

The Role of China's NGOs in Foreign Aid¹ and International Development

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As early as 2003, China's former Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan said that China should seriously consider the role of NGOs in international affairs and increase China's voice in the field of NGOs and international development. The Chinese Civil Organization's (CCO)² involvement in African development cooperation has significant implications.

First, CCO³'s social responsibilities should be recognized and stressed. Regarding the global task of poverty alleviation, China has achieved a great success, and takes the lead in fulfilling the poverty-alleviation objectives of the Millennium Development Goals. CCOs have played a very important role in the reduction of poverty in China. With the experiences in poverty reduction and in medical services, education, and professional skills, CCO can make a great contribution to Africa's development.

Second, CCOs can promote China-Africa relations. In recent years, China-Africa cooperation has witnessed good progress, but also many problems. CCOs can be mobilized to help solve many of these problems, at least partially. CCOs can take part in various development and relief activities in Africa, or help to carry out Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) of Chinese enterprises. They can also be of help in charity or rescue activities in Africa.

Third, CCOs can improve global governance and drive social and economic directives in a better direction with justice in Africa. The position and discourse powers of developing countries in the world arena are very limited. CCOs can make good use of its own experiences to cooperate with African NGOs and take part in international negotiations and activities

thus strengthening the discourse power of developing countries.

Fourth, Chinese CCOs can cooperate and exchange ideas with African NGOs, thereby raising efficiency in the public field and in ameliorating ecological conditions, so that they could play a more effective role in the international community. Both CCOs and African NGOs are facing the challenge of survival and development. By uniting, they can complement each other and produce productive interactions with their respective governments.

Finally, CCOs can also help the Chinese government to improve its diplomatic image and raise its international status. Due to lack of preparation, many Chinese companies have misunderstood Africa's local culture, law and customs, which in turn has caused various problems. Engagement of CCOs in Africa can help enterprises to solve those problems by building up the grassroots relations with local people, and their traditions.

To sum up, it is clearly important for the CCOs to take an active part in development cooperation in Africa, to form a strategic cooperative partnership with Chinese enterprises and formulate a triple cooperative and coordinated government-enterprise-CCO system. In this way, CCOs can better fulfill the task of supporting Africa's development, thus raising its own capability in internationalization.

In recent years, China's CCOs have been gradually involved in China-Africa cooperation with their own advantages, and have taken part in some activities in international development cooperation in Africa. Below are some examples.

1 Since all "recipient countries"(including African countries) are very much averse to the notion of "foreign aid" and consider the term of "donor-recipient" unable to accurately reflect the real sense of mutual relations, with which the writer of this briefing agrees, therefore, international cooperation will be emphasized instead of "foreign aid".

2 In this briefing, the "Chinese civil organizations" (thereafter CCOs) will be used to replace "NGO", based on four reasons. First, China usually uses Chinese "civil organizations" instead of NGO, since the existence of CCO and the use of the term has been much longer than NGO. Secondly, both African governments and many intellectuals have negative impressions about NGO, mainly because of its double service objects (fund provider and its own nation), which originated from the source of its funds. Thirdly, "civil organizations" cover a much wider range, including NGO, NPO, and GNGO. Fourthly, CCO must get registered in China and *Annual Report on Chinese Civil Organizations* has been published since 2008.

3 CCO: General Situation

During the 1950s, there were 44 national civil organizations; while during the 1960s, there were less than a hundred, and there were about 6,000 local civil organizations. The year 1989 witnessed 1600 CCOs and 200,000 local ones. In 2006, 354,000 CCOs consisted of various objectives, such as that of poverty reduction, of education, of society (community), of agriculture, of environmental protection, of medical-health and of associations of different walks of life. There were 435,000 CCOs in 2010, which increased to 462,000 in 2011. In 2012, CCOs reached 499,000, with an increase of 8.1%, and the CCO has become both the base and focus for further reform in China. At the end of 2013, 547,000 CCOs were registered. (Ministry of Civil Affairs is in charge of registration of CCOs, while China Network for International Exchanges (CNIE), established in 2005, is responsible for various exchange activities with international NGOs.)

Sharing of Experiences

Since its set-up, the International Poverty Reduction Center in China (IPRCC) has held various seminars for experience sharing on development issues with officials from African countries, under the frame of FOCAC.

Medical Cooperation

The China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA) started in 2007 the "Safe Mothers-Children 120 Action" in Guinea-Bissau. In 2011, CFPA established the Sudan-China El Gezira Friendship Hospital, in cooperation with a Sudan NGO partner and the Sudanese government.

Educational Cooperation

China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF) set up its African department in 2011 to manage the "Project Hope into Africa" with the aim of setting up primary schools in Tanzania and other African countries.

Environmental Protection

Chinese civil organization Mara Conservation Fund and East African Wildlife Society signed in 2013 a cooperation agreement in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, to protect ecological environments and wildlife.

Charitable Activities

In 2014, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA) and Chinese Lingshan Public Charity Promotion Association jointly launched the "Smiling Children Africa Project" to provide free meals for African children through philanthropy donations. Ethiopia was chosen as the first African country for the project.

CCOs are also involved in other development cooperation activities in Africa like academic exchanges, experience sharing in governance, and collaboration in poverty alleviation and public goods provision, etc.

From various policy briefings and research reports, it seems that in regard to the involvement of CCOs in Africa, what Chinese scholars are concerned about is the increase in China's "soft power", so as to disseminate Chinese culture, or to ameliorate China's image in Africa. This approach is not advisable. Therefore the author suggests the following:

Firstly, the major purpose of CCOs' entering into Africa is to promote African development through experience sharing, while cultural understanding can only be reached after a longtime mutual exchange. CCOs must accept this condition when they make their decision to enter Africa.

Secondly, the internationalization of African NGOs is much earlier than CCOs, therefore CCOs should exchange ideas and experiences with them in order to learn more about organizational building, funding sources, operational modes, international cooperation, development practice, etc.

Thirdly, on one hand, CCOs should strive for the biggest space from the government in order to carry out development activities in Africa by themselves. On the other hand, it should adhere to its own independent status. It should pay special attention to choosing the activities according to its own abilities and conditions.

Fourthly, CCOs should strengthen their cooperation with Chinese companies, to help them conduct CSR, and think and act from the African perspective while it is associated with the government-enterprise-CCO cooperation system.

Fifthly, CCOs' participation in development cooperation must start from the African reality. It should avoid making its own choice or decision without taking careful consideration the African situation. To contact and coordinate with a locality is a golden rule in order to achieve the best results of development cooperation in Africa.

Sixthly, the Chinese government can promote CCOs' involvement in Africa in three aspects. It should carry out a public diplomacy campaign in order to educate the Chinese people about the importance of international cooperation. It should include CCOs in the FOCAC framework and strengthen bilateral cooperation. To formulate relevant laws is imperative, especially those related to international cooperation, in order to regulate CCOs' action in Africa and other countries outside China and enable them to play more active and effective roles.

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