



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Integrative Synergies between BRI of China and Agenda 2063 of African Union: Reviewing the Policy Documents and Analyzing the Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa-Priority Action Plan 2 (PIDA-PAP 2) (2021-2030)**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study analyzes the diverse and burgeoning relationship between China and the African Union (AU) which has significant global implications. The primary focus of the study is to explore Chinese policy commitments, competitive dynamics, capacity-building plug-ins as well as measures taken for the development of infrastructure under Priority Action Plan 2 (PAP 2) which is a landmark initiative of Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) to develop hydroelectric power, railways, roads, ports and information and communications technology (ICT) sectors. Furthermore, the study reviews the interconnection between the AU's African Integrated High-Speed Railway Network (AIHSRN) Project as a case-study of China's endeavors for the development of railways within the AU member countries. This assessment propounds an understanding of the importance of infrastructure and logistics to form collaborations, boost connectivity, and promote African economic development. The study uses a qualitative method of reasoning to investigate the basis and impact of Chinese interest and involvement within the AU. It provides the relevant researchers, experts from academia and policy makers a deep insight into the true nature of Chinese engagement within the AU which makes this study a significant addition to the currently existing literature about China-AU economic relations.

**KEYWORDS** Agenda 2063, Belt & Road Initiative, China-African Union Economic Cooperation, Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa-Priority Action Plan 2

**Introduction**

China's financial help for Africa mostly stems out of China-Africa Cooperation Partnership for Peace and Security mechanism, starting as an outcome of 2012 FOCAC (Lammich, 2019). The AU significantly benefited from this support, predominantly in establishing a vigilant dialogue mechanism as well as securing considerable sums of financial assistance. China's commitment to collaborate with AU to achieve comprehensive objectives were proclaimed in China-Africa policy paper of 2015 which specifically provides that "China values and supports the AU's leadership in constructing a united and strong Africa and promoting African integration..... the AU's adoption and implementation of Agenda 2063 and its first 10-year plan..... offer full play to the China-AU strategic dialogue mechanism.... uphold cooperation with the AU in areas such as development planning, experience sharing in poverty reduction, health, peace and security, and international affairs (China Daily, 2015b)." Similarly, Chinese commitment to work with African regional organizations echoed in Article 3(n) of the Constitutive Act of AU (CAAU). Some of the provisions in the CAAU, which outline its continental mandate are worth-noting as:

- Article 3(f): Promoting peace, security, and stability on the continent.
- Article 3(j): Promoting sustainable development at economic, social, and cultural levels, and integrating African economies.

- Article 3(k): Promoting cooperation in all fields to raise living standards.
- Article 3(m): Advancing continental development through research in fields like science and technology.
- Article 3(n): Working with international partners to eradicate preventable diseases and promote good health (African Union, 2001a).

Wang Yi, Chinese Foreign Minister, once specified that China is prepared to extend cooperation with AU in five significant sectors to augment inspiration in China-Africa relations which included peace & security, public health, human resource development, international and regional affairs (Xinhua, 2015). Adopting the said roadmap, provision 3(3) of Part III of 2015 China Africa Policy mentions that China will enhance governmental initiatives and support financial institutions regarding AU infrastructure projects. The policy further boosts domestic initiatives to espouse several models to participate in construction of railways, highways, telecommunications networks, electric power facilities, regional aviation networks, harbours, waterworks, as well as development and protection of water resources (Xinhua, 2015). Hence the said policy created a great strategic alliance with AU while focussing on respecting sovereignty, developing human resources and infrastructure, and achieving mutual benefits. The FOCAC 2018 and 2019–2021 Action Plans distinctly represent these fundamental ideas. For example, the 2018 FOCAC commitment to closer relations between China and AU's Peace and Security Council (AUPSC), which aims to address regional security issues through African-led solutions, is especially relevant to the 2015 Policy Part III, Section 2 (China Development Gateway, 2015; FOCAC, 2018a). The 2019-2021 Beijing Action Plan was adopted to improve collaboration between both sides. It was coherent with the Part III, Section 1 of the said policy which emphasizes the value of strategic alliance between China and regional organizations in the continent. It is worth-noting that the 2019–2021 Action Plan, provides for establishment of the AU's Representative Mission in Beijing to further consolidate the Sino-Africa strategic relations (FOCAC, 2018b; Xinhua, 2015).

The announcement of the establishment of a China-AU Agriculture Cooperation Commission was part of the 2019–2021 Action Plan. This initiative is closely related to Part III (3), Sub-section (2) of the 2015 policy, which explained China's involvement in the transfer of technology in the agricultural field as well as improvement of food security. Furthermore, China's support to the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), as highlighted in the Action Plan (2019-2021), was aligned with the 2015 Policy Part III, Section 3 (3) (China Daily, 2015b; FOCAC, 2018b). This initiative aims to liberalize the aviation industry in Africa, which would transform it into a single market by deregulating air services and opening regional air markets to transnational competition.

The Chinese emphasis on sustainable and green growth across AU through (Part II) of the 2015 policy is in line with FOCAC 2021's commitment to upholding the values of friendship, interests and justice. Similarly, the China-AU Energy Partnership, is built on the policy's stress upon sincerity, practical results, and good faith provided in Part I, II and Part III 3(6) which are also in line with FOCAC 2021's efforts to promote clean energy and sustainable economic growth in Africa (China Development Gateway, 2015; FOCAC, 2021a). The key areas like industrialization, agricultural modernization, and infrastructure development were highlighted in the policy's Promoting All-Round Development of China-Africa Cooperation (Part III) section. These areas directly relate with FOCAC 2021's goals of building "Industrialized Africa," "Interconnected Africa," and "Bumper Harvest Africa" (Part III Section 3, Sub-sections 1, 2, and 3) (China Daily, 2015a; FOCAC, 2021a).

The Action Plan also emphasizes over the strengthening of ties between the China Economic and Social Council (CESC), and the Economic, Social, and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) of the AU (FOCAC, 2021b). The Policy 2015 stresses over infrastructure development as a driver of economic growth which is further reinforced by the FOCAC Action Plan's commitment to coordinate China-African infrastructure cooperation through

Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa-Priority Action Plan II (PIDA-PAP II) and the Presidential Infrastructure Championing Initiative (PICI). Furthermore, the strategic importance of infrastructure in accomplishing the AU's Agenda 2063 can be judged by the AU's focus on initiatives like the Pan-African E-network, the SAATM, the Integrated High-Speed Train Network (AIHSTN), and Cyber-Security projects (China Daily, 2015b; China Development Gateway, 2015; FOCAC, 2021b).

### **Agenda 2063 as a Framework for Infrastructure Development by AU and China**

The Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) of China, encompassing the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road, is intended to establish a comprehensive trade and infrastructure network connecting Asia with Europe, Africa and other allied regions (McBride et al., 2023). Basically, it seeks revival of ancient trade routes between Asia, Europe while modifying connections with Middle East, South America, and Africa (Khan et al., 2018). Also, the UN Global Development Initiative (GDI) harmonizes UN's 2030 sustainable development Agenda (Xinhuanet, 2021) whereas the China-AU coordination for implementing BRI harmonized steps to advance GDI in Africa (Mission of the People's Republic of China to the African Union, 2021). Noteworthy, in last 12 years, China remained largest trading partner of Africa. Over 1100 cooperation projects started and completed which contributed a lot in Africa's development (Ministry of Foreign Affairs The People's Republic of China, 2021).

Some of the provisions of Agenda 2063 directly focus over the urgent need of infrastructure development in AU. For instance, the AU, under provision 10 of Aspiration 1, aspires that "by 2063 Africa shall be a prosperous continent, with the means and resources to drive its own development, with sustainable and long-term stewardship of its resources and where Cities and other settlements are hubs of cultural and economic activities with modernized infrastructure (African Union Commission, 2015a)." Therefore, the AU has prioritized infrastructure development projects through initiatives like PIDA in order to improve inter-regional connectivity and trade as well as transport, energy, and ICT sectors (PIDA VPIC, 2023). The AU, under provision 20 of Aspiration 2, further aspires that by 2063, "Africa shall... have world class, integrative infrastructure that criss-crosses the continent (African Union Commission, 2015a)." In response, the AU put in place two Priority Action Plans: PAP 1 and PAP 2 under the PIDA initiative. The PAP 1 (2012-2020) with an initial estimate of financing at \$68 billion, received investments of over \$82 billion (PIDA VPIC, 2023). Such resources were streamlined toward major transport, energy, water, and ICT projects which in return boosted regional connections and trade. Emerging on this success, PAP 2 (2021-2030) focuses on sustainable and inclusive infrastructure development; the budget considered to be allocated to the project is \$160.7 billion (PIDA VPIC, n.d.). The economic impact of such plans is overwhelming in driving economic growth through reduced transport costs, increased access to energy, and promoted cross-border trade—all these vital ingredients intend to realize the ambitious goals of Agenda 2063 (AUDA-NEPAD & AU, 2023).

### **The African Integrated High-Speed Railway Network (AIHSRN)**

The provision 25 of Agenda 2063 outlines that till 2063 "the necessary infrastructure will be in place to support Africa's accelerated integration and growth, technological transformation, trade and development. This will include high-speed railway networks, roads, shipping lines, sea and air transport, as well as well-developed ICT and the digital economy. A Pan-African High Speed Train Network will connect all the major cities/capitals of the continent, with adjacent highways and pipelines for gas, oil, water, as well as ICT Broadband cables and other infrastructure. This will be a catalyst for manufacturing, skills development, technology, research and development, integration and intra-African trade, investments and tourism (African Union Commission, 2015a)." Accordingly, the AU has been involved in PIDA and the Pan-African High-Speed Train Network was devised to install a network of high-speed railways across the continent, along

with roads, shipping lines, and advanced ICT networks (African Union, 2014). Following this roadmap, over 16,066 km of new roads have been built, more than 4,077 km of railway lines laid, and ICT infrastructure put in place in many manifolds, with internet access has been provided to more than 25 percent of the total population of the AU (AUDA-NEPAD & AU, 2023). As mentioned earlier, the AIHSRN Project is a leading initiative under the said provision 25 which would connect all capitals and major cities of the AU through a high-speed railway network. The 5-year Action Plan was signed between China and AUC in October 2016. Its goal was to fulfil the charming dream of connecting all capital cities of African states (African Union, 2016c). The ceremony was held in AU's headquarters in which AUC Chairperson Dlamini Zuma and Chinese Envoy Mr. XU Shaoshi participated. In December 2018, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), was appointed as advisor for AIHSRN Project (PIDA VPIC, 2019). The consultant revised project preparation structure analysis, piloted during first 10-Year Implementation Plan (2015-2025) of Agenda 2063 (African Union, 2016b). The AIHSRN project aimed to enhance existing communication sources or rehabilitate 12,000 km of missing links with 20% of pilot phase had to be completed until 2023 (PIDA VPIC, 2018). This project is crucial to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement, signed by 44 countries in March 2018 (Thomas, 2022). It would enhance the intra-African trade as well as 18% of exports improving regional integration of transport networks from production to export level.

The prime objective of AIHSRN project is to connect Africa's capital cities, megacities, commercial hubs, economic zones, and tourist destinations (African Union, n.d.). The comprehensive project plan includes four longitudinal North-South and six latitudinal East-West continental railway networks, spanning over three phases to be completed over 50 years. These phases include short-term phase (2015-2025), medium-term phase (2025-2045), and long-term phase (2045-2065) (African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), 2018). Six corridors have been selected for immediate development, including Mombasa-Nairobi-Kampala connection, Durban-Pretoria-Gaborone route and Abidjan-Ouagadougou corridor. The majority of the work on the Mombasa-Nairobi-Kampala Railway corridor has been completed. The remaining part of the Malaba to Kampala section is expected to be started very soon (Reuters, 2023). It would be relevant to note here that the Chinese bilateral engagement with AU member states involves infrastructure development of Ethiopian-Djibouti railway, Lagos-Calabar Coastal Railway in Nigeria and Nairobi-Mombasa railway (Custer et al., 2023; Dreher et al., 2022). These projects would contribute to regional integration under Agenda 2063 connecting major cities, ports, and tourist destinations across Africa.

### **Capacity Development Trajectories in AU-China Policies**

Capacity building is AU's key objective, as postulated in Article 3(a to l) of the CAAU which provisions, *inter alia*, stressed over sovereignty and unity; emphasized territorial integrity and socio-economic development; safeguarded common interests; promoted international cooperation; fostered peace and stability; demanded good governance and human rights; desired significant role in the global economy; pursued sustainable development and socio-economic integration; desired policy formulation regarding coordination between Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and promotion of health facilities. Moreover, Article 3(m) resolves to advance continent's development by promoting research, particularly in science and technology (African Union, 2001a). The AU's Agenda 2063 coincides with these provisions by stressing over capacity building across the continent whereas China is also striving to collaborate with AU in pursuit of these objectives, however, one of the main hindrances in this regard is restricted funding for transformative projects. China's promise for interest-free loans is to address this challenge (Gilpin, 2023). These loans, in fact, increase debt burden to AU member states as well as their dependency over China which, in turn, helps China to secure its financial interests through obtaining contracts for infrastructure development in these countries (Vines et al., 2022). Setting aside this notion, many African leaders, in Johannesburg Summit, admired China's contributions

towards capacity building through various technical training programs started for African people (African Union, 2016a). The South African President Jacob Zuma, in his inaugural address, even demanded additional training programs from Beijing (The Presidency Republic of South Africa, 2015). The AU Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma also pressed necessity for an increased capacity building until 2050, when Africa would be expected to have world's largest working-age population (African Union, 2015). The Chinese leadership stressed the similarity in African and Chinese security views being linked to economic and social development (MOFCOM, 2015). This shared perspective further solidifies the rationale behind China's extensive involvement in Africa's capacity development initiatives.

China along with AU member states seriously take the issue of capacity building in Africa. For instance, China's promise under FOCAC 2015 backs AU's mandate to enhance technology (Aiping & Zeng, 2018), as outlined in Article 3(m) of the CAAU, which accentuates promoting research, mainly in science and technology (African Union, 2001b). This pledge is further strengthened by provision 72(d) of Agenda 2063, which provides for transforming and industrializing Africa's economies through value addition to natural resources and updating African agriculture and agribusinesses (African Union Commission, 2015b, 2015a). Moreover, Chinese capacity building programs in 55 AU member states provide support for AU's objectives and Agenda 2063 (Lammich, 2014) which admit Africa's human capital as most valuable resource which would be developed by implying sustained investments in early childhood, basic education, higher education, science, technology, research and elimination of gender disparities at all education levels (African Union Commission, 2015a). China-sponsored capacity building programs board African professionals from different backgrounds (Xinhuanet, 2017). Numerous vocational training programs have been organized at Confucius Institutes across Africa (Confucius Institute, 2024). The Academy for International Business Officials (AIBO), a branch of China's Ministry of Commerce, disseminates data on training programs offered by Beijing for African. Until the start of 2014, AIBO had sponsored 603 training seminars, including 43 at the ministerial level, inviting 14,545 officials from around the world (Benabdallah, 2017). Under FOCAC VI (2015), China pledged to host China-Africa Press Exchange Centre Program and to conduct training as well as capacity building seminars for African media workers; it also aims to train 1,000 media professionals every year (Shelton et al., 2015). China had promised, and the commitment from the AU indicated that many initiatives were planned and executed under the FOCAC action plan.

In the year 2018, the FOCAC Beijing Summit and the 7<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference were held. Beijing Action Plan (2019-2021) was adopted in this event. A detailed report about the follow-up action over the said plan was presented in FOCAC VIII (FOCAC, 2021c). The report revealed that eight-major programs and various projects have been implemented so far. The report highlighted that China vowed to provide \$100 million to the AU for military aid in addition to \$80 million and RMB 300 million as reserved capital for backing the G5 Sahel Joint Force (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Zimbabwe, 2021).

### **Capacity Building Initiatives in Information and Communication Technology Sector**

China also contributed towards capacity building of AU in field of ICT (African Union, 2017). A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in January 2015 between Huawei (China) and AU, which concentrated on capacity building in terms of ICT for the continent (Xinhuanet, 2017). Huawei launched the "Seeds for the Future" initiative under this agreement while arranging training and experience-sharing visits for African experts in China (ChinaAfrica, 2016). Following the Huawei's program, the 1<sup>st</sup> group of 20 African experts took part in training in December 2015 in China, which included a site visit to acquaint them with the state-of-the-art information and communications technologies at Huawei China (Xinhuanet, 2017). Also, in 2016, the 2<sup>nd</sup> batch of the "Seeds for the Future" program, consisting of 10 ICT specialists from the AU, travelled to China on June 10 for a

two-week training program, which included field visits as well as sessions in Shenzhen and Beijing (ChinaAfrica, 2016).

China's 2015 Action Plan aimed to promote the joint construction of cross-border fibre optical cables and ICT infrastructure and improve international communications connectivity (The State Council The People's Republic of China, 2015). The role of the AU in the establishment of regional negotiation mechanisms for multilateral engagement with China through the African Development Bank (AfDB) and RECs is quite impressive (Cissé, 2022). The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) also devised national infrastructure investment plans in terms of regional framework while transforming its relationship with China into practical cooperation. This kind of mutual effort supports the agendas set by the AU and it also led to the adoption of the Regional Infrastructure Master Plan 2012–2027 (Terrefe & Bénazéraf, 2015).

Digitalization and internet permeation in Africa are powered mainly by mobile usage. Since 2019, the continent has seen 4.6%/annum growth in this sector which is exceeding than what was expected until 2025 (Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA), 2019). Noteworthy, in 2018, only 24.4% of Africans had access to the internet, but by the end of 2020, the percentage of mobile internet users had risen to 28 percent (Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA), 2019). In 2018, \$25.7 billion out of a total \$100.8 billion Chinese investments were allotted for infrastructure development in Africa (ICA, 2018). The AU's total backing for the ICT sector amounted to \$7.1 billion with \$550 million support from China (Cissé, 2022). In 2020, net Chinese funding to Africa witnessed a decline nevertheless loans to the ICT sector saw a significant increase (Hwang et al., 2022). As mentioned earlier, Chinese telecom giants Huawei and ZTE are the chief actors involved in laying telecom infrastructure in the ICT landscape of the AU (Chanakira, 2010). Noteworthy, Chinese investment in ICT often comes through preferential loan agreements extended to governments availing these technologies (Cissé, 2022).

China wanted to enhance its global influence in ICT, as outlined in China's 12<sup>th</sup> 5-Year Plan (2011–2015) and 14<sup>th</sup> 5-Year Plan (2021–2025) (Cissé, 2022). China's inclusive interest in ICT compelled the European Union to re-engage in Africa's ICT sector. Chinese increased investments are aligned with African continental needs for ICT development and China helped in bridging the telecom gap while increasing connectivity across Africa.

### **Program for Infrastructure Development (PIDA-PAP 2) (2021-2030)**

In AU summit of Feb-2021, the heads of member states and RECs established PIDA-PAP 2 to oversee infrastructure development projects during 2021-2030. Afterwards, China, which had harnessed the projects under PAP 1 with all kinds of expertise, finance, technical acumen, construction of infrastructure, too, extended full support to the initiative and resolved to contribute in the same manner as it had done during the 1<sup>st</sup> phase [Note: for complete details of Priority Action Plan 1 Please see "Raza, M. A., Khan, Dr. A. B. (2024). Role of China in Improving the Regional Connectivity and Economic Development in African Union through Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa-Priority Action Plan 1 (PIDA-PAP 1) (2012-2020). *Remittances Review*. 9(S3). 467-501.

In the following pages, different initiatives taken under the PIDA PAP 2 will be analysed turn by turn.

### **Development of Energy and Water Resources**

The Genale-Dawa III multipurpose hydropower project (254 MW), also known as GD-3, is a major addition to water and power resources of the AU. Backed by China, it is located in the Genale-Dawa River Basin, 200 Km away from Addis Ababa Ethiopia (GlobalData, 2024). This project is pivotal for Ethiopian energy security and economic

development. The total investment for GD-3 was approximately \$451 million out of which a substantial amount of \$295.9 million was financed by the Eximbank of China in terms of a Preferential Buyer Credit (PBC) loan (Custer et al., 2023; Dreher et al., 2022). The Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) contract of the project was assigned to the China Gezhouba Group Company Ltd. (CGGC) (GlobalData, 2024). This Hydroelectric Project is multipurpose in its functions and features cutting-edge technology, showcasing its innovation and modernity (NS Energy, 2020). Commencing in March 2013 and completed in February 2020, the GD-3 contributes 254 MW to Ethiopian national grid, enhancing its energy capacity and reducing dependence on fossil fuels (Power Technology, 2021; Stantec, n.d.). The dam serves as a water reservoir, supporting irrigation projects like the Lower Genale Irrigation Development Project, which irrigates 25,000 hectares of land (Ethiopian Monitor, 2020). Located in a strategic area, GD-3 exemplifies Ethiopia's efforts to utilize its hydroelectric potential for economic growth and regional stability. It aligns with Ethiopia's development goals of expanding renewable energy sources and enhancing agricultural productivity through irrigation.

One of the AU's aspiring projects, the Mambilla Hydroelectric Power Project (MHEPP) (3050 MW), included in PIDA-PAP2, is also a part of the "ECOWAS Master Plan for the Development of Regional Power Generation and Transmission Infrastructure 2019-2033" (Portfolio, 2020b). The MHEPP is being built in the Nigerian State of Taraba which will facilitate the ECOWAS region, including Nigeria (Monks, 2017). The Mambilla Plateau, with the most topographical advantages, featuring a 1000 m drop and also fed from the Donga River, provides an appropriate location to set up this technically sound project (Decrown WA Company, n.d.). Notably, where the Donga River meets with the Benue River, it makes the catchment area of the Donga stretching over 20,000 square kilometres at the convergence point. The covered area of the plateau is over 3500 Km<sup>2</sup>, with high elevation ranges of 1300 m to 1900 m above sea level (Blench & Mallam Dendo Ltd, 2004). The region lies in the high rainfall zone of Nigeria, where rainfall experienced 2000 mm per annum. Thus, the Mambilla Plateau is an exceptional site for the project. Upon completion, the MHEPP will be the largest power-generating plant in Nigeria, producing 5.457 billion kWh of electricity annually. Four compacted concrete (RCC) dams, Nya, Sumsum, Nghu, and Api Weir, are part of the project, and each dam will generate 250 MW of power. To integrate Nigeria's National Grid with the MHEPP, a transmission line of 700 Km length will be erected, and the project is expected to enhance the national generation capacity up to 30% (Nweke-Eze, 2021). This project too is funded by China which showcases its committed role in regional as well as continental infrastructure development. China's Eximbank is providing a substantial concessional loan of \$4.923 billion for its construction (Custer et al., 2023; Dreher et al., 2022). Chinese firms such as Gezhouba Group, Sinohydro, and CGC Overseas Construction Group (CGCOC) are jointly working in the construction consortium, ensuring technical proficiency and timely execution of the project owing to their extensive experience in hydroelectric projects (THISDAY, 2021). Nigeria's Federal Executive Council approved the project in September 2017 while its construction started in November 2017. The project is scheduled for completion until 2030 (NS Energy, 2018). The MHEPP will stimulate the regional economy, job opportunities, and socio-economic progress of rural areas. It would facilitate power exports to West African Power Pool (WAPP), thereby promoting regional energy security and cooperation (Nweke-Eze, 2021). Importantly, the project will also contribute to reducing Nigeria's carbon footprint by providing a clean and renewable source of energy.

### **Modernization of Transport Infrastructure**

The Abuja-Keffi Road Expansion and Dualization of the Keffi-Akwanga-Lafia-Makurdi Road Project in Nigeria, is a key project being constructed with international collaboration chiefly backed by China. China's Eximbank provided \$460.8 million in Preferential Buyer's Credit (PBC) for this project (Custer et al., 2023; Dreher et al., 2022). The two main phases of the project are the expansion of the Abuja-Keffi expressway (5.4

Km), which links Abuja to Nasarawa as part of Phase-1. The reconstruction and dualization of the 221.8 Km Keffi-Akwanga-Lafia-Makurdi expressway connects Nasarawa to Benue is included in Phase-2 (K. Yusuf, 2023). The China Harbour Construction Company was the contractor of the project (H. Yusuf, 2024). The ground-breaking ceremony was held in November 2018 to commence work. The construction of a two-lane auxiliary road parallel to the existing six-lane section is included in the expansion of the Abuja-Keffi expressway.

Similarly, the Keffi-Akwanga-Lafia-Makurdi expressway is widened from a 2-lane to an expanded 2-way and 4-lane section. The project, a significant milestone, has successfully been completed in April 2024, with 15% of the funds shared by Nigeria and 85% from the Eximbank of China (Ikpefan, 2024; Xinhuanet, 2019). The trans-Saharan highway is of vital importance spanning over Algeria, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Tunisia. It aims to enhance trans-continental connectivity for commercial exchanges and regional integration in Africa. The project connects to the West African coastal road from the west with Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, then Lagos, as well as from the north with Niger and Algeria (Xinhuanet, 2019). Moreover, its eastern side connects with Cameroon and Chad. It facilitates travelling from Lagos to neighbouring states and increases regional interconnectivity.

The upgradation of Kampala-Malaba Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB) through a \$301 million loan facility, ensures the project's financial security. The China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) completed the project in February 2023, showcasing China's significant role in AU's infrastructure development. Phase 2B from Naivasha to Kisumu (262.3km) and Phase 2C from Kisumu to Malaba (102km) are the remaining sections of the SGR in Kenya (Preston, 2024). The estimated cost of both phases is about \$5.3 billion (Anami, 2024). Noteworthy, Kenya has secured significant funding from China for Naivasha to Malaba SGR, about 363.3 Km (total length of both phases). In July 2024, the construction work was started over Naivasha to Malaba, and the Malaba to Kampala section will also open for construction work in September 2024 (Trackopedia, 2024). Additionally, SGR extensions are planned to connect Uganda to DRC, Rwanda, and South Sudan. The Mombasa-Nairobi SGR project, which is part of the development agenda of Kenyan Vision 2030, is conceived as a flagship project (Railway Technology, 2020). It aims to streamline cross-border transport operations, decrease traveling costs, and contribute to the advancement of the economies of Kenya and its neighbouring states.

The Tabora-Kigoma SGR (506 Km) is a project of immense potential. It is set to be constructed by two esteemed Chinese companies, the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) and China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC), in a joint venture with the Tanzanian government. The deal between the counterparts was signed in December 2022. This 4-year project includes the construction of the 4 main lineS (411 Km), branch lines (95 Km), 10 stations and 2 freight yards in Katosho and Uvinza. The construction is progressing according to the planned timeline, with Phase-I already underway since 2017 and scheduled for completion in 2025, and Phase-II is expected to be completed in December 2026. The Tabora-Kigoma agreement of \$2.21 billion was signed in the presence of Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan at the State House in Dar es Salaam. President Samia highlighted the vital role of the Tabora-Kigoma rail line and the Uvinza-Msongati rail line, as they significantly enhanced Tanzania's connectivity with DRC. These projects are poised to revolutionize cargo transportation from the port of Dar es Salaam, thereby boosting the economy.

The Mwanza-Isaka SGR (Phase-5), a 249 Km long project estimated to cost \$1.32 billion, is an important part of the Central Corridor SGR Project (Gakweli, 2021). The implementation of this project, entrusted to the capable hands of the abovementioned CCECC and CRCC, instils confidence in the project's execution. An agreement was signed between the counterparts in 2021 (TREM Africa, 2021). As per the statement of the Foreign Minister of Tanzania, Palamagamba Kabudi, the entire funding for this project will be



provided by the government of Tanzania. The phase-5 part of the Dar es Salaam to Mwanza SGR (1219 Km) rail line is expected to be completed and officially handed over to the state in current year i.e. 2024 (Kennedy, 2023). The completion of the whole project will open up a central corridor, providing numerous economic opportunities through a reliable and integrated transport network. It is worth mentioning that China's Eximbank approved \$7.9 million for a railway project in 2016 (Custer et al., 2023; Dreher et al., 2022). However, President Magufuli cancelled and blocked the Chinese firms' tendering due to irregularities in the process. It would be pertinent to mention here that the Central Corridor SGR project is strategically significant for East and Central Africa. It aims to create a seamless transport network linking major ports like Dar es Salaam to landlocked countries like Rwanda, Burundi, and potentially the DRC. By improving transport efficiency and reducing costs, the project promotes regional trade facilitation and economic growth across participating countries.

### **Information and Communication Technology Networks**

The extension of the National ICT Broadband Backbone (NICTBB) to the DRC via Lake Tanganyika is a pivotal infrastructure project under PIDA-PAP 2 (Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa, n.d.). This project, which aims to enhance regional connectivity, uniquely positions Tanzania and DRC as the only African nations linked with fibre optic cable communication stretching from the East African coast to the Atlantic Ocean (Daily News, 2022). The potential benefits of this project extend to fifteen states neighbouring Tanzania and DRC. The Tanzanian government has already constructed a National ICT Broadband Backbone (NICTBB) that provides connectivity outside the border with Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi, with a total network length of 7,910 kilometres (Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa, 2023). The project is expected to facilitate data linkage, boost regional economic activities, and increase access to more reliable internet connectivity. The NICTBB also involves a section that lays a 160-kilometer optical fibre cable from Kigoma Port (Tanzania) to Kalemie Port (DRC) (Kamala, 2023). A Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) between Tanzania and DRC was formalized over the project, which underscores the commitment to fostering regional integration (Mdoe, 2022). Once it is operational, it will improve the communication channels between both counterparts as well as with neighbouring countries.

Tanzania's state-run telecommunication firm signed a contract in April 2023 with Chinese tech giant Huawei for an extension of the NICTBB to 23 districts across Tanzania covering an area of about 1,520 kilometres (Belt and Road Portal, 2023). This extension, which is part of a larger project to make Tanzania a communication hub in the continent, is made possible through the substantial financial support from China of \$160 million through Eximbank for the completion of different phases that are part of Tanzania's fibre optic network project. The Eximbank has also provided concessional loans of approximately \$93.77 million for Phase III of the project (Sub-Phase I) (Custer et al., 2023; Dreher et al., 2022). Through this funding, fibre optic cable network spreading over thousands of kilometres was laid down across the East African region. To ensure an in-depth design, it will involve detailed studies of Lake Tanganyika's bottom terrain, marine activity risks, hydrology, beach landscapes, and environmental factors. Moreover, a submarine optical fibre cable (OFC) of two hundred kilometres will be required, considering the direct water distance of 150 kilometres and the depth of the lake which is 1470 meters (Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa, 2023). This project will bring modern ICT infrastructure across the region and promote economic growth and regional integration.

### **Development of Ports**

The Beira Port Development Project in Mozambique has been an ongoing mega initiative. In 2023, the Chinese investors and the Mozambican government mutually discussed the modification plans regarding the project. A leading Chinese multinational group *i.e.* the Tsingshan Holding Group, which was already engaged in the African

infrastructure construction market, was interested to construct two new terminals (no. 11 and 13) at the port of Beira. On July 22, 2023, Mozambican Prime Minister Adriano Maleiane held a meeting with the Chinese investors during his visit to China wherein the president of the Tsingshan Holding Group, Xiang Guangda, requested expedited analysis of the project, indicating active collaboration between the two parties (Club of Mozambique, 2023). It is strategically a pivotal port, nearest to the landlocked countries, such as Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The project aims to boost regional integration and economic development through improved port and transport infrastructure following the AU's Agenda 2063 Aspirations. The total cost of the phase-1 of the project is \$88.6 million whereas it is \$509.1 million in the case of phase-II (Portfolio, 2020a).

Finally, China's engagement in infrastructure development in São Tomé and Príncipe is not just a standalone initiative, but a part of a broader pattern of economic cooperation which is strategically aimed at bolstering connectivity and economic development in the region, and is aligned with objectives of PIDA. The direct or indirect role of China is evident in a notable parallel project involving China's investment in São Tomé and Príncipe's infrastructure. In October 2015, China signed an agreement with São Tomé and Príncipe for the construction of a Deepwater port with a cost of \$800 million (Jiang, 2015). The China Harbour Engineering Company will build and invest \$120 million in the project which would serve as a trans-shipment hub while linking the four continents of Africa, Europe, America, and Asia (Press, 2022). This investment underscores China's broader interest in developing infrastructure projects across strategic locations, including small island nations like São Tomé and Príncipe. Similarly, both actors have signed an agreement for the modernization of São Tomé International Airport (STP Press, 2022). These infrastructural initiatives, with their strategic alignment with PIDA objectives, will significantly boost intercontinental connectivity and the economy of the state.

## **Conclusion**

It becomes evident from the preceding detail that China, while focussing upon regional integration in AU has directly invested in vital transport, energy, ICT, water resources projects. This collaboration is essentially required by Agenda 2063. By effecting the PIDA-PAP 2 fruition while removing infrastructure impediments, multiplying intra-African trade and enhancing sustainable growth, China solidifies itself as significant development partner of the AU amidst these initiatives. However, while considering the model of China's BRI which is actually intended to promote interregional and intraregional connectivity throughout various continents it becomes easier to understand the motives of China's extended involvement with the AU for infrastructure development within the member states. The AU has designed Agenda 2063 and is considering its implementation as a foremost priority while looking towards the next fifty years but the Chinese excessive engagements within the length and breadth of the African continent with massive financial investments suggest that it would be difficult for the member countries of AU to mitigate and neutralize the impacts of Chinese presence at such a deeper extent for a longer time to come. In fact, the world is sensing that and the voices are being raised to alert the intelligentsia of the countries being affected by the aftereffects of Chinese BRI but since almost all of such countries are underdeveloped therefore the ruling elite therein is finding it difficult to resist the rainfall of Chinese dollars albeit being aware of the true intentions behind these investments. The terms like neo-colonialism, economic expansionism are being attributed to this Chinese approach which is chiefly being followed by the current Chinese regime whereas it was initially designed with the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In a nutshell, it might be quite safely observed that to counter this Chinese model of extra-regional as well as extra-territorial penetration would remain challenging for the western powers led by the United States of America for a long time to come.

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