

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Political Economy of West African States

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Abstract

The Chinese plan for global economic leadership and desire to influence the world through its Belt and Road Initiative has been observed to be one of the international opportunities and challenge to African States. The objective of the study is to investigate the effect of Chinese global economic policy on the political economy of West African states as well as the opportunity therein. This study is an attempt to analyse the impact of Belt and Road Initiative introduced by the Chinese authority to establish connectivity with developing countries of the world, in the area of infrastructural development covering telecommunication services, ports, aviation services, skyscrapers, highways, power plants/stations and dams, and railways constructions in an effort to close infrastructure deficits. It is a documentary research to study the deliberate policy of the Chinese Communist Party aiming to influence the International Political Economy of the world, while focusing on the ambition of China to key in larger number of countries in West Africa into its global development plans. China with Africa in mind have succeeded in creating openness for active participation of all countries within the continent through private partners and international organisations. The study find out that, African states in general and West Africa to be specific has demonstrated overdependence on the Chinese loans due to its high level of infrastructure deficit and crisis of development. It is concluded that, Chinese connectivity plan within the realm of this Chinese reordering of global economy perpetuated with the merciless exploitation and pauperization of the African states in general and West Africa in particular. The study assumed that the policy is a win-win economic strategy to improve Chinese foreign investment plan to assist poor nations to develop their national economy and become competitive in the global economy.

Keywords: Global development plan, Belt and road initiative, Globalism, Infrastructure deficit

Introduction

Africa is becoming the centre piece of global economic development as well as an alternative source of natural resources (both human and material resources) countries of the world are looking for, towards advancing their economic interests. The two major powers (United State of America and China) have shown their desperation to have total control of the continent using different strategic plans. It is a known fact that U.S. has a deliberate policy on Africa aiming towards political freedom, democracy and openness,

liberalisation and commercialisation, greater participation and economic opportunity as well as the security of the continent (Devermont, 2020; The White House, 2022). As rightly pointed out by Devermont, 2020 'the longstanding U.S. goals to advance democracy governance; peace and security; trade and investment; development in Africa remain valid' (pp.1). This indicated how valuable Africa is to the U.S. international political economic plans and foreign policy, more importantly as regards to interconnectedness to windows of opportunities available to its national interests. The Chinese government on the other hand, have initiated a number of strategy and vision for globalisation targeting the continent of Africa for its global economic development. These strategic plans have started since 2000 with establishment of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) with series of engagement between the Chinese government and African countries focusing on building new bilateral relationships. The FOCAC came out with cooperation strategic plan for specific sectors such as; agriculture, manufacturing, education as well as the environment.

In 2013 the Chinese government introduced One Belt One Road initiative and later changed to Belt and Road Initiative in 2015 and finally allowed it to fully take up in the year 2016 as china's strategy and vision for globalisation. The initiative has two components; the land based Silk Road Economic Belt (the long term vision for the infrastructural development, connectivity and economic cooperation) with six development corridors and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road planned to connect China to Southeast Asia and beyond. Going by its global outlook, the China BRI focuses on countries in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle-east because of their economic potentials and larger markets.

The African continent is not the initial target of the BRI policy of China but considering its population, resources, geographical location and land mass, market availability, and industrial potentials. The signing of an agreement between China and African Union to connect all the 54 states of the continent marked the involvement of Africa into BRI. This study is aimed at assessing the impact of BRI and its implication to West Africa political economy. The focus of the study is to identify and examine the reason why Africa became the major target of the Chinese authority for its plan, strategies and vision for globalization. It is against this background that this study identify the following as its major objectives; 1. To explore the major reason Chinese captured the West African states to be part of its BRI on the continent of Africa; 2. Examine the impact of Chinese BRI on the political economy of West African States and its associated relationship with interconnectivity towards addressing the challenge of infrastructure deficit; 3. To analyses the challenges many countries faced in participating in the Chinese globalization plan.

The paper is divided into sections. The first section is the introduction. The second section dealt with West African States in the globalized economy. The third section is the general overview of Chinese Belth and Road Initiatives and its strategic plans. The fourth section covers the china development plan in the area of infrastructural development covering telecommunication services, ports, aviation services, skyscrapers, highways, power plants/stations and dams, and railways constructions in an effort to close infrastructure deficits. The fifth component of the study discusses the Chinese Trade and

Investment Agreements in West Africa and the last section focuses on the assessment of the Impact of BRI on West African Economies and its implications.

Review of relevant and related literature

A number of scholars have indicated the possibility of another form of neo-colonialism and interdependence within the process of Chinese global political economic initiatives using the logic of interconnectivity, and financial support to fill in the gap of infrastructure deficit in different part of the globe (Nedopil, 2021; Langton, 2008; Namtulya, 2019; Afzaal, 2018; Yin, 2019; Brautigam, Huang and Acker, 2020). The work of Brautigam, Huang and Acker (2020) is a clear evidence that African countries are the most vulnerable to debt distress and also among those with high Chinese debt after participating in the BRI since 2016. Going by statistics given, in 2017 the official bilateral credits from China reached 62 percent, or about 23 percent of all public and publicly guaranteed debt in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2018, the Africa Chinese debt to low income countries was 60 percent of bilateral lending, and 17 percent of public and publicly guaranteed (PPG) debt in this subset of countries. All most all the loans were given by the Chinese commercial banks and they are always enjoying the support of the Chinese authority using the statistical evidence of World Bank (pp. 2).

To corroborate with the above argument Chen, Sun, Ukaejiofo, Xiaoyang and Brautigam (2016); Thompson Ayodele & Olusegun Sotola (2014); Xiaoyang, (2016) have proven the use of power of technology, financial means and infrastructure deficit to dominate the African economies towards the development of the Chinese and their world economic order. The current literature on China development plan has demonstrated that, the Chinese is seeking to consolidate influence in the West African region. The recent account on China revealed that, Beijing is seeking to deepen cooperation in the world but Chinese engagement in African states such as Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, and other West African states is a catalyst and also a springboard towards achieving China advance strategic goals of globalism thereby bringing West Africa into the BRI circle.

West African states in a globalised economy

Globalization is no doubt a processes of subjugating or rather integrating developing economies into a more internationalized global economy in order to transform emerging economies into contemporary developed capitalist economies. The realities of globalized economy with its attendant rules have demonstrated high levels of multidimensional and multifaceted inequalities both internationally and within individual nation-states. This is largely because the formation and regulation of the global economy is widely dominated by International bodies, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and International Financial Institutions like the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The changing nature of the global economy is totally connected with the experiences of colonialism and neo-colonialism as well as the realities of advanced economic world. The reordering of global economy, on the other hand aided the merciless exploitation and pauperization of the West African states and the African continent at large.

The present globalization led by WB and IMF have started with reforms like the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) in most of the West African countries in the early 80's deviating from the past pattern of slavery during colonialism and debt arrangements of neo-colonialism. The reforms packages usually came with conditions governing the processes of the reforms so as to force the receiving poor nations to open up their economy for international competition and trade liberalization. With this International economic integration, the capitalist economy restructured the global economic rules by way of internationalization of trade, finance and capital which adversely affects many West African economies paving ways for over dependence on super powers such as U.S., China, Britain, Russia and France for their socio-economic advancement. The establishment of monolithic system of universal rules imposed by highly centralized institution to further the interest of cooperation and that of U.S. in particular has eroded the autonomy of states in the globe.

This phenomenon have introduced and gave power to new transnational corporations to increasingly take over the world government roles for capital interest in general and competitive transaction in particular. In essence, the current development in the international economic system has made it mandatory upon West African states to continue to submit both willingly and unwillingly to certain decisions that have their origins from outside. In light of that, many scholar and political analyst have written a lot in explaining the complexities and contradictions of globalization, more especially the implication of the process to developing nations (Choamsky, 2000; Toyo 2010).

From the perspectives of these two different unequal economies, it may be argued that globalization is proceeding in a very uneven fashioned. In most cases the problem has to do with the financial sphere in which internationalization of markets is most advanced with high level of competitiveness in production, finance, technology and trade. In short, globalization has measures of global inequality and international inequality shaping the world trade regime and financial market in ways that diminish potential benefits to weaker nations (APSA 2008). Globalization as a phenomenon has different facets coordinating the working of the system. These divisions has exhibited itself in areas which cut across economic, political and cultural aspect of humanity, but the most important aspect of all is the economic globalization having been the most predominant of all as well as the determinant of the responses of the other dimensions. It is increasingly clear that highlighting these dimensions will help the reader to understand better what globalization is all about.

Rikoweski (2001) observed that globalization is a process and has a number of dimensions which comprises of (1) cultural phenomenon associated with cross fertilization and uniformity of cultural form that determine how consumer react in global market, identify with certain things and the kind of choice they will make (2) political globalization which has to do with the powers and influence nation states has in the economy. In this case, globalization has eroded state power over economy in the global market economy by reorganizing its function. (3) economic globalization which involves production, distribution, management, trade and finance to advance surplus value accrued in social production, which is historical and associated with the social form a value form.

Globalized economy no doubt has a direct bearing on increase in development of international business as well as expanding global financial activities across border, but rules governing the working of the system favour countries with quality products and sophisticated financial services at the expenses of weak economies including that of the West Africa. It is through the global economy that African societies are undergoing dramatic financial changes. Different changes and the removal of technical, trade and monetary barriers as well as the liberalization of the world economies, including those of the transitional economies and emerging nations more especially the West African states create challenges and opportunities from the standpoint of investment and financial transitions (Gianaris, 2002).

China's Belt and Road Initiative: An Overview

The China's Belt and Road Initiative is the part of the economic plans of the Chinese government for global infrastructure development strategy introduced in 2013 to improve and enhance its foreign investments across the world covering about seventy countries. While the involvement of international organizations is considered. The development plan is a deliberate policy of the Chinese Communist Party to influence the international political economy of the world. The strategy is one of the Chinese leader Xi Jinping's foreign policy willing to collaborate and open up for win-win economic master plan. The policy was originally announced as the "Silk Road Economic Belt" during an official visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013 by the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party.

It is a well organised international trade policy to incorporate many countries of the world and their economies willing to addresses infrastructure gap as well as creating value addition that would further accelerate economic growth across Asian countries, Africa countries and some European countries. The major examples of China Belt and Road Initiative infrastructure investments plans comprises areas such as telecommunication services ports, aviation services, skyscrapers, highways, power plants/stations and dams, and railways constructions. The aims of the BRI Initiative are as follows: (a) To promote the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas. (b) To establish and strengthen partnerships among the countries along the Belt and Road. (c) To set up all dimensional, multi-tiered and composite connectivity networks between participating states (d) To realise diversified, independent, balanced and sustainable development in the participating countries.

The main goal of China Belt and Road Initiative centred around enhancing regional connectivity working plan to embrace a brighter future in the area of construction targeting the year 2049 as the period for completion. Report by Green Belt and Road Initiative Center (2021), show that as of January 2021, the number of countries that have joined the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China raised to 140 noting that the participating countries have spread across all the continents of the world. The large number of these countries are in Sub-Saharan Africa

with the total number of forty (40) states. Thirty four (34) BRI countries are in Europe & Central Asia (including 18 countries of the European Union (EU) that are part of the BRI, while the total of 25 BRI countries are in East Asia & Pacific. The total of Seventeen (17) BRI countries came from the Middle East & North Africa. Eighteen (18) BRI countries are in Latin America & Caribbean, and Six (6) countries are in South East Asia which is the least in number.

The reason why Sub-Saharan Africa have been captured the most with more countries has a direct link with the lack of infrastructure and stark underdevelopment bedeviling the states. Part of the Belt and Road initiatives target in most countries within the continent includes rail, road and dam construction to network many countries. In Africa most countries have benefited from the major projects such as; the trans-African roads and rail networks connecting Dakar and Djiboti Dakar and Bamako, Guinea and Ivory Coast, and many more ongoing plans to connect counties such as Ghana, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mali with their neighbors to mentioned but a few. A number of studies have shown that China have succeeded in advancing its strategic goals towards bringing West Africa into the Belt and Road countries in an effort to expand and consolidate its influence in a historically French dominated region(). It is clear that different countries were given the opportunity to participate for a particular reason. For example, Senegal is considered because of its political and economic stability. Likewise, it has export and import potential for raw materials to and from China. In fact, Senegal is one of China's top importing countries. The Senegalese government

Nigeria as the largest African economy and also the most populous country in Africa joined the band wagon in 2018 at a summit in Beijing positioned the country among the 40 African countries that signed the Belt and Road Initiative MoU as a partner. Among the completed projects and ongoing ones in the country include the Kaduna-Abuja standard gauge rail line, Abuja rail mass transit at the new terminal of the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja, Malam Aminu Kano International Airport, Port Harcourt International Airport, Port Harcourt, Abuja-Lagos-Ibadan standard gauge rail line, Lekki deep sea port project and Abuja township road project.

The Ghanaian experience

China Global Development Plan

Chinese has short term and long term plans on global economies aimed at influencing the world economy and working towards strengthening its economic powers. The Belt and Road initiative is one of the China's global development plans with massive ambition of creating openness for larger number of countries and international organizations to address the challenges of infrastructure deficits and allow greater partnership and connectivity through globalization. It is a plan for global economic leadership and desire to influence the world through private partnership in areas of project development aiming at promoting economic integration of participating countries. The transcontinental infrastructural development plans was designed to cover telecommunication services, ports, aviation services, skyscrapers, highways, power plants/stations and dams, and railways constructions in an effort to close infrastructure deficits.

To bring more countries of the world into its global economic leadership Chinese government have succeeded in creating more collaboration and cooperation as another strategic plan of the initiative. The priority areas include intergovernmental cooperation and multi-level macro policy exchange, communication mechanism and policy support for the implementation of large scale projects and coordinating monetary policy. Thus, five priority areas focusing on achieving the cooperation plan for the initiative were itemized to include the following: (a) Policy coordination to promote intergovernmental cooperation, multi-level intergovernmental macro policy exchange and communication mechanism (b) Facilities connectivity through improvement of connectivity of infrastructure construction plans and technical standards systems (c) Unimpeded trade via the reduction of investment and trade barriers as well as promotion of regional economic integration (d) Financial integration using coordination and cooperation in monetary policy, set up by financing institutions (e) The use of people-to-people bonds by way of cultural and economic exchange and dialogue, and media cooperation.

Chinese Trade and Investment Agreements in West Africa

Studies have shown that the sub-Saharan Africa is one of the target areas of China's strategic vision for globalization with a massive financial ambition as well as an opportunity to elevate itself diplomatically on globalism. By using BRI, Chinese stand the chance of ensuring strong global system of alternative partnership and ties with Africa in terms of connectivity and private partners in this era of globalization (Nantulya, 2019). With this strategy Chinese has created interdependence with Africa and also redirect its international trade by creating enabling environment through openness for active participation of all countries. While the Chinese have enjoyed multiple opportunities to its companies and firms to invest directly in the critical sector of the economy.

The initiative have perceived and identified Africa as the focal point of China's foreign investment due to its infrastructural deficit or gap and development challenges. While the Chinese government sees African inadequate infrastructure as an opportunity, the African ruling elites on the other hand embraced the initiatives as a panacea for the development. Consequently, the Chinese government have increasingly succeeded in participating through a variety of construction projects in the critical sector of the economy. The West African region seem to have facilitated a more profitable cooperation with the Chinese government. Studies have shown that, inadequate infrastructure is one of the bottleneck to African continent development and the Chinese sees opportunity to position itself in the global economic leadership and also to support African leaders to address the problem (Cai, 2017; Lall, S, V, and Lebnaand, M., 2019; Takyi-Amman, G. E., Meiyong, Z. and Norgbey, E., 2018; Toyo, E. 2001). As stated by Cai (2017) '*China is using OBOR to assert its regional leadership through a vast program of economic integration. Its aim is to create a regional production chain, within which China would be a centre of advanced manufacturing and innovation, and a standards setter*' (pp.5).

Chinese inter-regional trade has a number of destination across the globe. The trade flow between China and West Africa have increased with unprecedented exports and imports of agricultural produce, transport equipment, electrical machinery, mining and

quarrying, home appliances, textiles and services. These indicated trade linkages of varying degree with B&R economies at global levels while West Africa remain the most important region of the world in the trade linkages (Boffa, 2018).

Assessing the Impact of BRI on West African Economies

Studies have shown that West African countries that participated in the Chinese BRI projects have benefitted in a number of ways depending on areas of interests. The initiative has impacted in dealing with the problem of infrastructural deficit, created new business and trading opportunities, improved trade, expanded foreign investment and create connectivity and cooperation for participating countries. The Chinese plan for global economic leadership and desire to influence the world through private partnership in areas of project development aiming at promoting economic integration of participating countries has become a reality. For West African countries, BRI has benefitted many participants in a number of ways including the following:

Reducing the cost of trade is one of the impacts BRI on the economy of West African countries through easy access to cheaper consumables to household and industries. The import growth from the Chinese coincided with export growth the continent of Africa leading to massive movement of raw materials for industrial use in all the areas of the initiatives (Maliszewka and Van der Mensbrugge, 2019).

Provision of good transport infrastructure through china connectivity and cooperation has a large inputs in ensuring global effort to deal with infrastructure gap. The BRI in meeting the growing global infrastructure needs has invested vehemently in the area of transportation (roads, rail and water ways) using different methods to connect China with economies of the world. This strategic plan increases the opportunity of creating better road links and easy transport communications for the smooth running of the economic belt, reduction in the hurdles to trade and investment and greater connectivity. However the World Bank Group (2019) has indicated worries over the Belt and Road transport corridors by lamenting that perhaps the new infrastructure can help close the infrastructure gap or deficit in participating economies but is going to be costly and also increases the public debt (pp. 4). This corroborate with what is obtainable from Debt Management Office in Nigeria, where the Chinese companies and investors funded projects in Nigeria through loans estimated to \$ 3. 121 Billion USD in 2020. The loan is lucrative to Chinese but costly to Nigeria due certain conditions attached to the loan. One of it is the loan will be payable in over 20 years and is also estimated to represents 3.94% of Nigeria's total public debt at 2.50% interest rate. Though, the bilateral relations between Nigeria and China is somehow beneficial to one another. In real sense the Nigerian state is primarily enveloped in a new form of economic colonialism within the Chinese debt strategy for a long period of time.

Connectivity in trade expansion and economic growth is another area of collaboration and partnership that the Chinese have in its geostrategic interests in Africa where china establishes a number activities to promote economic influence. As an active international trade policy to incorporate many countries of the world and their economies into creating global value chains (GVCs) which is value addition that would further accelerate economic

growth across Asian countries, Africa countries and some European countries. It is primarily seen in Chinese global exports, imports and foreign direct investment (FDI) across the globe. The African markets for Belt and Road corridor economies have increased the global value chains especially in trade in goods. The trading corridors had tremendous growth overtime enabling China trading more with West African countries and beyond. The Chinese BRI is a working strategy for growth through connectivity and facilitating trade through bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms for free trade zones. As a platform for promoting trade, the BRI have significantly benefits participating countries in the area of exports, markets for products, imports, and greater connectivity with china. It is observed that, china has have proven to the world that china and participating economies of the world that have signed BRI initiative agreement have been successful in raising the share of the world economy through openness and mutual benefits (OECD, 2018)

Source of infrastructure financing through Chinese banks have a considerable loans and finance to many countries including those from West African states such, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Niger, Mali, and Ivory Coast. Though the finances left many economies with public debt, the Chinese finance of connectivity projects through its development banks have supported many countries to execute many projects by releasing lucrative loans.

Employment opportunities and Technology transfer has been one of the area Chinese exported technology and knowhow to so many counties which later help them improved their unemployment problems. Industries and foreign companies have benefited tremendously through technology transfer and high technology investment too.

Conclusion

The current development realities in the international economic system has made it mandatory upon states to continue to submit both willingly and unwillingly to certain decisions that have their origin from the outside as in the case of BRI. Since International economic inequality enables powerful countries like China to shape the growth of global markets in ways that limit the benefits globalization to its development, the African position exhibited comparative disadvantages of where different efforts are needed to look inward in order to improve on agricultural and industrial development just to meet local demands.

It is true that Africa is single out as the victim of the globalizing economy whereby marginalization and discrimination of states in the continent exhibited international imbalance as well as retrospect to local economic businesses and development of infrastructure. To that effect, operating with multinational corporations as in the case China's BRI have added to the diminishing national sovereignty of African states specifically in the socio-economic aspects of the people. To understand the changing nature of global economy, one need to be informed with the experiences of Colonialism, Neo-Colonialism and the realities of economies of the advance world as well as the present Chinese connectivity plan within the realm of this reordering of global economy perpetuated with the merciless exploitation and pauperization of the African continent and beyond.

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