

AN EAGLE VIEW INTO CHINA'S CONTRIBUTION TO GLOBAL POVERTY REDUCTION WITH LESSONS FROM AFRICA

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Abstract

The paper examined China contribution to Poverty reduction in Africa. China's economic engagement in Africa, particularly through infrastructure development and economic cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has significantly influenced poverty reduction across the continent. the paper adopted modernization theory as the theoretical framework. It employed secondary sources of data collections. The findings revealed that Chinese investments under the BRI have significantly improved Africa's infrastructure, addressing a critical development gap and her investments in infrastructure under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have addressed critical developmental gaps in Africa. The paper recommends that African governments should negotiate agreements that require Chinese firms to involve local workers and transfer skills and technology, Governments must adopt stringent debt management frameworks to ensure the sustainability of Chinese loans. And finally, African governments should include clauses in contracts that require Chinese firms to employ local labor and transfer technical skills.

Keywords: Poverty Reduction, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Foreign Direct investment (FDI), infrastructure, Industrialization Drive

Introduction

In the last twenty years, China's involvement in Africa has become a pivotal element in the continent's economic advancement and poverty alleviation initiatives. China, as a global pioneer in poverty alleviation, has leveraged its experiences to tackle poverty issues in Africa, mainly via commerce, infrastructure development, and foreign direct investment. These initiatives are frequently contextualised within the expansive framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has profoundly influenced China's developmental alliances with African countries (UNDP, 2021). Africa confronts significant poverty issues, with millions residing beneath the poverty threshold and restricted access to vital services. The World Bank (2020) said that sub-Saharan Africa comprised more than 40% of the global population experiencing

extreme poverty. China's investments in essential areas, including transportation, energy, and agriculture, have generated employment, enhanced infrastructure, and boosted economic growth. Chinese-funded railway projects in Kenya and energy initiatives in Ethiopia have improved regional connectivity and resource accessibility, directly influencing poverty alleviation (Chen & Nordhaus, 2021).

China's collaboration with West Africa has facilitated substantial developmental advancements, encompassing enhanced access to infrastructure and technology. In Nigeria, the Abuja-Kaduna railway, funded and built by Chinese companies, has enhanced economic activities and generated employment chances for local residents (Huang & Ding, 2022). Moreover, Chinese agricultural initiatives in nations such as Senegal and Ghana have enhanced rural productivity and food security. Nonetheless, discussions on the sustainability of China's contributions continue. Concerns over debt sustainability and the long-term economic ramifications of Chinese loans are often articulated. Nonetheless, China's contribution to essential infrastructural and economic assistance in a region frequently neglected by conventional donors has significantly influenced poverty alleviation initiatives.

The significance of China's contributions to poverty reduction in Africa, especially in West Africa and Nigeria, necessitates further investigation to evaluate the long-term advantages and problems. Comprehending the efficacy of China's development model within the African environment is crucial for formulating lasting poverty reduction measures. This study seeks to elucidate the opportunities and constraints of China's engagement, providing a basis for policymakers and stakeholders to improve future collaborations. It is against this backdrop that the study raises the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. How has China's economic engagement, including investments under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), contributed to poverty reduction in Africa.
2. What are the key challenges and opportunities associated with China's role in reducing poverty in Africa through infrastructure development and economic cooperation.

Literature Review

Poverty Reduction

The elimination of poverty is the primary target among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations (Tollefson, 2015). Eradicating global poverty has consistently posed a difficulty (Glauben et al., 2012; Manish, 2012). The World Bank has established the extreme poverty threshold of 1.90 USD per day, recognised as the global poverty line. In 2020, 742 million individuals resided within the extreme poverty threshold, struggling for survival. This extreme level of poverty can lead to hunger, perhaps resulting in famine, as well as insufficient shelter, housing, or clothing. Countries worldwide exhibit varying levels of poverty, with extreme poverty still prevalent in numerous developing nations in Africa and Asia (Bicaba et al., 2017). Therefore, undertaking research that enables a more thorough evaluation of poverty alleviation measures in these areas is a crucial measure for attaining the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. In the ongoing struggle against poverty, human-earth system science has become a significant field of research (Liu, 2020). Human-earth system science represents the convergence of contemporary geographic science and earth system science, examining the coupling mechanisms, evolutionary processes, and intricate interactions within the human-earth system. It is essential to evaluate the interplay between the human-earth system and regional sustainable developments across various nations (Liu, 2020).

This approach prompts us to concentrate on poverty alleviation strategies and identify sustainable solutions. In 2013, China initiated the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiatives, together known as the Belt and Road Initiative, to protect the open global economic system (Liu, 2015). The Belt and Road Initiative identifies the developing countries of Eurasia situated along the historic Silk Road as primary areas for collaboration, aiming to establish an open platform for international and regional economic cooperation (Liu and Dunford, 2016; Andornino, 2017; Mahmud Titumir and Zahidur Rahman, 2019). The program seeks to establish more efficient poverty alleviation strategies for qualifying nations and to uplift 7.6 million individuals from extreme poverty (SCIO, 2021). Our research indicated that, as of 2020, the impoverished population in the Belt and Road countries constituted roughly 8.9% of the global poverty rate. The achievement of poverty alleviation along the Belt and Road is consequently linked to the attainment of the United Nations' worldwide zero poverty objective. Due to varying national situations and developmental stages, countries along the Belt and Road have implemented distinct poverty alleviation criteria, methodologies, and strategies. As a result, these countries have experienced a reduction in poverty, albeit to differing degrees. The progression of poverty levels is chiefly assessed by two categories of metrics: singular income poverty and its derivative measurement approach (Dang and Lanjouw, 2018; Ren et al., 2018; Purwono et al., 2021), as well as the Multidimensional Poverty Index (Alkire and Santos, 2014). Numerous studies have examined poverty alleviation experiences in nations participating in the Belt and Road Initiative. Bangladesh, China, and Vietnam have experienced significant poverty reduction and attained impressive outcomes (Ravallion and Chen, 2004; Chen, 2018; Binh and Ha, 2019).

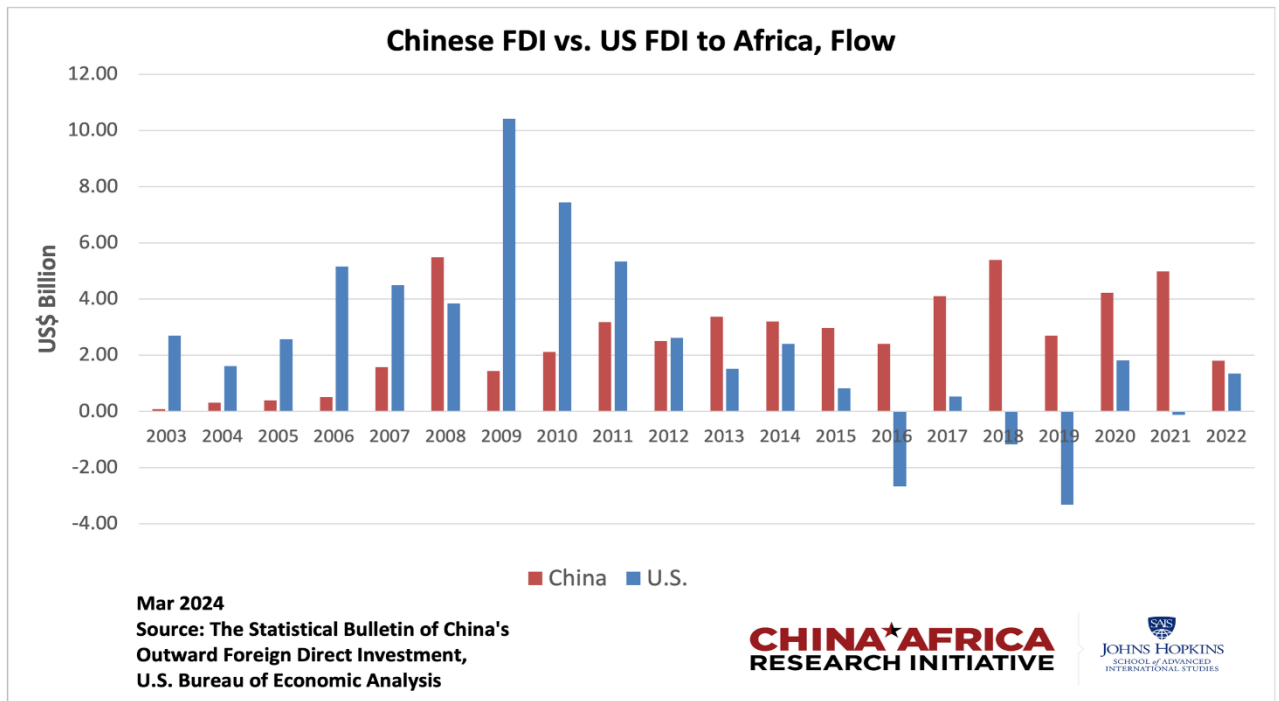
Various strategies to alleviate poverty were executed in these nations, encompassing the enhancement of development in impoverished regions through the promotion of local industries, the restoration of rural “hematopoietic function” (Sharma et al., 2021), and the implementation of ecological poverty alleviation initiatives focused on sustainable development (Liang et al., 2017; Liu and Wang, 2019; Zhou et al., 2019).

The nature of poverty reduction strategies has evolved from folk charity to government institutions, ultimately culminating in a collaborative governance model involving government, businesses, and non-profit organisations (Hipsher, 2013). Poverty alleviation tactics have evolved from a relief model to a development model, and ultimately to a participatory approach (Chen, 2018). Countries have employed extensive and vigorous economic stimulus, investment, and import-export commerce to promote economic growth; yet, the marginal efficacy of these approaches has progressively diminished. The COVID-19 pandemic and economic shutdown precipitated a global recession in rich economies, emerging markets, and developing nations, severely undermining the global poverty alleviation efforts (Fernandes, 2020; World Bank, 2020b). The World Bank has asserted that initiatives for poverty alleviation and development must urgently facilitate the opening of advanced economies (World Bank, 2020a). Revising national poverty alleviation methods is crucial; nevertheless, current research concerning Belt and Road countries lacks comparative analysis. The traits of poverty progression and the experiences of its alleviation in the nations along the Belt and Road remain ambiguous. In this context, elucidating the attributes of poverty progression and successful initiatives in Belt and Road countries can enhance poverty alleviation and human welfare. Prior research employed case studies conducted at national or smaller scales to examine poverty reduction experiences, so failing to deliver a comprehensive understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative, its quantifiable contributions to poverty alleviation in the region, or China's policies. China is a significant subject of analysis due to its successful eradication of severe poverty,

prompting several countries to seek insights from its poverty alleviation strategies (Ravallion, 2011; Zhang, 2019). Furthermore, China's elimination of extreme poverty was a pivotal advancement towards the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The significance of China's poverty alleviation experiences must be underscored.

Major countries in the Belt and Road region

Name of region	Countries within the region	
China-MongoliaRussia	China, Mongolia, Russia	11
Southeast Asia	Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Brunei, East Timor	7
South Asia	India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Maldives, Bhutan	
West Asia and North Africa	United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Turkey, Qatar, Oman, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Israel, Yemen, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia	20
Central and Eastern Europe	Poland, Albania, Estonia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Northern Macedonia, Serbia, Romania, Slovakia, Croatia, Latvia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova	19
Central Asia	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	5



Chinese FDI in Africa Data Overview

The graph compares Chinese and U.S. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows to Africa from 2003 to 2022, measured in US\$ billion. Over the period, China's FDI to Africa shows a consistent upward trend, particularly from 2005 to 2022, with significant peaks in 2008, 2016, 2018, and 2020. Conversely, U.S. FDI to Africa exhibits a more volatile pattern, with both significant inflows (e.g., 2009 and 2013) and notable outflows in certain years (e.g., 2016, 2019, and 2020). By 2022, China's FDI to Africa consistently outpaces that of the U.S., reflecting a shift in investment dynamics on the continent.

Key observations:

1. China's investments peaked in 2008 at over \$10 billion, aligning with the global financial crisis when China leveraged its economic resilience to expand influence in Africa.
2. U.S. FDI shows marked declines post-2014, with notable outflows in 2016 and 2019, signaling reduced American engagement in Africa relative to China.
3. Since 2017, China's FDI demonstrates stability and dominance, particularly in 2018 and 2020, when U.S. FDI saw outflows.

Implications

China's sustained FDI growth in Africa suggests its strategic prioritization of the continent through infrastructure development, resource extraction, and trade facilitation, largely under initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This trend indicates China's increasing role in Africa's economic transformation and its capacity to fill investment gaps traditionally addressed by Western nations.

In contrast, the U.S.'s inconsistent FDI flows reflect either shifts in policy focus or challenges in sustaining long-term economic partnerships in Africa. This decline could reduce U.S. influence on the continent, creating opportunities for China to strengthen its foothold.

For African nations, China's investment model offers immediate developmental benefits, including infrastructure and job creation. However, it raises concerns over debt sustainability and dependency on Chinese financing. Meanwhile, reduced U.S. involvement limits Africa's diversification of investment sources, potentially leading to overreliance on a single major partner.

Belt and Road Initiative

China has achieved substantial progress in Africa through the Belt and Road Initiative. It has invested in 52 of the 54 African countries and is prepared to enter the 53rd market in Sao Tome and Principe. China's official figures indicate that 49 of the 54 countries, exceeding 90 percent, have signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs). Geographically, 22 of the 49 countries (about 50 percent) are situated in West Africa, whereas East Africa has 12, North Africa has nine, and Southern Africa has six, collectively constituting the remaining 50 percent (Risberg, 2019). The African Union has executed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding BRI collaboration with China. Although MoUs lack legal binding authority, they formalise Chinese investments within the country, receiving due recognition from the local authorities. This facilitates the investment process for Chinese enterprises in those nations. Furthermore, executed Memoranda of Understanding can facilitate the establishment of a legally enforceable

contract. Only five African nations—Eritrea, Benin, Mali, Sao Tome & Principe, and Eswatini (Swaziland)—have neither signed a Memorandum of Understanding nor shown support. Nonetheless, China persists in advancing its influence in these nations unabated. It has just commenced investments in the Koka gold mine in Eritrea. The President of Benin has requested that the local company Petrolin and the French conglomerate Bolloré "withdraw" from a significant rail infrastructure project connecting Benin to Niger, to facilitate China's involvement (Lokanathan, 2020).

Additionally, China has entered into deals totalling US\$11 billion with Mali to fund two cross-country railway projects designed to connect the landlocked nation to the shore. In May 2017, Sao Tome and Principe altered its diplomatic stance, transitioning from recognition of Taiwan to endorsement of the "one-China policy." On 1 April 2019, an agreement was established with China to expedite the implementation of projects financed by China, including direct assistance for the 2019 General Budget. Increased Chinese investments are anticipated to progressively prompt certain governments to sign Memoranda of Understanding or convey official support in the future (Dahi, 2019). In recent years, as China's influence in Africa has expanded, governments have consecutively distanced themselves from Taiwan. Eswatini is the sole African nation that has opposed China's influence and maintains a prohibition on Chinese investments. It remains the sole ally of Taiwan in Africa and has not participated in subsequent FOCAC forums.

Key Challenges and Opportunities Associated with China's Role in Reducing Poverty in Africa

China's growing involvement in Africa has presented significant opportunities for poverty alleviation but also raised notable challenges.

China's investment in Africa has primarily focused on infrastructure, trade, and agriculture, which are critical to poverty reduction. Infrastructure investments, such as roads, railways, and energy projects, have enhanced connectivity, facilitated trade, and created jobs. For example, Chinese-funded projects like the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway have improved regional trade and reduced transportation costs (UNCTAD, 2021). Additionally, China's agricultural technology transfer programs in countries like Zambia and Ethiopia have bolstered food security and rural livelihoods (Huang et al., 2020). Chinese investments also drive industrialization. Manufacturing zones, such as Ethiopia's Hawassa Industrial Park, have created employment opportunities, especially for women, contributing to household incomes and poverty reduction (Tang, 2019).

Despite these advancements, challenges persist. Debt sustainability is a critical concern, as several African countries have borrowed heavily from China for large-scale infrastructure projects. Zambia and Kenya, for instance, have faced debt distress due to Chinese loans, raising questions about long-term economic stability (World Bank, 2020). Furthermore, the benefits of Chinese projects are sometimes unevenly distributed. For instance, Chinese firms often bring their workforce, limiting local job creation (Chen & Nordhaus, 2021). Environmental degradation from resource extraction projects in countries like Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo has also exacerbated poverty in affected areas.

Theoretical Framework

Modernization theory, primarily developed in the 1950s and 1960s, was spearheaded by thinkers such as Walt Rostow and Talcott Parsons. Rostow's "Stages of Economic Growth"

(1960) outlined five linear stages of development, emphasizing that societies evolve from traditional to modern states by adopting industrialization, technological innovation, and capitalist economic systems. The theory assumes that underdeveloped nations can achieve development by emulating the pathways of industrialized nations.

Modernization theory provides a lens to analyze China's role in poverty reduction in Africa. China's investments and initiatives align with the theory's principles, as they emphasize industrialization, infrastructure development, and technology transfer. For instance, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has provided African nations with access to modern infrastructure such as railways, roads, and energy systems, critical for economic transformation. Ethiopia's industrial parks, heavily supported by Chinese investments, have created jobs, boosted manufacturing exports, and spurred economic growth, which are hallmarks of modernization (UNCTAD, 2021). Moreover, China's transfer of technology and skills to African countries reflects modernization's emphasis on knowledge diffusion. In agriculture, Chinese-sponsored projects have introduced modern farming techniques, increasing food security in nations like Zambia and Mozambique (Alden & Large, 2019). Similarly, initiatives like the establishment of Huawei training centers in Africa have fostered digital inclusion, helping to modernize African economies.

However, critics of modernization theory argue that its application risks ignoring local contexts and replicating unequal power dynamics. For example, while Chinese projects have created opportunities, they often rely on Chinese labor and expertise, limiting local capacitybuilding (Carmody, 2020). Additionally, modernization theory's linear model may oversimplify the complexities of Africa's development pathways, especially when external dependency, as seen in debt accumulation, threatens sustainable growth. Thus, modernization theory underscores the significance of China's contributions to Africa's poverty reduction but also highlights the need for inclusive and context-specific approaches to ensure long-term sustainability.

China's Economic Engagement and Poverty Reduction in Africa

China's economic engagement with Africa, particularly through investments under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has been transformative in fostering economic growth and poverty reduction. The BRI, launched in 2013, focuses on enhancing connectivity and infrastructure development across continents. In Africa, it has facilitated large-scale investments in roads, railways, energy, and ports, which are crucial for stimulating economic activities and reducing poverty (Chen & Nord, 2018). One of the most significant impacts of China's economic engagement has been in infrastructure development. Projects such as the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway in Kenya and the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway in Ethiopia have improved connectivity, reduced transportation costs, and enhanced trade opportunities. These infrastructural improvements have allowed farmers and businesses in rural and urban areas to access markets more efficiently, thereby reducing poverty and promoting inclusive development (UNCTAD, 2021).

Furthermore, Chinese investments have created jobs across various sectors, including construction, manufacturing, and agriculture. For instance, Ethiopia's industrial parks, built with Chinese assistance, have attracted foreign direct investment and generated employment for thousands, especially women and youth (Bräutigam, 2020). Similarly, in agriculture, China has supported modern farming practices and provided technical training, enhancing food security and reducing rural poverty in countries such as Mozambique and Zambia (Alden & Large, 2019). Critically, while China's economic engagement has demonstrated measurable

benefits, concerns about rising debt levels and the dominance of Chinese firms in project execution remain. Countries like Zambia and Djibouti have faced debt challenges, raising questions about the long-term sustainability of these investments (Carmody, 2020) **Key Challenges and Opportunities of China's Role in Reducing Poverty in Africa**

China's role in reducing poverty in Africa, particularly through infrastructure development and economic cooperation, presents a mix of opportunities and challenges. On the opportunity side, Chinese investments under initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have significantly improved Africa's infrastructure, a key bottleneck to development. Major projects such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway and the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway have enhanced regional trade and connectivity, reducing transportation costs and facilitating economic integration (Chen & Nord, 2018). Improved infrastructure allows businesses to thrive and creates opportunities for job creation, both directly through construction and indirectly by enabling market access for rural and urban entrepreneurs.

Additionally, China's focus on industrialization, demonstrated through the establishment of industrial parks in countries like Ethiopia, has stimulated economic activities, enhanced technology transfer, and reduced unemployment (Bräutigam, 2020). These developments align with broader goals of sustainable development by addressing some root causes of poverty.

However, challenges remain. One significant issue is the rising debt burden on African nations. Countries such as Zambia and Angola have experienced financial strain due to borrowing for Chinese-led infrastructure projects, raising concerns about debt sustainability (Carmody, 2020). Moreover, the dominance of Chinese firms in executing projects often limits the transfer of skills and knowledge to local workers, reducing long-term capacitybuilding benefits (Alden & Large, 2019). Environmental concerns and the displacement of communities for infrastructure projects also raise questions about social and ecological sustainability.

Discussions of Findings

Chinese investments under the BRI have significantly improved Africa's infrastructure, addressing a critical development gap. Projects such as the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway and the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway have reduced transportation costs and improved regional trade integration, which literature identifies as pivotal for economic growth and poverty alleviation (Chen & Nord, 2018). Moreover, Chinese-supported industrial parks in Ethiopia and Angola have created employment opportunities, promoted technology transfer, and spurred industrialization. These initiatives have been particularly effective in reducing unemployment among youth and women, aligning with Bräutigam's (2020) assertion that China's investments foster economic inclusivity. However, challenges persist. Rising debt levels in countries like Zambia and Djibouti highlight concerns about the sustainability of China-led projects. Additionally, Alden and Large (2019) argue that the lack of local capacity-building and the dominance of Chinese firms in project execution reduce the long-term developmental impact. Environmental degradation and community displacement, often linked to large-scale infrastructure projects, further compound these challenges (Carmody, 2020).

Chinese investments in infrastructure under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have addressed critical developmental gaps in Africa. Projects like the Lagos-Ibadan Railway in Nigeria and the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway have facilitated regional trade, reduced transportation costs, and enhanced market access, which are essential for poverty alleviation (Chen & Nord, 2018). Industrial parks supported by China in Ethiopia and other African countries have also created

jobs, accelerated technology transfer, and strengthened economic diversification, which Bräutigam (2020) emphasizes as a pathway to reducing dependency on raw material exports. Despite these opportunities, significant challenges persist. Rising debt levels in African nations, such as Zambia and Djibouti, have raised concerns about debt sustainability and the long-term economic risks of Chinese-funded projects (Carmody, 2020). Furthermore, Alden and Large (2019) highlight that Chinese companies often dominate project implementation, limiting opportunities for local capacity building. Environmental degradation and community displacement caused by large-scale infrastructure projects also pose significant challenges, as noted by Gadzala (2018).

Recommendations

Based on the findings the following recommendations were made;

1. African governments should negotiate agreements that require Chinese firms to involve local workers and transfer skills and technology. This approach will enhance local expertise and ensure long-term economic benefits.
2. Governments must adopt stringent debt management frameworks to ensure the sustainability of Chinese loans. Diversifying financing sources and prioritizing economically viable projects will reduce over-reliance on Chinese funding.
3. African governments should include clauses in contracts that require Chinese firms to employ local labor and transfer technical skills. This will create long-term developmental benefits by equipping locals with expertise for future projects.
4. Governments must establish stringent debt management systems to ensure that funds borrowed for infrastructure projects generate adequate returns. Emphasizing feasibility studies and economic viability can help mitigate the risks of unsustainable debt.

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