

# Fighting Ebola and Strengthening China's Humanitarian Assistance

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Since June 2014, the international community has been troubled by two types of killings. One is the killing of innocent people by the extremists of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and the other is the spread of Ebola, a deadly virus (of terror), in West Africa. Although the latter does not bring war or bloodshed like the former, such a severe and hemorrhagic infectious disease has led to a growing fatality rate due to its fast outbreak and strong infectious nature. Statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO) shows that by the middle of October 2014, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leon, the countries most seriously affected by the epidemic, have seen more than 8900 suspected and likely infectious cases with a death toll of 4500. WHO has declared the Ebola epidemic the most serious international emergency in modern human history. Considering China's valuable experience in fighting SARS in 2002-2003 and the fact it is the second largest economy in the world, China needs to further increase its contribution in this global battle with Ebola and increase the share of its humanitarian assistance in foreign aid.

## 1. The fight against Ebola has been regarded as a new frontier of China-US competition in Africa

Facing such a rampant epidemic like Ebola, governments of affected countries have responded immediately with huge input of manpower and resources. However, there is a serious shortage of medical supplies and human resources in the affected countries who thus need the help of the international community. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon convened a high-level meeting on Response to the Ebola Virus during the 69th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2014, which was aimed at mobilizing more global players in the fight against the disease.

In the global battle against Ebola, China has always been at the forefront. But media, especially the Western media tends to compare the contribution from the US and China, the biggest and the second economy in the world. Some media state that the US has gained the upper hand over China, given the supply of more advanced medical technology/drugs and hundreds of millions of dollars of in-kind medical assistance (President Obama recently announced that the US will send 4000 military personnel to the afflicted region to provide medical and logistical support). Furthermore, some media also delight in calculating and comparing the promised, but yet to be delivered assistance aid. For example, a German weekly newspaper website said on Oct. 10, 2014, "The aid money that China has donated for fighting Ebola is relatively small. EU has promised to offer

1 billion Euro, the US promised \$ 750 million." A Japanese magazine said, "Even though China is the second biggest economy, but it is only ranked as the 29th (behind Greece and ahead of Portugal) in terms of humanitarian aid provision. Only 0.4% Chinese foreign aid goes to humanitarian causes. Though China puts huge aid in infrastructure projects, people feel that Beijing is reluctant to spend money on humanitarian aid."

## 2. Strengthening China's humanitarian aid can better reflect the new "morality-benefit concept" in China's Africa policy

Correct handling of the relationship between justice and benefit is an important guideline laid down by China's new leadership in its engagement with Africa. In March 2013, when President Xi Jinping visited Africa, he used four phrases to summarize China's attitude toward China-Africa relations: "remaining faithful, valuing real results, cultivating kinship-like quality and being sincere."

In January 2014, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi, visited Africa, reiterating that "the right concept of morality and benefits is a banner of China's diplomacy." According to Wang, China will neither embark on the plundering road of colonialists nor seek to profit selfishly as done by some other countries. Instead, China hopes to become prosperous together with African countries. During the process, China will give more consideration to the needs of African countries so that they can benefit more through cooperation.

The “morality-benefit concept” not only refers to letting African partners share more benefits when China is engaged with them, but it also means that China needs to offer generous help when African people are in extreme difficulty. In summer 2011, when the Horn of Africa countries including Somalia suffered severe drought and famine, the Chinese government provided food and cash emergency assistance valued as high as 443.2 million RMB within a very short period of time, which is unprecedented in China’s humanitarian aid history. The delivery of the humanitarian aid has not only relieved the famine on the ground, but also served as a good demonstration footnote for China’s “morality-benefit concept”.

### **3. Strengthening China’s humanitarian aid can display China’s sense of responsibility and soft power**

In May 2014, the Chinese Premier Li Keqiang paid a visit to Africa, while addressing the World Economic Forum on Africa in Nigeria. Li noted that China and Africa had a combined population of more than 2.3 billion, and strengthening mutually beneficial cooperation can help improve the well-being of people from both sides and promote balanced world economic development. Cooperation itself is the world’s greatest model for inclusive growth. Through opening up and mutually beneficial cooperation, China and Africa can make joint progress in development, benefiting the economic growth and livelihoods of one third of the world’s population. This can greatly promote balanced world economic development and the overall progress of humanity. It also shows China is willing to take on its responsibilities.

In the global fight with Ebola, China has made notable contributions in terms of providing medical materials, cash donations and medical experts, etc. It is more commendable and worth pointing out that China has offered most-needed precious human resources - Chinese medical teams to Africa and experts on disease control and public health, were in the frontline against the Ebola disease. Ever since the arrival of the first Chinese medical team in Algeria in 1963, over 20,000 Chinese medical experts and staff have been sent to Africa over the past half a century, and have treated several millions of patients in 51 African countries and regions, and nearly 50 Chinese medical staff have lost their lives in the process. At present, there are 43 Chinese medical teams with nearly 1000 members in 42 African countries. When the dangerous epidemic began, the Chinese medical teams in those countries affected did not go away. Rather, they stayed there to work together with

Africans to fight the disease. On top of that, more Chinese medical experts have arrived at the forefront of African countries to join in the battle.

Statistics show that since the outbreak of Ebola in three west African countries, China has sent 174 medical staff to support and participate in the disease prevention and control campaign. Confronting the ruthless disease, the Chinese doctors have demonstrated their courage and caring heart. Although attacked unexpectedly by the virus, African countries know that the Chinese are with them. This is a demonstration of China-Africa friendship, and is an important display of China’s sense of responsibility. Therefore, there are media reports saying that “China’s medical diplomacy is gaining the rich political dividend”. The Sierra Leone Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Samura Kamara highly appreciates China’s true friendship. He said that the government and people of Sierra Leone give their thanks to China for providing anti-epidemic materials, funds and laboratories immediately after the outbreak of the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone. He said, “The generous support from China highlights that China is a genuine strategic partner of Sierra Leone and African countries. The image of China has become even more upright and taller.”

Since the Ebola epidemic is still plaguing Sierra Leone and other west African countries, the minister said, “it is hoped that China will continue its support in the fight against the epidemic and help Sierra Leone and Africa as a whole build up their disease prevention and control capacity.”

Moreover, Chinese medical research on medicines for curing Ebola has also been pushing forward in a speedy way. One pharmaceutical company called “Sihuan Pharmaceutical Holdings Group” has already developed a medicine called “JK-05” for Ebola treatment. Even the Japanese media made comments on this saying, “if this medicine proved to be successful in curing the Ebola epidemic in Africa, that will greatly enhance China’s pharmaceutical industry and Beijing’s soft power in Africa.”

All in all, further strengthening China’s humanitarian assistance to African countries which have suffered humanitarian disasters or a public security crisis, is not only a need to compete with the US, EU, etc., but is also an imperative to make the “morality-benefit concept” more practicable. It will greatly improve China’s image and soft power in the African Continent.

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