Research Project Proposal (Draft), 18.03.2010

China in Africa: A Human Rights Impact Audit

The purpose of this project is to carry out empirical research on the impact of the presence of China in Africa on human rights. The hypothesis to be tested is "whether China's non-interference engagement policy with Africa leads to deteriorating respect for human rights in Africa".

About the Project

The rapid rise of China as a global economic player and its engagement with African countries has resulted in increasing number of publications and debate (Melber: 2007). But a close study of the literature reveals scanty and unsystematic treatment of human rights. The bulk of the literature decribe China's non-interefence policy on Africa as supporting dictators, destroying the environment, exploiting minerals and natural resources with complete disregard for human rights. One or two impact assessment studies are available but they focus on a single country[1] or single sectors[2] where human rights is not necesarily the main focus. The question of the impact of China's policies in Africa is an empirical problem that requires qualitative, quantative and comparative evaluation of evidence and data. There lacks, however, detailed and systematic empirical data on which the prevailing generalisations of human rights impact are based. The existing empirical assumptions are rather weak. The purpose of this project is to fill in this gap by generating necessary emprical knowledge, evidence and data.

Background

China's presence in Africa is not new. What may have changed are the motivations. During the cold war, China's engagement with Africa was informed more by ideological and diplomatic considerations. China long believed African countries to be diplomatically important in its encounter with the international world dominated by the Soviet Union and USA.[3] At the same time, China played a different role in Africa from Africa's colonial powers, supporting African countries in various

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[1] A report by Waging Peace: China in Africa: The human rights impact, February 2008 focusing on Sudan.

[2] Corkin, Lucy and Burke, Christopher (eds.), China's Interest and Activity in Africa's Construction and Infrastructure Sectors: A research undertaking evaluating China'sinvolvement in Africa's construction and infrastructure sector prepared for DFID China. Centre for Chinese Studies, Stellenbosch University, South Africa, 2005.

[3] Taylor, Ian, Unpacking China's resource diplomacy in Africa. In Henning Melber (Ed.) China in Africa. Current African Issues No. 35, Nordiska Afrakainstitutet 2007.

liberation struggles, providing educational opportunities and assisting in healthcare.[4] But the current closer ties with Africa, after a lengthy period of lull, were triggered by the Western responses to the Tiananmen massacre in 1989. China responded positively, by enhancing relationship with Africa, as a result of the support it received from African leaders in the face of criticism from the West.

Currently, China interests in Africa rage from natural resources, energy (oil and natural gas), security, trade, and diplomacy. In return, China is extending much need development and economic aid, especially in neglected areas of infrastructure, social development, and opening for greater bilateral trade with African countries.

African countries and governments have enthusiastically embraced China's 'friendship'. They see this rekindled relationship as a golden opportunity to escape Western domination and make the West less relevant to Africa.[5] Apart from the economic aid, debt cancellation and other benefits derived from trade with China, Africa is attracted by the Chinese foreign policy towards Africa. African leaders perceive China as treating them with respect by not interfering with their internal affairs through its policy of non-interference. They too appreciate the Chinese "business is business" approach that does not prickle them with political and humanitarian conditionalities.[6] In return African countries are willing to open their natural and energy resources for Chinese exploitation as well as accepting the "one China principle" and severing any diplomatic ties they may have with Taiwan. For African leaders and the Chinese authorities this is a "win-win" relationship.

The relationship, however, is not celebrated by all. The Western countries are especially cagey on the closer ties between China and Africa. Although this is purely in respect to their interests, it is also projected as a concern for Africa. Western interests in Africa are not different from the Chinese. The difference is in approach. While the West is interested in Africa's natural resources, oil, natural gas and market for their goods, they also demand political stability and democracy in Africa. In this respect, they use their development aid money and diplomatic influence as carrots and sticks towards this goal. They do not hesitate to punish or reward African governments in accordance to their failure or efforts on democratisation, human rights and good governance. China's political *laisse fare* dealing with Africa is perceived as a threat to international zeal for democracy, good governance, human rights and environmental protection as well as the war against corruption. The West is determined to counter China's negative influence in Africa if not to stop it.

African peoples and civil society on the other hand are caught in between the bad African leadership with access to free flowing money from China, Western countries with their economic, development aid and political reform conditionalities which do not seem to address the devastating poverty and lack of leadership in the continent,[7] and China's non-conditionality economic and development aid coupled with China's success in lifting millions of its population out of poverty in the last three decades while not following Western prescription on human rights and democracy. Is China offering

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[4] Firoze Manji and Stephen Marks (eds.), African Perspective on China in Africa. Cape Town, Nairobi and Oxford: Fahamu – Networks for Social Justice, 2007, p. vii-viii.

[5] Moreblessings Chidaushe, China's grand re-entrance into Africa – mirage or oasis? In Firoze Manji and Stephen Marks (eds.), African Perspective on China in Africa. Cape Town, Nairobi and Oxford: Fahamu – Networks for Social Justice, 2007, p. 107

[6] Ndubisi Obiorah, Who's afraid of China in Africa? Towards an African civil society perspective on China-Africa relations. In Firoze Manji and Stephen Marks (eds.), African Perspective on China in Africa. Cape Town, Nairobi and Oxford: Fahamu – Networks for Social Justice, 2007, p. 39

[7] Ibid. p. 43

offering Africa a new paradigm of development not burdened by donor pressure for Western-style political reforms? The tripartite dimension of this relationship presents a real challenge to the civil society, human rights and good governance in Africa.

China's development model may not be a bed of roses for Africa after all. Negative consequences are readily visible. For example claims are rife that Chinese exports are stifling local industries and destroying local manufacturing capabilities and competitiveness. Mostly affected is the clothing and textile industry where cheap Chinese imports flood is edging out local products out of the export market. Chinese are also being accused of unfavourable business practices that are causing resentment in many African countries. There is for example disproportional deployment of Chinese labour in Africa that reduces the potential positive effects of Chinese investments on household incomes in Africa. China's support and sale of arms to dictatorial regimes is also raising concern and alarm.

The scenarios above presents intriguing challenges in economic development, human rights and good governance policy making in Africa. This project aim is to examine these dilemmas. It utilises literature review to explore and analyse the problems and case studies based on human rights indicators to provide and analyse empirical data in the area.

Methodology and Theoretical Basis

Two approaches based on qualitative and quantative methods are to be used in this study: Literature review and case studies.

Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review will be to explore and establish the existing knowledge; theories, ideas, data and evidence and identify any existing gap or gaps in relation to the hypothesis. The review will be organised around three perspectives.

- Africa engagement with China: An African perspective

- China engagement with Africa: A Chinese perspective

- China engagement with Africa: A Western perspective

Each of the perspectives will identify the prevailing views, evidence and core human rights challenges as well as changes taking place as the relationship between China and Africa deepens.

Case Studies

Case studies are preferred as a research method in this project because although African countries bear some similarities, they are politically and economically diverse and portray different levels of respect for human rights. The countries' motivations in engagement with China may also vary. The project will carry out human rights impact studies in six countries in order to capture these diversities: two countries considered to be 'free', two 'partly free' and two 'not free'. The choice of countries will be based on the Freedom House survey findings criteria and categorisation 2009 and the current or past collaboration and links with researchers in these countries and the NCHR.

The project will also develop human rights assessment indicators for investigation, evaluation and analysis of the empirical data. The following basic indicators will be used: Respect (Structural), protection (process) and fulfillment (outcome) of human rights.

Theoretical approaches will be guided by following human rights doctrines and principles: Human rights as an international concern, states' legal responsibility to promote and respect human rights in their own countries, corporate social responsibility, development and eradication of poverty.

Objectives

- To generate new knowledge and understanding of the impact of the relationship between China and Africa on respect for human rights in Africa.

- To generate empirical data to verify the generalisations prevailing about the relationship and impact on human rights and identify new trends.

- To identify areas that require capacity building in order to maximize positive benefits and limit negative effects of the relationship, in particular for African countires which are perceived as weaker partners.

- To link research and program activities at the NCHR.

- To promote collaborative research between researchers at the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights working on Africa and China and between African and Chinese researchers and institutions.

Duration, Plan and Milestones

Duration of the project and study is 4 years.

First 1 year

- Activities: Literature review and theoretical analysis

- Outcome: a conference and book

2 years – Case studies

- Activities: develop a user's guide – human rights indicators, case study surveys (baseline studies), Investigations (fieldwork), analysis and writing

- Outcome: Human rights indicators: User's guide, Six Reports, Conference and Book/report

1 year – Comparative Empirical data analysis

- Activities: Summary of cases, Comparative human rights impact analysis, Theoretical imperatives and conclusions

- Outcome: Conference and Book/Report