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Beijing consensus diplomacy: A promoter or threat to Africa's pathway to sustainable development

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Abstract: Using a qualitative research methodology and explanatory approach to collect data, we assessed whether the Beijing Consensus diplomacy in Africa is a promoter or threat to Africa's pathway to sustainable development. The collected data were analysed using document and content analysis techniques. Analysis of the data revealed that the Beijing Consensus diplomacy in Africa is a positive initiative that has created a win-win situation, promoting sustainable development. The Beijing Consensus is opposed to the Washington Consensus, which influenced a win-lose situation that has deepened poverty, making Africa unable to move towards achieving sustainable development. The study found that China's resource-for-development approach has similarities with pre-colonial Africa's barter trade approach, which Africans practised in the entire continent. The analysis showed that applying the Beijing Consensus diplomacy to Africa has led to economic growth and development. The results showed that China's Belt Road Initiative has transformed Africa, changing the continent from poverty to economic productivity, as road infrastructure is associated with economic growth and development. Moreover, it was evident from the analysis that without an African continental foreign policy rooted in continental sovereignty with transparent terms and conditions, Africa's current benefits from China's investments would lead to poverty instead of sustainable development. A continental foreign policy would create an African Consensus, which would act on behalf of the entire continent. This African Consensus diplomacy would thus become a continental foreign policy defining Africa globally. However, as it stands, the Beijing Consensus diplomacy is a promoter of sustainable development, but this promotion would not last long without African Consensus diplomacy. The study recommends that Africa should establish a continental foreign policy with African Consensus diplomacy to enable the continent to have one standard foreign policy and goal when trading with China and any other external world.

Keywords: Beijing consensus diplomacy; China; sustainable development; economic growth; Washington consensus; road infrastructure; Africa

1. Introduction

When the term Washington Consensus was coined in 1989, the initiative was to set up market-oriented policies controlled by Washington-based policy institutions to improve economic performance in third-world countries (Williamson, 1993). These policies centred around fiscal discipline, market-oriented domestic reforms, and openness to trade and investment. The introduction of the Washington Consensus in Africa inspired market-based reforms prescribed by international financial institutions (IFIs) like the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), under structural adjustment programs (SAP) (Onyekwena and Ekeruche, 2019). These reforms became preliminary conditions for any financial credits to African states.

However, these foreign financial credits from the Washington Consensus led to unbearable and unsustainable external debts that plunged Africa into chronic poverty instead of sustainable development (Onyekwena and Ekeruche, 2019).

After the end of the Cold War in 1991, which brought about a unipolar global system with the United States (USA) becoming the superpower and controller of the worldwide system, the Washington Consensus became a dominant model for socio-political development in Africa. However, Africa never recovered from chronic poverty and hunger, and sustainable development was never achieved. With the imposing of the Washington Consensus in the development pathways in Africa, the continent never moved from underdevelopment to sustainable development status. Later, the 2008 global financial crisis shook the world. It brought other emerging economies to play a role in the international global economy. These emerging economies challenge Washington's economic monopoly in global economic governance.

Among those emerging economies is China, which has its Beijing Consensus, a Chinese foreign policy that it used to access African markets. China's Beijing Consensus diplomacy has created competition with the old economic power, particularly with the Washington Consensus diplomacy in Africa. However, the Washington Consensus has been losing its market-oriented policy dominance in Africa lately. A China model for sustainable development under the Beijing Consensus diplomacy has taken shape in Africa. This model refers to the economic and political system contributing to China's sustained growth. Joshua Ramo coined the term "the Beijing Consensus" from this model to describe the Chinese cooperation model, which differs from the Washington Consensus (Ramo, 2004) in policy and dealings with Africans. Asongu (2016) characterises the Washington Consensus as a combination of liberal democracy, private capitalism, and a priority on political rights, while the Beijing Consensus deemphasised democracy, state capitalism, and a priority on economic rights.

This paper argues that the Beijing Consensus diplomacy in Africa is a positive initiative that has brought about a win-win situation as opposed to the Washington Consensus, which brought a win-lose situation, thus hindering Africa's efforts toward achieving sustainable development. Instead of promoting a single model, Beijing Consensus diplomacy recognises the coexistence of commonality and difference and has understood which approach to development fits Africans and which approach Africans understand. It has applied a resource-for-development approach, which has similarities with pre-colonial Africa's barter trade, which Africans practised in the entire continent. Historically, African countries have been told by old economic powers under the Washington Consensus that they lack the capability and capacity to promote economic growth; hence, they were compelled to seek foreign assistance, which acted as a debt-trap diplomacy model, confining Africa to chronic poverty and underdevelopment. The debt-trap diplomacy model never favoured Africans because the Washington Consensus created a scenario of debtors versus creditors (Niyitunga, 2014). While African states became debtors, helpless, depending on the mercy of the old economic powers, they became creditors. A debtor-creditor relationship created a situation of enslaved persons versus enslavers, where enslavers exploited enslaved people. Niyitunga (2014) argued that the debtor becomes a slave to the creditor and

cannot challenge anything or unequal policy emanating from the creditor. For these reasons, the Washington Consensus created a debt trap that made Africans become enslaved, thus losing the opportunity to move forward toward sustainable development.

In the contemporary application of Beijing Consensus diplomacy to Africa, Africa has experienced much economic growth and can boost it. For example, the China Belt Road Initiative (BRI) has transformed Africa and changed the continent from poverty to economic productivity since road infrastructure is associated with economic growth and development. Road transport infrastructure is one of the ingredients that sustains development and accelerates economic growth (Pradhan and Bagchi, 2013). Road transport networks link separated facilities, enable social contact and interaction, and provide access to better education, health, and significant critical social services that accelerate economic growth and sustainable development (Rudra et al., 2013). This has made China attractive and provided opportunities for Africans to understand Beijing Consensus diplomacy as they see it as a pathway to sustainable development.

The paper is divided into six main sections to affirm and ascertain the above argument. While the first section was an introduction and background of this paper, the second section explains China's involvement in Africa. The third section investigates key developmental challenges in Africa. The fourth section assesses economic policies characterising China's involvement in Africa. The fifth section discusses the pitfalls and benefits of Beijing Consensus diplomacy in Africa to explain whether the Beijing Consensus diplomacy is a promoter or threat to Africa's pathway to sustainable development. The last section proffers concluding remarks of the chapter.

2. China's involvement in Africa

China-African relations are dated rightly during the colonialism era. Leslie (2016) argued that Africa has been at the centre of China's foreign policy since the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1947 and supported several African countries in their quests for political independence during the Cold War. Thompson (2005) noted that China's relationship with Africa has progressively deepened and strengthened since the "new China" was established in 1949. Initially driven by ideology during the Cold War, China-Africa relations have evolved to incorporate pragmatic economic and political strategies. In the 1960s and 1970s, China backed liberation movements in several African countries and provided aid to socialist nations for building stadiums, hospitals, railroads, and other infrastructure (Thompson, 2005). However, in all its engagement with Africa, China has been viewed positively through its win-win situation with Africans, thus bringing economic development, or negatively as imperialistic, exploitative, and ruining the African environment (Leslie, 2016).

The growth of China's influence and involvement in Africa is widely recognised (SAIIA, 2007). China is regarded as Africa's largest trading partner and source of foreign direct investment and has significantly contributed to infrastructure development and economic growth (Albert, 2017; Liyew, 2023). Over the past few decades, China has increasingly engaged with African nations, driven by adopting the

Beijing Consensus diplomacy, which first emphasises resources for growth and development, and security becomes automatic and obvious. Vines and Wallace (2023) argue that China provided extensive assistance to emerging African countries such as South Africa, Zambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, Uganda, and Equatorial Guinea (Stein and Uddhammar, 2021). These efforts aim to create a global order that fosters peace and supports China's economic growth, stability, and peace in developing countries.

Today, China views economic relations with Africa as a means to achieve its development goals, and it has emerged as Africa's biggest bilateral trading partner, bilateral lender, and one of the largest foreign investors on the continent (Stein and Uddhammar, 2021). For these reasons, Chinese companies have entered almost all African markets, with over 1000 companies operating in Africa and more than one million people of Chinese descent residing on the continent (Stein and Uddhammar, 2021). Many Chinese companies are privately owned, while others are wholly or partly state-owned. Within this framework, Chinese companies enjoy significant freedom to operate on African market terms and receive backing from Chinese investment capital on favourable terms (Stein and Uddhammar, 2021).

The China-Africa partnerships are marked by numerous collaborations (Mkhize and Lawrence, 2023). Initially, China's investments in Africa span diverse sectors, such as infrastructure, mining, agriculture, and technology. Infrastructure development has been the mainstay of China's engagement. Inadequate infrastructure is one of the primary constraints to business in Africa, where energy and transportation are among the major bottlenecks to productivity growth and competitiveness (Wang, 2007, p. 20). As a result, China has occasionally supported major regional infrastructure projects, such as electricity transmission lines between southern African countries (Africa Development Bank Group [AfDB], 2011). Furthermore, China has provided the framework for regional projects, including power generation projects, power interconnection, road projects, port projects, railways, and ICT networks (AfDB, 2011). Between 2000 and 2019, the trade volume between China and Africa increased significantly from \$10 billion to \$192 billion. This growth occurred through the 2000 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) involving 44 African countries (Ramani, 2021).

China's involvement in Africa was deepened during the Beijing Summit that took place in November 2006. The summit focused on the Forum on China-African Cooperation, and the then-Chinese President Hu Jintao made significant commitments that opened its doors in Africa (Wang, 2007, p. 13). These commitments included:

- preferential credits totaling US\$5 billion, comprising US\$3 billion in concessional loans and US\$2 billion in export buyers' credits;
- direct investment through the establishment of a US\$5 billion China-Africa Development Fund to support Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Africa;
- expansion of duty-free African exports to China and establishment of trade cooperation zones in Africa;
- grants and debt relief, including building hospitals, malaria prevention and treatment centres, rural schools, and a conference centre for the African Union,

as well as the cancellation of all interest-free loans owed by eligible countries that had matured by the end of 2005;

- technical assistance, such as training for African professionals, sending agricultural experts to Africa, setting up agricultural technology demonstration centres in Africa, and doubling the number of Chinese government scholarships for African students (Wang, 2007).

According to Akani (2017), by 2009, China had funded over 884 African projects. These projects included 142 agricultural initiatives, 71 schools, 154 hospitals, 53 sports complexes, and 62 conference centers (Akani, 2017). The outcome of these investments was that Africa, for the first time, experienced growth. They witnessed an immense improvement in social infrastructure, living conditions and an increase in the annual GDP growth and economic development (Akani, 2017, p. 150; Yue, 2016;). Akani further presented that Beijing Consensus diplomacy allowed Africans to access China's loans and aid with fewer conditions, making the Washington Consensus and its conditional loans and aid less attractive and relevant to African leaders (Akani, 2017).

China's involvement in Africa is still rooted in the Beijing Consensus, emphasising diplomacy and cooperation. For instance, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that shook the global system, China solidified its engagement and involvement in Africa (Nantulya, 2021). Hence, the current Chinese President Xi Jinping addressed the 73rd World Health Assembly in May 2020, announcing a \$2 billion commitment to the World Health Organization's (WHO's) COVID-19 response, particularly in developing countries (Nantulya, 2021). At the China-Africa Summit on Solidarity Against COVID-19 in June, he pledged additional support to Africa, including debt relief, equipment, vaccines, education and training, and technical expertise (Nantulya, 2021).

However, the Beijing Consensus diplomacy in Africa has been criticised for having resulted in huge debts that Africa should pay back, despite the development and investment activities through the China-Africa relations. There has been a growing concern about China's involvement in Africa, which, while generally positive, includes self-serving trade regimes and diplomatic ties that compromise the idea of an equal partnership. This has led to the discourse surrounding the views that China may be taking advantage of fragile states (Mkhize and Lawrence, 2023). Albert (2017) further noted that some political leaders and workers had criticised Beijing for ignoring environmental standards, violating local laws, and other exploitative behaviours. These views emanate from numerous mega projects done in Africa under the administration of China and its loans that might lead to long-term sustainable debts that Africa will not be able to repay. This situation might make the Beijing Consensus diplomacy create the same scenario of debtor and creditor as did the Washington Consensus in Africa. Africa has lost the pathway to sustainable development because of its overwhelming and unbearable debts to the First World.

Even though Beijing Consensus diplomacy aims to assist Africa in its journey towards sustainable development, its applicability on the continent and outcomes have become controversial. For instance, the Beijing Consensus diplomacy has led to unequal and opaque investments and may exacerbate corruption and ignite governance breakdown in Africa. Brautigam (2009) found it challenging to measure the increment

of China's investments in Africa because of the opaque nature of those investments and the fact that China's central government does not share its data. Humphrey and Michaelowa (2018) argued that while there is a pattern of uneven investments, growing economic ties between Africa and China have become strong. Nonetheless, Ayers (2013, p. 227) argued that Chinese investments are a "new scramble for Africa" to collapse Africa and kill her pathway to sustainable development. Moreover, Ayodele and Sotola (2014) argued that Chinese engagement in Africa is similar to that of Western countries decades ago, which led to the colonisation of the African continent. This means that the Beijing Consensus diplomacy is harming Africa, destroying the dream to achieve sustainable development, as did the Washington Consensus. From the above scholars, one can, therefore, equate both Beijing and Washington Consensuses at the same level, harming and exploiting the African continent.

However, Gagliardone (2019) argued that China is contributing to the African rising narrative by making investments on the continent with minimal conditions, while the Western countries' approaches toward engaging with African countries are still trapped between being proponents of human rights and freedom of expression and emphasising economic stability and service delivery to their citizens. Joseph, Luz, and Oluwaseyi (2024) argued that the Beijing Consensus diplomacy has put Africa at a crucial juncture in its development journey with fewer financing challenges. This makes the Beijing Consensus diplomacy a significant player in Africa's economic transformation. African countries must navigate these economic transformations and relationships strategically to ensure their pathway to sustainable development (Joseph et al., 2024).

The study indicated that for Africa to achieve sustainable development in the presence of Beijing and Washington consensus scrambling on her natural resources, the continent needs to have a continental good governance together with African consensus. According to Adesida (2001), good governance encompasses effective citizen participation in public decision-making, accountability, legitimacy, transparency, adherence to the rule of law, and creating an open environment to tackle socioeconomic issues. This necessitates a participatory continental governance and the ability of African governments to address developmental needs. Moreover, it relies on consistent, transparent, and accountable public management to ensure fair and effective decision-making and its implementation. Addressing societal issues such as corruption, inefficiency, and mismanagement requires a full commitment to and enforcement of good governance standards (Ragolane and Malatji, 2021). However, many African countries still fall short of these ideals, as their governance systems remain insufficiently open, and governments often struggle to meet even basic needs. Accountability and transparency are lacking, and many citizens cannot effectively engage in the governance process. Consequently, there is growing skepticism about the sustainability of efforts to establish participatory democracy in Africa, with public frustration increasing over slow progress. The ability of African nations and their leaders to confront critical challenges such as sustaining high economic growth, meeting basic needs (like food, housing, clean water, and electricity), improving education and healthcare access, boosting agricultural productivity, ending conflicts, and significantly reducing poverty depends heavily on the successful institutionalisation of good governance (Adesida, 2001).

However, it tends to be the case that China has played multiple roles in Africa's economic transformations and trajectories through Beijing Consensus diplomacy. It has served as a market, donor, financier, investor, contractor, and builder. China-Africa trade and investment relationships have surpassed aid in volume, making economic relations between them predominantly commercial rather than aid-focused (Wang, 2007) as opposed to Washington Consensus. Moreover, China-Africa economic interactions have become more decentralised and widespread (Wang, 2007). While the West's investments in Africa accumulate and centralise money and wealth for the top political leaders, China's investments decentralise wealth so that ordinary citizens at the grassroots level benefit immensely.

China's involvement in Africa can be attributed to two factors. The first is that its trade and investment relationships with Africa might help Africa achieve sustainable development by addressing its developmental challenges. The second is that the relationships will likely strengthen Africa's foreign policy integration and collaboration through the Beijing Consensus while maintaining legitimacy and autonomy as strongholds within Africa's international relations. Therefore, this persuades one to understand what developmental challenges Africa faces and how the Beijing Consensus is helping Africa overcome them to achieve sustainable development.

3. Africa's developmental challenges

Development is a synonym for the economic growth that every state in a particular stage has to undergo, driven by the transformation of traditional agriculture into modern industrialised production of various products and services, shifting from the traditional society to the stage of maturity and high consumption (Klarin, 2008, p. 68). The notion of development is related to the past Western concepts of imperialism and colonialism. In that period, it implied infrastructure development, political power, and economic policy, serving imperialists as an excellent tool for marginalisation and diminishing the power of certain countries (Tangi, 2005). Literature links the meaning of development to economic development and the term underdeveloped areas have a lower standard of living than developed areas (Estevo, 2010, p. 2).

Africa has great diversity, consisting of low, lower-middle, upper-middle, and high-income countries. African countries are either fragile or affected by conflicts with limited human capital. However, the continent is rich in natural resources (Taylor, 2016) and is home to the world's largest free trade area and a market of 1.2 billion people. The world depends on African resources, and the digital technologies shaping the world rely on Africa's minerals and traditional technologies (Niyitunga, 2024). This makes the continent ripe for exploitation by external forces depending on its resources. Unfortunately, the continent has remained poor with tremendous developmental challenges; the social media and World Bank reports rank African countries as the poorest in the global system. However, the continent can potentially create a new development path, utilising its resources and people.

Scholars have argued that Africa currently faces many development challenges and the presence of the Washington Consensus right after colonialism has not yet been addressed. According to different scholars such as Amavilah (2006, 2014); Nunn

(2008, 2009); Nunn and Puga (2012); Asongu (2014c); Obeng-Odoom (2015); Asongu et al. (2014); Amavilah et al. (2014); Amavilah (2015); and Asongu and Kodila-Tedika (2015), these challenges can be summarised into fifteen strands, namely:

- loss of traditional institutions and African deinstitutionalisation;
- the neglect of art as an expression of technological know-how;
- juxtaposition between ‘private property rights’ and ‘private use rights’;
- the idleness of natural resources;
- overvaluation of foreign knowledge and devaluation of local expertise;
- the inability to acknowledge scarcity;
- excessive consumption of luxurious goods by the wealthy elite;
- the false economics of pre-conditions and the lost decades with the Washington Consensus;
- issues surrounding colonialism, neo-colonialism, and Western imperialism;
- over-reliance on Western policies and development assistance;
- failure to integrate qualitative development measurements in development paradigms and the ‘Africa rising’ narrative;
- the need for a paradigm shift from strong economics (or structural adjustment policies) to soft economics (or human capability) development;
- low-depth of regional integration,
- fragile institutions, absence of conducive local conditions, ineffective negotiation of the terms of foreign aid, and less stringent property rights essential for reverse engineering and imitation of foreign technology and
- corruption in international trade.

Niyitunga (2021) associates these challenges with the destruction of African traditional education and the imposition of Western colonial education in Africa. Colonialists designed the established education systems that produced colonial education to impose upon Africans the white people’s mythical racial superiority and African inferiority (Oba and Onyije, 2011).

Oba and Onyije (2011) highlight the following features of colonial education that have intensified developmental challenges in Africa, preventing the continent from achieving sustainable development. Education was never designed to promote the rational use of Africa’s resources to benefit Africa; it was never designed to give young people confidence and pride as members of African society; it instils a sense of deference towards all that is European and capitalist; and shows Africa as a dark continent. Kelly and Altbach (1984) argued that colonial schooling poses immense development challenges because education resulting from it leads to subordination, exploitation, the creation of mental confusion, and development of underdevelopment; it does not give African people confidence in their ability and capacities to overcome obstacles; tends to make African people feel their inadequacies and their inability to do anything about the conditions of their lives; promotes corruption of the thinking and sensibilities of the African, and filling them with abnormal complexes.

Many of those challenges are the result of the West dealings with Africa. Others are consequences of Western colonialism in Africa, and the Washington Consensus, instead of alleviating the challenges, aggravated them from bad to worse. The Consensus has disempowered the African continent from addressing the impacts of

colonialism. Instead, it has led to Structural Adjustment Programs, which have served as tools that have plunged Africa into chronic poverty, thus failing to achieve sustainable development. Although not uniformly applicable to the entire continent, these challenges adversely affect a disproportionate number of the African population and require holistic solutions to be addressed. Some lessons can be drawn from the Chinese economic development experience, which are discussed in detail in the next section.

4. Economic policies characterising China's involvement in Africa

To unpack the economic policies driving China's engagement with Africa, it is crucial to initially examine the economic principles that form the basis of the Beijing Consensus. China's interactions with African countries are guided by policies that offer a structure for decision-making and diplomatic relations. A prime example is the Beijing Consensus's emphasis on the state's role in directing and supporting economic development. This entails active government intervention in critical sectors such as infrastructure development and strategic industries (Lijie and Yushan, 2015). Furthermore, China's impressive economic expansion has often been attributed to the government's decisive intervention, which can mobilise substantial resources to remove any obstacles to growth or institutional changes (Yao, 2011).

The foreign policy in the Beijing Consensus carefully sets the agenda for developing African states while growing Chinese legitimacy without "forced power." As noted by various scholars, the Beijing Consensus has been characterised by the lack of capital and basic infrastructure in many African nations. In stark contrast, China's robust economy has a solid industrial base and a growing consumer market. Moreover, China's trade policy ensures a steady supply of natural resources, such as oil, which are critical to its economic growth while providing access to new markets for its manufactured goods. In exchange for these resources, China pledges to invest in exporting low-cost manufactured goods to African countries to boost their economies (Masud et al., 2013).

Put forward, the guiding principles of the Beijing Consensus manifest several characteristics of China's economic policy involvement in Africa. For instance, China has assisted in establishing the Development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in various African countries. These zones attract foreign investment, boost industrialisation, and create jobs. The SEZs benefit from tax incentives, infrastructure development, and streamlined regulatory environments modelled after China's successful SEZs (Nyere, 2013, p. 22). While there are limitations in implementing the SEZs successfully, given the African economic position, China has been supporting African SEZs in the whole process, from financing, construction, and management to industrial transfer and investments (Chen, 2023). Furthermore, China's engagement in Africa prominently features large-scale infrastructure projects. These projects include the construction of roads, railways, ports, and telecommunications infrastructure. Such investments enhance connectivity between African countries and China, facilitating trade and economic integration (Nyere, 2015). China constructed the Nairobi-Mombasa Standard Gauge Railway, which cost \$4.7 billion, with plans to build industrial parks in multiple Kenyan cities and connect industrial areas with port access

in Mombasa (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2022). This railway has enhanced trade and connectivity within Kenya, fostering regional economic integration and economic growth.

Trade policy is one of the crucial aspects of China's economic engagement with Africa. The South-South relationship or the Sino-African trade relations are driven by China's demand for raw materials to fuel its industrial growth (Sun, 2014). For example, Sub-Saharan African nations have benefited from exporting oil and other natural resources through resource-for-infrastructure deals—such as the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, funded and built by China in 2012 for \$200 million. Four hundred Chinese investment projects valued at more than \$4 billion are in operation in Ethiopia, and Zambia defaulted on external debt payments in November 2020 (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2022). Ideally, China seeks to enhance bilateral trade with African countries by offering preferential trade agreements and duty-free access to certain African exports. This policy aims to boost African exports to China, reduce trade imbalances, and foster economic growth in African nations by integrating them into global markets (Akani, 2017; Nyere, 2015; Yin, 2019).

Despite the favourable economic policies for Africa, Masud et al. (2013) point out that China's monetary policies with Africa have distinctive and debatable characteristics:

- China's economic interests in Africa do not fundamentally differ from those of Western states;
- it is unclear whether China's engagement will substantially improve Africa's development prospects;
- the aggregate African trade with China exhibits a significant deficit;
- local retailers face competition from expatriate Chinese traders;
- China's investments predominantly cover labour-intensive and export-oriented sectors;
- China's trade relations have softened the impact of U.S. and E.U. economic sanctions in Africa;
- the massive transfer of skilled personnel from China will likely negatively impact the African job market.

Arvin and Shariff (2009) and Masud et al. (2013) added that Africa's capital-intensive exports to China may create an imbalance in the local job market. This is despite the argument that China's "win-win" economic policy is fuelled by its aim to fill the power vacuum in Africa and promote mutual economic growth (Masud et al., 2013). Chen (2023) concurs that involvement in Africa is mutually beneficial, focusing on export-oriented manufacturing, infrastructure development, and state-driven industrialisation. Moreover, Masud et al. (2013) added that China promotes its domestic capital to seek foreign investment opportunities. This has resulted in a significant increase in Chinese FDI in Africa.

Additionally, the Beijing Consensus diplomacy has been welcomed in Africa, and African states have received less Western aid in recent years than in the 1980s. For instance, in 2007, China provided \$8.1 billion to Africa, whereas the World Bank contributed only \$2.3 billion (Arvin and Shariff, 2009; Masud et al., 2013). During the 2006 Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, it was agreed that

China and African countries would collaborate in enhancing projects already established under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). This included revamping extensive infrastructures and implementing a sound agriculture development plan until 2006, using Beijing's resources to support what was deemed a rational strategy for the development and growth of the entire continent. However, no specific projects were proposed by China to strengthen NEPAD on the continent (Executive Research Associates, 2009, p. 97). Moreover, this policy involvement in investment leads to competition with Western and European powers. This competition can have implications for governance, as different powers may have diverse priorities and values (Masud et al., 2013).

China's extensive global economic and political influence in regions such as Africa reflects the domestic economic development imperatives driving China's pursuit of natural resources today (Executive Research Associates, 2009). China heavily invests in countries from which it gets natural resources (Masud et al., 2013). For example, 20% of Africa's exports go to China, while around 16% of African imports originate from China. In 2023, this investment amounted to \$282 billion in total trade volume. The primary commodities involved in this trade are mineral products and fuel (Munyati, 2024). China's energy consumption is on the rise. By 2025, it is projected to import an additional 7.2 million barrels per day of foreign oil, up from nearly 3.7 million barrels per day currently (Butts and Bankus, 2009; Masud et al., 2013).

After the Middle East, which accounts for 44% of its energy imports, Africa is the second-largest source at 32%. Moreover, the "one-China" principle is the political foundation for establishing Afro-Sino economic relations (Oloo, 2011; Masud et al., 2013). According to Sun (2014), there is a debate over whether China's political interests should be prioritised alongside its economic interests in its Africa strategy. Sun argued that for the past six decades, Chinese officials had emphasised that the Africa strategy has not been solely for economic interests or benefits, as it has been a means of selflessly assisting Africa when China itself was poor, as stated by the then-Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, "We did not exploit one single drop of oil or extract one single ton of minerals out of Africa" (Sun, 2014).

As Sun (2014) highlighted, the economic relations between China and Africa over the past six decades can be categorised into three distinct stages. Initially, from 1949 to 1979, China's economic activities in Africa were mainly driven by its political agenda and focused on providing economic assistance to newly independent African nations to establish diplomatic relations, support Africa's anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism struggles, and gain their support for the People's Republic of China internationally. Secondly, from the start of the reform and opening-up period in 1979 to the mid-1990s, China's foreign policy shifted towards supporting domestic economic development. This shift resulted in the gradual adjustment of China's priorities for its African policy from extracting political favours to promoting "mutually beneficial economic cooperation" and providing assistance to assist in promoting "service contracts, investment, and trade." Finally, beginning in the mid-1990s, the theory of "utilising both domestic and international markets and resources" became prevalent in China's foreign policy on economic relations with the global

world. This change led to a boom in China's international economic cooperation and the initial introduction of the "Going Out" strategy in 1996 (Sun, 2014).

A particular set of institutional arrangements, in this case, a strong 'autonomous' state, makes the policies so effective in this system. In effect, the Chinese development model is shorthand to discuss the state's role in developing the nation. This conversation covers the role of institutions and the state in economic growth (Hasmath, 2014). These monetary policies reflect China's strategic approach to fostering long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with African countries. While this engagement has led to significant infrastructural and economic gains for many African nations, it raises concerns about debt sustainability, local labour market impacts, and environmental considerations. Therefore, providing an alternative to the Western development model, China's involvement offers African nations the opportunity to explore diverse pathways for their economic development.

5. Pitfalls and benefits of Beijing consensus diplomacy in Africa

The Beijing Consensus diplomacy has gained significant praise and support for several key reasons. Akani (2017) showed that African leaders are particularly attracted to the Beijing Consensus due to its lenient loan conditions and support for development without imposing ideological requirements, in contrast to the Washington Consensus. Analysis of the data provided evidence that that most African countries would prefer Beijing because of the softness of loans, which they see as leading them toward sustainable development. This paper argues that the benefits of the Beijing Consensus diplomacy for African states are manifold. Firstly, Beijing Consensus diplomacy does not insist on political liberalisation and democratisation. Secondly, it has facilitated substantial debt cancellation, exemplified by the \$1.3 billion in debt forgiven for 31 African countries. Thirdly, it aids in diversifying trading partners through Chinese export credit (Akani, 2017; Ayodele and Setola, 2014) with less bearable conditions.

African leaders' embrace of the Beijing Consensus diplomacy can be attributed to what is most appealing about Beijing's "soft power." The Beijing Consensus diplomacy performs in a longstanding history of amicable ties between China and Africa (Thompson, 2005). This, therefore, has led to the provision of appreciated, "no-strings-attached" financial and technical aid to both elites and the neediest. It has also led to burgeoning commerce between the world's largest developing nation and the continent with the most developing countries (Thompson, 2005). African scholars and policymakers view the Beijing Consensus diplomacy as pivotal to a shift towards sustainable development in Africa, fostering hopes for a more significant role for Africa (Akani, 2017; Rebol, 2010, p. 2). Put differently, the favourable reception of the Beijing Consensus diplomacy in Africa is evident in the rapidly expanding economic and trade cooperation. China's approach to forging economic, political, and cultural ties with Africa aligns with its historical principles of friendship, collaboration against colonialism, mutual benefit, and reciprocity. This enhances trade relations and promotes learning through social and cultural exchanges (Jarso, 2018).

The benefits of the Beijing Consensus diplomacy are rooted in the guiding principles and objectives of Chinese foreign policy towards Africa, which include (1)

the political aspect, sincerity, friendship, and equality; (2) the economic aspect: Mutual benefit, reciprocity, and shared prosperity; (3) the international aspect: Mutual support and close coordination; and (4) the social and cultural aspect: Learning from each other and seeking joint development (MOFA, 2006; Jarso, 2018). These principles underscore how China intends to conduct its relationship with Africa, starkly contrasting the Washington Consensus. The latter promotes Western orthodox principles, often disregarding Africa's unique socio-political conditions. It advocates for African governments to align their economic, social, cultural, and political policies accordingly (MOFA, 2006; Jarso, 2018). This contrast highlights the Beijing Consensus diplomacy's distinctive and potentially more adaptable approach to fostering sustainable and mutually beneficial development in Africa.

According to Hasmath (2014), the Beijing Consensus diplomacy inherently acknowledges that each development scenario presents unique challenges, necessitating tailored and experimental solutions considering the current political, social, and economic environment. This philosophy demands that policymakers exhibit broader risk-elasticity, enabling the adoption of innovative policies rooted in an ultra-pragmatic approach. The Beijing Consensus diplomacy offers a valuable philosophical framework for African states, particularly from China's development concept. It suggests that policymakers should embrace diverse metrics to advance a nation's economic and social experiences rather than adhering strictly to a single economic measurement (Hasmath, 2014). Consequently, African states have grown optimistic about devising their development paths (Lammers, 2007). The Beijing Consensus diplomacy also extends its benefits to Africa in the following developmental balances positioned within China's development concept—these benefits include (a) harmonising urban and rural development, (b) ensuring balanced regional development, (c) integrating economic and social progress; (d) achieving a balance between individuals and nature; and (e) synchronising domestic development with greater global integration (Hasmath, 2014).

These principles are further realised through a ten-focus area plan that complements the five balances: (1) constructing more affordable housing, particularly in rural areas; (2) accelerating the construction of rural infrastructure, including roads, power grids, and water conservation projects; (3) expanding transportation networks, including railways and airports in western provinces; (4) enhancing health and education services; (5) improving environmental protection efforts; (6) fostering innovation and industrial restructuring; (7) expediting disaster recovery; (8) increasing average incomes, especially in rural areas; (9) revising the value-added tax system; and (10) increasing financing for domestic companies (Hasmath, 2014).

However, the Beijing Consensus diplomacy, which has established a strong presence in many African countries, has been criticized despite its powerful influence. While African leaders view the emerging south-south relations as a historic opportunity to break free from their neo-colonial ties to the West (Lammers, 2007), western scholars have raised concerns about the potential negative consequences of this diplomacy for the African continent. According to Yin (2019), many of the qualities that optimists praise the Beijing Consensus diplomacy for are the same ones that draw the most criticism. For instance, Nyere (2013) found that one of the main criticisms of the approach is its reliance on Chinese labour and companies for projects

in Africa, which undermines local job creation and technology transfer. This practice leads to a situation where high-skilled jobs are occupied by Chinese nationals, hindering the development of local expertise and capacity. For African states, this is a situation they strive to avoid when expanding development.

However, the researchers found that the Beijing Consensus diplomacy presents fewer challenges that Africans can quickly address, thus leading to sustainable development. Analysis of the data showed that China's investments do not stop at the top leaders but go on to the ordinary citizens. It was further revealed that the Beijing Consensus diplomacy combines both top-down and bottom-up approaches, which has made it admired mostly by local citizens or ordinary Africans. This potential attraction for many developing nations to the Beijing Consensus has come almost entirely due to the tangible economic and political benefits rather than intangible moral appeals. This finding is opposed to Hasmath (2014), who argued that the Beijing Consensus lacks moral appeal because it is guided entirely by pragmatism, which is behaviour disciplined by neither a set of values nor established principles. Hasmath (2014) further argued that the downside is that Beijing's assistance has supported regimes that would otherwise be ignored or condemned in the international society of nation-states. The researchers found this argument one-sided because Africa can address the challenges presented. After all, the Beijing Consensus diplomacy reaches ordinary citizens who possess the power to change situations.

Western and a few African scholars attribute the other pitfalls to the Beijing Consensus diplomacy: it promotes colonialism. Nyere (2013) and Hasmath (2014) argued that the Beijing Consensus perpetuates a new form of colonialism. Western observers say that China's involvement in Africa is driven by self-interest, focusing on resource extraction without genuine concern for the long-term developmental needs of African nations. This view is supported by the observation that Chinese investments are primarily capital-intensive and concentrated in natural resource sectors, which do not significantly contribute to local employment or sustainable economic growth. Moreover, China's development assistance may strengthen existing authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes, forestalling democratisation in some contexts and perhaps reversing this process in other jurisdictions (Hasmath, 2014). However, Hasmath (2015) concurs that, from a purely philosophical standpoint, "China's behaviour thus far suggests that it does not seek to impose its priorities on partner countries overtly." However, the analysis showed that the Beijing Consensus diplomacy is not exploitative in Africa, as is the Washington Consensus, because it does not attach its loans or assistance with sanctions or conditions. It would seem that that colonialism is associated with the conditions that dictate how it should be used, mainly to benefit the donor rather than the receiver. The findings are supported by Shafiu and Salleh (2020) and Chitenderu and Newadi (2022), who argued that conditionalities accompanying Western loans in Africa slow economic development, increase poverty and inflation, and promote social inequality. In such a situation, it becomes difficult for Africa to progress toward sustainable development.

Furthermore, the analysis showed that sanctions associated with Western loans to Africa are the ones that promote colonialism, unlike the Beijing Consensus diplomacy, which has not sanctioned any African countries. Steinbach et al. (2023) supports the findings that sanctions deteriorate human rights and are blunt weapons that cause

severe collateral damage. Ghomi's (2022) findings showed that its sanctions affect ordinary citizens while protecting political leaders primarily because of the top-down and centralisation of Western loans. Afesorgbor and Mahadevan (2016) argued that sanctions are associated with increased economic inequality and disparities. Other scholars have argued that economic or political sanctions increase poverty and income inequality (Early and Peksen, 2019; Farzanegan and Hayo, 2019). It is clear that the Washington Consensus, which leans on sanctions when dealing with Africa, is the one perpetuating colonialism and chronic poverty, while the Beijing Consensus diplomacy perpetuates benefits that lead to sustainable development in Africa.

In essence, the consequences of the Beijing Consensus diplomacy stem from the fact that while it does not align with Western perspectives, western scholars accuse it of disregarding human rights, governance, and the rule of law in Africa. However, human rights violations and lack of governance based on the rule of law have been an issue in Africa. The Beijing Consensus diplomacy does not involve itself in the domestic affairs of African states' partnerships. This does not give rise to human rights violations or lack of governance. The Beijing Consensus benefits Africa in infrastructure development and financial aid without stringent conditions. Analysis of the data provided evidence that that infrastructure development is a critical pathway to sustainable development. This paper argues that without sustainable infrastructure, there is no possibility of achieving sustainable development. Prus and Sikora (2021) argued that road infrastructure influences the formation of human, social, and cultural capital and opportunities to develop economic initiatives. It attracts external capital, opportunities for modernising agricultural production, improving inhabitants' lives, and shaping multifunctional and sustainable rural development (Prus and Sikora, 2021), road infrastructure, promotes civilisation and increases territorial cohesion needed for sustainable development.

Road infrastructure directly or indirectly influences the attainment of all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Thacker et al., 2019). The transport system is a promoter of sustainable economic growth that leads to the achievement of sustainable development (Popova, 2017). Nidziy (2017) found that transport infrastructure promotes and strengthens investments and is a reliable pathway to sustainable development. In the short term, road transport increases investments that lead to financial income through the construction of transport infrastructure, but it also creates new workplaces (Prus and Sikora, 2021). In the medium run, road infrastructure stimulates economic growth, reduces the transport costs of enterprises, and improves people's lives and well-being (Prus and Sikora, 2021). The findings thus showed that China's BRI in Africa is one of the projects that will lead the continent toward sustainable development. This, therefore, qualifies the Beijing Consensus diplomacy to be a promoter of sustainable development in Africa.

Moreover, Beijing Consensus diplomacy promotes sustainable development in Africa. China advocates for the rights of developing countries and calls for reform of the Security Council to give more representation to developing countries, especially African nations. This aligns with China's foreign policy based on Confucian morality. It is revealed that this image of China may not be consistent with reality as it requires addressing the mistakes made by the Washington Consensus in Africa through promoting justice and equal rights. Furthermore, the researchers found that the cheap

imports of Chinese goods, particularly in the textile industry, though achieved by every citizen, may pose a significant threat to Western industries in Africa. This paper also found that Chinese companies in Africa often bring their workers instead of hiring locals, which prevents knowledge, skills, and technology transfer. Thus, it is argued that it could ultimately result in unemployment in Africa, which threatens sustainable development.

It is revealed through the analysis of the data that that China's engagements with Africa are built on 'win-win' cooperation and multilateralism rather than hegemony and oppression as opposed to the Washington Consensus. This model has made the Beijing Consensus admired and welcomed by numerous African countries. It is a new model for developing countries because it "provides a wider field of action" that promotes sustainable development (Lubieniecka, 2014). One can argue that Beijing's development model (unlike Washington's) does not want to be imposed, but it is appealing because of the evident Chinese success story. Moreover, the Beijing Consensus diplomacy is peaceful, innovative, pragmatic, ideological, growth-oriented, asymmetric power tools-based, national, and flexible. It foresees gradual changes, not shock therapies; it assumes that social change is as crucial as economic change (Ramo, 2004, pp. 2–4). This is what Africa needs to achieve sustainable development, considering the myriad challenges it is confronted with, as discussed in the third section of this paper.

China is building its relations with Africa on a new basis, different from the one Western countries used to build. Its Beijing Consensus diplomacy is embedded within the Confucianism philosophy, which is a base for authorities' morality, economic and political calculation (paying attention to internal growth and doing the proper things to maintain it) (Fulin, 2010, p. 6). China has learned from Washington Consensus's failure to lead the continent towards sustainable development (Ramo, 2004). Ironically, Western debates greatly centre on current China-Africa relations, putting China in the driving seat.

6. Conclusion

The Beijing Consensus diplomacy in Africa presents lesser challenges that are easy to address to help Africa achieve sustainable development. The paper showed that it is a promoter of sustainable development in Africa. The Beijing Consensus diplomacy is becoming the cornerstone of the development opportunities in Africa and is transforming both the political and economic system. However, as the model was found to be a win-win, the African continent lacks terms and conditions when negotiations that lead to win-win situations are being done. Nevertheless, Africa lacks continental sovereignty, which would lead to continental self-determination and a uniform continental foreign policy. Dealing with external worlds with the current status of Africa divided into smaller or individual sovereignties threatens her pathway to sustainable development. If not addressed, China has understood this vacuum, which will weaken the continent and prevent it from benefiting from the Beijing Consensus diplomacy. Without a continental foreign policy rooted in continental sovereignty with transparent terms and conditions, Africa's current benefits from China's investments would lead to poverty instead of sustainable development. A

continental foreign policy would lead to the formation of an African Consensus diplomacy that would act on behalf of the entire continent. An African Consensus diplomacy is therefore a durable solution for Africa to navigate through Beijing and Washington Consensuses, and secure deals that promote sustainable development in Africa. As the Beijing Consensus diplomacy as opposed to the Washington Consensus is a promoter of sustainable development, without an African Consensus diplomacy, this promotion would deep poverty and intensify political instability in Africa.

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