Province had great implications for African countries to consider establishing a regional response system for better responding to the pandemic jointly. Professor Lu Xin, from the Center for Global Health of Peking University, proposed that in future China should support African countries in improving their public health systems by ameliorating primary health care systems and enhancing capacity to use science and technology to deliver health services, disease surveillance, diagnosis and management. To the end, the experts and scholars all agreed that China and Africa should fight this pandemic together under the framework of the FOCAC.

3.2 The BRI and the Development of the AfCFTA

The participants in this panel expressed inspiring opinions on the relational issues between the BRI and the AfCFTA. Dr. Philani Mthembu, Executive Director at the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD) in South Africa, regarded the BRI as the catalyst for the global economy's recovery during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in Africa. Despite the numerous negative impacts exerted by the pandemic, China was the first country to recover from the pandemic. China has not only promoted the domestic consumption to drive the economy, but also upgraded and transferred the industries, and even increased its investment in some BRI countries. For African countries, the BRI effectively enhanced the trade and manufacturing capacity within the African region. What's more, the AfCFTA will enhance substantial investment in infrastructure and promote active cooperation between China and African countries. Dr. Wiyo Mujiba, from the African Studies Institute at South Africa, said

that African countries should take full advantage of the opportunities created by the BRI to develop infrastructure and capacity building for better participating in the global industrial chain.

For the future development in the context of the BRI and the AfCFTA, Professor Yao Guimei, Director of the Center for South African Studies at the China-Africa Institute, pointed out that China should grasp the opportunity to push economic reform and structure adjustment after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, promoting trade and investment in combining Africa's resources advantage with China's capital advantage. The Chinese government and enterprises should continue to support the infrastructure construction of the African continent. On one hand, it should continually assist African countries in building traditional infrastructure projects such as railways, highways, power grids and ports and so on. On the other hand, it should pay attention to enhance cooperation in new fields, such as digital economy, smart cities and 5G. At the same time, African countries should focus on the projects concerning people's well-being with China, which can improve logistics channels for Africa, expand imports from Africa, and increase the recognition of African products among domestic consumers. Dary, Chief Executive of the South African Management Development Institute (SAMDI), put forward to establish a coordination mechanism including two models. The first model was to combine the BRI with BRIC policies and the FOCAC so as to form the system where all of them were able to coordinate more closely with each other, thus contributing to achieve all setting objectives. The second model referred to combine other initiatives with the BRI, which was expected to form specific coordination mechanism in the future. He believed that the pandemic was changing global supply chains and that coordination mechanisms mentioned above can make effective contribution to ensure continuity of operations in domestic economies and global supply chains in a crisis. Professor Huang Haibo, from Shanghai University of International Business and Economics, made four suggestions for African countries to participate in the AfCFTA. First, African countries should embrace the AfCFTA with a more open and inclusive attitude and actively promote eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers among member states. Second, clear and phased measures should be taken to minimize non-tariff barriers and concrete actions should be taken to coordinate the different impacts of the AfCFTA on different countries and sectors. Third, African countries should develop policies to encourage structural transformation and reduce their dependence on commodities. Finally, the African Union should take effective measures to actively promote the development of the AfCFTA under COVID-19 circumstance.

3.3 China-Africa Cooperation on Climate Change

Although Africa contributed only 4 percent of global greenhouse emissions, the impact of the climate change on Africa was devastating, causing many adverse effects to the infrastructure, to the access to water and also to human health and welfare in Africa. Poverty issues in Africa

was aggravated, let alone the forced migration and many conflicts in Africa. China had a long record of cooperation with African countries. However, cooperation on climate change issues has been a more recent phenomenon. China has been building weather monitoring and forecasting infrastructure on the continent and helped launch the weather satellites for some African countries since 2013. Professor Zhu Weidong, Director of the Center for African Laws at China-Africa Institute, said that clean and green energy development was also a part of climate cooperation, such as building hydro-power stations. But challenges were still prominent. One of the biggest challenge was the lack of public awareness of the seriousness of the climate change problem among ordinary people between both sides. They thought it was a job for the scientists. The other challenges included the inconsistent policies and financing difficulties in some African countries.

Besides, scholars from Nigeria mentioned the empowerment for local groups including women to enhance industrial cooperation as for dealing with climate change issues. Professor Allan Gainfrom Angola university talked about the effect caused by climate change in Angola, such as extreme weather, and the ways to improve local housing conditions and the clean energy cooperation for both sides in the future. There were still many scholars showing their views and worries about climate change issues in Africa. In sum, the climate change issues have aroused many attentions from the scholars who will put forward more initiatives about environmental improvement in future.

3.4 African Development and China-Africa Cooperation on Poverty Reduction

China's poverty reduction measures were realistic and sustainable, which may be used as reference for African countries. There were many similarities between China and African countries so that China can provide African countries with reliable, pragmatic and sustainable experience in poverty reduction. Looking at the history, China has become a major player in the global market from a poor country, and its economic development model can offer some beneficial lessons for some African countries. According to experts' opinions, China-Africa cooperation under the principles of "Sincerity, Real Results, Affinity and Good Faith" and "Five No" approach can contribute to alleviate poverty in different ways. First, the economy in some African countries was still dominated by agriculture, and it was particularly important to increase agricultural output and food security. Second, promoting industrial development can be a better way to transfer development of the whole national economy. Third, infrastructure connectivity to promote inter-regional trade was also a good measure to which attention should be attached. Fourth, it was urgent to promote trade facilitation, increase exports and raise national incomes. Nowadays, the COVID-19 pandemic posed a huge challenge to poverty issues in Africa. Unemployment was still very serious, posing a greater threat to the exacerbation of poverty. Professor Li Zhibiao, Researcher at the China-Africa Institute,

contended that the main measure in China's current poverty alleviation campaign was the targeted poverty reduction which referred to the identification of the causes of poverty and the taking of targeted measures. China's achievements in tackling poverty have attracted worldwide attention, and there were many lessons for other countries to learn. However, it was very urgent for African countries to explore their own poverty reduction strategies and models.

Marine economy can be seen as one of the most successful achievements made by bilateral cooperation. China and African countries have been carrying out ocean-driven cooperation. Although African marine economy has made outstanding contribution in many aspects, it still faced many challenges in achieving inclusive growth and sustainable development, which exerted negative effect to reduce poverty in Africa. Dr. David Monya, from the University of Johannesburg in South Africa, suggested that Chinese and African scholars should focus on the studies related to the marine cooperation in poverty reduction and share useful experience from China. African countries differentiated in many aspects including policies, geographical size, status of wealth, development degree and so on, which made it impossible for all of them to copy China's experiences. African countries may learn from China to improve the well-being of the poor in rural areas, to relocate them and to implement the environment-friendly policies taking into account the African history and culture.

3.5 The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and China-Africa Relations in the New Era

Many scholars explored the issue about the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and China-Africa relations in the new era. First, considering historical background of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, it can be shown that the cooperation between China and Africa was based on mutual understanding and trust for win-win result. According to the statement made by Professor Li Wentao, Deputy Director of the African Department at China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), it was a long and valuable history for China in conducting cooperation with African countries under the guidance of the principles that can be embodied in the "Five No" approach proposed by President Xi Jinping at the FOCAC in 2018. To be more specific, the contents of the "Five No" approach which included the respect for state sovereignty, non-aggression and non-interference in each other's internal affairs were still highlighted in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Babacar Socrate Diallo, Director of the Center for Strategy and Diplomatic Studies, pointed out that those principles still had strong practical significance and great vitality at present. Against the backdrop of the rampant pandemic, while western powers were still in favor of unilateralism, adherence to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence can be the effective way to ensure that all countries enjoyed equal and inviolable sovereignty, safeguarded common security, and promoted common development so as to achieve win-win cooperation based on inclusiveness and mutual understanding.

Even from now, this principle was still followed by China who is not only the initiator, but also the firm practitioner. When the world was undergoing profound and uncertain changes, it was important for China and Africa to adhere to the principles and pursue the goals of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits. Only in this way can they truly build a closer community with a shared future. Professor Chen Qi, from School of Social Sciences at Tsinghua University, pointed out that China should seek common ground while reserving differences and should clarify the importance of South-South cooperation.

According to some speakers, the BRI has drawn much inspiration from the Five Principles. Professor Ibrahim Sheriff, from the University of Abuja, Nigeria, believed that the BRI with inclusive features was highly complementary to the AfCFTA. Strengthening the linkage for both sides was conducive to deepen China-Africa relations by accelerating the connectivity of African countries. Professor Ikenna Emewu, Executive Director of Afri-China Media Centre in Nigeria, stressed that friendly cooperation between China and Africa should be further strengthened in the context of the BRI and the AfCFTA soon. In particular, China can provide public health assistance, strengthen technology transformation, and support the transformation of economic structure in Africa. Under the guidance of the principles, Win-Win cooperation between China and Africa will continue to be enhanced, making benefits to African people.

4. CONCLUSION

Experts and scholars in China and Africa had in-depth exchanges on the current hot topics in the five parallel panels, which not only met the current appeals for mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, but also fulfilled China's commitment under the BRI. In the five parallel panels, scholars discussed the hot issues from different perspectives, exploring five aspects including China-Africa cooperation in poverty reduction, economic development, climate change, prevention and control of disease, achievements and challenges under the BRI. After one-day discussion, the scholars from both sides reached the following consensus: as regards the issue of the poverty reduction, China's experience in poverty reduction may provide some inspiration to some African countries, but African countries may learn from the relevant experience according to their own national conditions instead of completely copying the Chinese model; Climate change is a new area for green cooperation and will be one of the themes of China-Africa economic and trade cooperation in the future; China and Africa will continue to explore how the BRI can precisely align African urgent needs for development and support African countries in realizing leapfrog capacity development; China will continue to follow the friendly principles to help African countries to fight the COVID-19, which shows that China-Africa relation in the new era not only adheres to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, but also highlights the high-quality cooperation for mutual benefits; The think tanks may be regarded as the bridge of communication between both sides to exchange their views and propose suggestions on future cooperation, so as to realize a truly beneficial development model for

South-South cooperation. Besides, China-Africa Think Tanks Forum has attracted more than 200 experts, scholars and media representatives from China and Africa together to share their perspectives in eight sessions from 2011 to 2020. It was a fact that academic communications between both sides have been institutionalized and regularized.

The convention of the China-Africa Think Tank Forum is meaningful in terms of two aspects. First, it witnessed the common development for both sides. For example, in 2019, trade volume between China and Africa reached US\$208.7 billion, and China's direct investment stock in Africa reached US \$49.1 billion, with the increase of 20 times and 100 times respectively. According to the Ten Major Cooperation Plans and Eight Major Initiatives both proposed by President Xi Jinping at the FOCAC, dozens of China-Africa economic and trade cooperation zones and industrial parks have been established in Africa. What's more, China has built more than 80 electric power facilities, 130 medical facilities, 45 stadiums and 170 schools and so on in Africa, which promoted African economic and social development to reach a higher level.

Second, it strongly promoted mutual trust to deepen friendship. The communication mechanisms such as the China-Africa Think Tank Forum, the China-Africa Non-Governmental Forum, the China-Africa Information Exchange Center and Youth Gala have played crucial roles as communicating bridges for deepening bilateral friendship. China has offered 120,000 government scholarships to several African countries, built 61 Confucius Institutes in 46 African countries, and sent 21,000 medical teams to 48 African countries to treat more than 220 million African patients. In 2014, when the Ebola pandemic broke out in West Africa, over 1,000 Chinese medical experts rushed out there to help. In June 2020, President Xi Jinping and leaders of African countries jointly held an extraordinary summit against COVID-19 which sent a strong message of solidarity in fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic. All those actions taken by China show that China-Africa friendship has grown stronger on the basis of mutual trust and benefit.

In the future, China will continue to promote high-quality development under the BRI and will take an active part in the reform of the global economic governance system and uphold multilateralism and the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits. China is ready to work with African countries to realize global peace and development and to build an even closer China-Africa community with a shared future. The purpose of this forum is to pool the wisdom so as to make suggestions for better cooperation in the future and it will definitely play a great role in forstering the friendship the mutual understanding between China and African countries.