

**ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY AS A PROACTIVE TOOL TO ADVANCE
AFRICAN AGENCY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF FOCAC**

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**A mini-dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree Master of Arts (Diplomatic Studies)**

In the Department of Political Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

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October 2021

ABSTRACT

The institutionalisation of China-Africa relations under the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which was formally established in the year 2000 in Beijing, took place within the context of emerging South to South engagement. FOCAC's reputation as China-Africa's key multilateral platform, is premised on the objectives of achieving a mutual partnership and win-win cooperation through dialogue. The Forum has undoubtedly served Africa's economic profile well, especially in areas such as infrastructural development and exponential trade growth. However, growing concerns around Africa's inability to fully maximise the opportunities extended by FOCAC's framework, continue to leave room for scepticism over China's development commitments to the continent.

From a review of literature on the evolution of China-Africa relations, the study identified the absence of an Africa-China policy as a major gap contributing to Africa's difficulty in articulating what it expects from its external partner, China. So as to advise how Africa can better exercise agency towards China, and fill in the research gap, the following main research question is used to guide the study: what is the level at which economic diplomacy creates opportunities for Africa to benefit of its relationship with China? After critical analyses were deduced from the terms 'economic diplomacy' and 'agency', the study subsequently relied on primary sources such as key FOCAC documents, dignitary speeches and plans of action to examine how far Africa's agency has been exerted within the Forum since it was launched.

Out of these facts and figures, a number of positive observations were made. For instance, a several policy objectives based on the AU's agenda 2063 were adopted within FOCAC. However, these strengths are challenged by other structural factors, such as the hesitancy by some individual African governments that are unreceptive of the AU's role as the continent's main bridge of communication with China, in the Forum. As a result thereof, these countries have been working with the superpower bilaterally on the side; derailing from the Forum's multilateral scope.

The study affirmed that African actors at the FOCAC negotiation table have indeed been able to influence decision-making on the receiving end of their economic relationship with China, but only to the extent that their Chinese partners have allowed this to happen. As one of the measures proposed to enhance this African agency, more transparency regarding the flow of financial aid from China to Africa was encouraged.

Key words: Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), diplomacy, economic diplomacy, agency, African agency, multilateralism, bilateralism, Sino-African relations

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Presentation of the study's primary theme

Part of the evident transformations brought about by globalisation, is the increased level of South to South diplomacy between the Chinese government and the African continent. The rise of the global South has opened new avenues for the African continent to challenge the power asymmetry in the global governance architecture (Lala 2018:5). By 2009, China had replaced the United States at becoming Africa's largest bilateral trade partner (Shinn 2011). The 21st century has thus been ushered in by strengthened South to South economic ties; for instance, under the establishment of co-operation platforms such as the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) which was established in 2000.

FOCAC is a platform of collective exchange, purposed to forge collaboration and stimulate dialogue between China and their African counterparts (Mlambo et al 2018:82). Under FOCAC, China developed its first policy framework to guide its engagement with African countries in 2006, and a more elaborated one in 2015 at the FOCAC Johannesburg summit (Wekesa, 2017). The 2006 document explicitly formulates the principles and objectives of China's policy towards Africa (Stahl 2016:4). The 2015 document accounts for the restructuring of relations between the partners, so as to adapt Chinese economic interest to 'new circumstances' (Wekesa 2015).

Through FOCAC, least developed African countries that had taken loans from China, but could neither repay their debts nor the interest, were relieved of their financial burden, after the Forum had encouraged the Chinese government to exempt them from these debts (Aiping & Zhan 2018:92). Another positive outcome of the forum's framework, pointed out by some scholars, is that African countries have expanded their educational, infrastructural, agricultural, health and financial capacity (Aiping & Zhan 2018:93). These outcomes are as a result of development initiatives such as: the training of African scholars; the modernisation of Africa's agricultural technologies; the provision of adequate medical supplies for the enhancement of Africa's healthcare and the enabling of Africa's industrialisation through the implementation of tariff-free trade with the Chinese market (Aiping & Zhan 2018:93-96).

Against this background, there is, however, scant evidence of a collective African approach that guides African countries in understanding what they want out of their relations with China and what they expect in order to achieve these goals (Wekesa 2015). The absence of such an

approach explains why there are still pending questions around Africa's ability to make decisions that align with its continental interests and the national interests of African states (Van Staden et al 2018:5). What this study seeks to do, is explore how far economic diplomacy can go to create opportunities for African agency (i.e. within the context of FOCAC) to be developed in its relations with China. It is important to note, that when the study speaks of 'Africa' throughout each chapter, it is referring to the collective role all 53 African states who have established diplomatic relations with China, play under FOCAC.

1.2 Literature Overview

The purpose of this brief literature overview, is to provide a summary of what has been written on China-Africa relations, on FOCAC and on the nature and characteristics of economic diplomacy. This kind of narrative review, also known as a traditional review, critiques and summarizes the literature, in order to identify, amongst other things, inconsistencies within a body of knowledge (Dudovskiy 2019).

This overview is divided into five sections. The first one examines how China's Africa policy has evolved from the pre-establishment of FOCAC till today. The second section identifies the different academic schools of thought and their contestations around the issue of China's role in its diplomatic engagements with Africa since FOCAC's inception. The third one explains what the gap within this literature is and section four discusses the kind of effects the gap brings to Africa's command in operation within the FOCAC framework. To conclude, section five provides a broad definition of what economic diplomacy is and how it intends on filling the literature gap; as this is the tool the study proposes throughout each chapter, as a solution to facilitate Africa's ability to exercise agency within the economic sphere.

1.2.1 Summary of the evolution of China's Africa policy

Before delving into the academic debates about what kind of relationship China and Africa have, it is important to first examine the literature on the background and contextual considerations of China's Africa policy. This allows for a contrast to be made between what has been written in black and white, and what is actually happening when such policy is implemented.

Sino-African relations would be nowhere close to successfully delivering the promises of their agreements without cohesive policies (Zondi 2021:57). Before FOCAC stepped in as the new element of Sino-African diplomacy, the 60-year-long relationship between Africa and China

had been one of complex interaction; and this is evident with the way China's Africa policy varied over the years (Parut and Shelton 2008:51-52). From the 1940s to the 1970s, China played a significant role, not only in supporting, but also in training and equipping Africa for its liberation struggles against imperialism (Parut and Shelton 2008:52).

In the 1980s, China's Africa agenda changed from a political and anti-imperialism focus to a more commercial focus, with an emphasis on peace, technological cooperation and development that would mutually benefit their economic goals (Parut and Shelton 2008:53). From the 1990s onwards, China's Africa policy, be it through aid assistance, trade or developmental approaches, prioritised principles such as sovereignty and non-interference (Parut and Shelton 2008:59).

1.2.2 Academic debate surrounding China-Africa economic relations

From the writings of Western commentator Chris Alden (2010: 9-11), we are able to understand that there are three different angles from which Sino-African relations can be interpreted: a mutual partnership, a competitive relationship and a post-imperial alliance with China as the new coloniser. There are also different thematic conceptions of FOCAC from the Africa-China scholarly community – whilst some see the forum as a Chinese entity, others as an African forum and a third group acknowledges a joint effort (Mthembu & Wekesa 2017:4).

Although on paper China's Africa policy seems to offer a partnership that is mutually beneficial, scholars such as Siphamandla Zondi (2021:57-58) have argued that in reality, these benefits are unequally distributed, meaning that only the policy areas that profit the strategic interests, goals and visions of China, are successfully implemented (Zondi 2021:57-58). This particular kind of view is called the neo-colonial school of thought – one of the most dominant contestations around Sino-African economic relations according to Asongu (2016:352).

It advocates the work of authors such as Giovannetti and Sanfilippo (2009:506), who state that bilateral trade relations between Africa and China make domestic industries within Africa very vulnerable; as well as that of Villoria (2009:531), who reaffirms that it is the Chinese who are benefitting more from the relationship than Africa itself.

Second is the optimistic school of thought, comprising of authors like Munemo (2013:106) and Zambian economist, Dambisa Moyo (2009:120-122), who confirm the rise of China as Africa's 'golden opportunity' for capital accumulation and infrastructural development through bilateral

trade. Even Power and Mohan (2010:462) find the historical relations between the African continent and the Chinese mutually beneficial.

Lastly, there is the accommodation school of thought, where authors like Ovadia (2013:233) see China's engagement with African countries as both a project of development and that of imperialism. Put simply, as a result of the evolving nature of globalization, Africans must choose between Euro-American imperialism or succumb to that of China, which on the bright side (according to the author), is a better alternative for the prospects it offers on sustaining economic growth (Ovadia 2013:233).

Scholars such as Sautman and Hairong (2009:729-730) also fall under this category because their findings both acknowledge that there are some areas of tension with the way Chinese competition is affecting African exports, yet also assert that Africans' perspectives about their interaction with China is not as bad as Western discourses of China-Africa links portrays it to be in the media. They derive Africans' positive opinion formation to infrastructural development, as well as the fostering of industrial prosperity; and Africans' negative opinion formation to corruption (Sautman and Hairong 2009:758-759).

1.2.3 The Literature gap

According to authors such as Gazibo and Mbatia (2012:67), financial prowess dictates most parts of the bilateral agreement in the making of South to South relations and the establishment of organisations like FOCAC. China being the largest contributor, still affects African agency to a great extent (Mlambo et al 2018:83). However, this study has identified the following gap: the financial disparity between China and Africa, emphasized by most scholars working in this field of study, is not the only factor that accounts for asymmetry within the Forum (Gazibo & Mbatia 2012:67). There is also the question of Africa's missing China policy.

While examining the evolution of China's Africa policy is possible, the same cannot be said about Africa's China policy – the fact that the continent does not have an overarching China policy, including how it deals with China from a continental perspective, is a critical issue that poses challenging consequences to the continent's agency (Parut and Shelton 2008:59). There are even more results that appear from online search engines when academic narratives about China's African policy are dug out, and little to none for Africa's China policy (Wekesa 2021:12). It is important to mention and address Africa's policy gap towards China because policy responses from the continent will direct how African states and civil society react to China's initiatives (Wekesa 2021:13).

The absence of Africa's China policy reduces Africa's chances of pursuing and achieving its own interests when dealing with external powers like China, within the international system (Wekesa 2021:13). As stated by scholars such as Bob Wekesa (2021:11-12), it is without denial that asymmetry exists within the political, economic and cultural spheres of engagement between China and Africa. For example – in the cultural sphere – it turns out that South Africa's soft power in China, through the establishment of scholarships and institutions, is muted in comparison to the flow of Chinese cultural exchanges that are present in South Africa (Wekesa, 2021:12). However, the power imbalance between China and Africa is only a reflection of Africa's absent policy architecture; one that strategizes what the continent wants out of its relations with China (Wekesa 2021:12). Even when certain aspects of Africa's China policy are observed in Agenda 2063, implementation is far from done (Wekesa 2021:12). Africa is yet to craft a mutually beneficial agenda like China has done, to sustain their commercial relationship (Parut and Shelton 2008:59).

1.2.4 Consequences of Africa's policy response towards China within FOCAC

The absence of a unified African approach within the forum, affects the continent's ability to lead or influence South to South cooperation, as well as threatens their command in operations within FOCAC. For instance, although South Africa, forming part of the collective, has done its best to promote the interest of the African bloc (Naidu 2015:8), there is a lack of coordination among African countries as to the way formulated goals have to be realized and negotiated with China (Aiping & Zhan 2018:102). There is no African agenda with which FOCAC's policy framework can align, in order to ensure that the Forum's values are well synchronized with a Pan-Africanist roadmap (Naidu 2015:2).

Without a collective approach, the continent is not placed in a strong bargaining position and as a result, proposed plans are not well executed and the relevant FOCAC measures cannot be put into place (Aiping & Zhan 2018:102). A contributing factor to the absence of a unified African approach, is the domestic conflicts some of the continent's sub-regions are still vulnerable to (Aiping & Zhan 2018:103). When political crises are unresolved, they make it difficult for Africa to exert full command (Aiping & Zhan 2018:103).

Secondly, when reference to the continent is made, it tends to be treated as a monolith. This poses a threat to how the continent is perceived because it creates space for generalizations – taking every country into account as if they were the same (Broadman 2016). Africa being reduced to a single actor (i.e. as if it were a country) ignores the fact that its composition is

made up of 54 states and diverse sub-regions with dissimilar needs and unique contextual conditions that vary geographically, politically and economically (Broadman 2007:5). In certain cases, such as that of the FOCAC mechanism, it is relatively difficult to identify each country's specific priorities, with the result that reference is usually made to the continent as a whole.

Nevertheless, to fill this policy gap, the tools provided by the economic diplomacy Africa has towards China will be utilized in this study, in order to make suggestions on how to effectively improve relations between them; especially to the economic advantage of African countries. But to do so requires that the conceptual framework of economic diplomacy first be understood.

1.2.5 Understanding the conceptual framework of economic diplomacy

From an economic perspective, the framed win-win South to South cooperation between China and Africa is unbalanced (Van Staden et al 2018:28). In this study, the absence of Africa's integrated response towards external partners is a predominant factor that should be critically taken into consideration before accepting the conditions and agenda set by the emerging economies of the non-Western world (McDougal 2009:65). To understand this, Africa's economic diplomacy towards China must be explored, but first, a conceptual framework of economic diplomacy is needed in order to appreciate its broad definition and primary goals the more.

History affirms that there are traces of commercial activity, such as trade, during the earliest diplomatic relations between countries (Baranay 2009: 2). There is more than one interpretation of what economic diplomacy is (Baranay 2009:2). A major characteristic of economic diplomacy is its multidisciplinary nature. International relations focuses on the context within which economic diplomacy is practised – the relationship between politics and the economy (Okano-Heijmans 2011:21). International Political Economy looks at what kind of structures are put in place, as well as which institutions facilitate the activities of economic diplomacy (Okano-Heijmans 2011:22) – whereas Diplomatic Studies, focuses on the procedural aspect of economic diplomacy (Okano-Heijmans 2011:28).

Taking these scopes into account, existing literature like that of Baranay (2009:1) defines economic diplomacy as the practice of economic activities that govern relations between the relevant countries in the international sphere. As a component of foreign policy, its primary purpose is to advance cooperation regardless of the differences in each country's economic

interest and in effect, the economic diplomacy of one country can influence the policy decisions of another (Baranay 2009:3-9).

Traditionally, economic relations were limited to the matters that concerned the state and the most prominent voice in conducting this assignment, was that of ambassadors and government officials (Yiu & Saner 2003:29). However, postmodern society has extended the mandate to non-governmental actors like business diplomats (Yiu & Saner 2003:29-30). The growing number and increased role of non-state actors in the complex environment of a postmodern economy, has contributed to the elasticity of the term ‘economic diplomacy’, from one that is state-centric, to one that is more fragmented (Yiu & Saner 2003:2). What the IPE, IR and diplomatic perspective can agree on, is that the state is not the sole actor that governs the processes and practices of economic diplomacy, but it is rather the primary one (Okano-Heijmans 2011:16).

To develop a broad definition of what economic diplomacy is, there is a need to understand what the ‘economic’ (i.e. the business end of the term) in economic diplomacy means, as well as what the term ‘diplomacy’ (i.e. the ‘power-play’ end of the term) entails (Okano-Heijmans 2011:9). Business-wise, economic diplomacy has to do with how states and businesses work to pursue commercial opportunities that will advance national interest (Okano-Heijmans 2011:17). The diplomacy angle, focuses more on how policy is constructed and employed for these opportunities to be maximized (Okano-Heijmans 2011:22); it is therefore process-orientated.

For the uncertainties of today’s interdependent Sino-African relations to be well managed, economic diplomacy allows for both governments and business enterprises on each side, to join forces, in order to strengthen institutional capacity that will enable them to put the right foreign policies forward (Yiu & Saner 2003:3-4). The multiplicity of stakeholders is thus faced with the challenging task of developing the appropriate diplomatic skills that will facilitate constructive engagement and dialogue between them (Yiu & Saner 2003:30).

1.3 Problem statement and research question

As long as Africa remains fractured continentally, African agency will continue to be undermined internationally. The answers African countries are looking for, lie within their ability to develop a cohesive response towards its external counterparts (i.e. one that is aligned to its Pan-African values) (Mthembu & Wekesa 2017:2). Finding these answers begin by looking at African agency within the China-Africa context, beyond ‘economic power hierarchy’. The focus of this study is to unpack the issue of African agency in the continent’s

relationship with China and explore how economic diplomacy can serve as a pathway to the consolidation of an African agenda towards China. Therefore, this study investigates the following core question:

To what extent does economic diplomacy offer opportunities for Africa to benefit from its relations with China within the FOCAC framework?

To answer this question, three interrelated sub-questions will be investigated:

- a) What are the characteristics of economic diplomacy?
- b) What provision does FOCAC make for African agency?
- c) What are the strengths and weaknesses of African agency within the FOCAC framework and how can economic diplomacy address these to the benefit of Africa?

1.4 Limitations of the study

There have been a few practical implications of the COVID-19 online learning experience upon the conduct of this qualitative research. First was the issue of accessibility. Although this study's data collection process did not heavily rely on face-to-face interaction, several sources such as journal articles could only be accessed within the confinement of their respective institutions. Therefore, such information could only be gathered after national restrictions that prohibited outdoor activities had eased; putting the time-frame of the research under strain because of delayed findings. Secondly, despite the wealth of data generated from both Chinese and Western research networks on China-Africa relations, there was a limited number of sources that made provisions for an African perspective. Additionally, the validity of these Western and Chinese-based literature would at times come into question because of their tendency to be biased. However, the study made ample use of African perspectives, even though limited in quantity.

1.5 Research Methodology

There are various routes to take or methodological avenues to apply when doing research about economic diplomacy; especially within the context of a forum. However, this study finds it most relevant to employ a combination of both primary sources and secondary sources in order to make provision for the answers to the research questions. By primary sources, the study refers to the extraction of first-hand information or original evidence about a particular subject, person or event (Streefkerk 2018). And by secondary sources, the study refers to already used and interpreted data that has been analysed by other researchers, organizations or institutions

(Streefkerk 2018). Under the category of primary sources, official FOCAC documents, press releases of conference speeches, foreign policies from the ministries of certain African states such as South Africa, as well as that of the Chinese government, will be critically analysed. All of these sources are in the public domain.

Secondary sources include the works of different scholars and authors who have written books, transcripts of research reports, internet blogs and articles about African agency and FOCAC; as well as journal articles and annual reports that interpret data on the subject of economic diplomacy. Furthermore, this study applies a qualitative approach that is non-interactive. It is historical in nature; looking at data about the flow of trade, FDI and commerce (i.e. all of which are characteristics of economic diplomacy) between China and Africa, in order to examine how their economic engagement has evolved since FOCAC came into being.

1.6 Structure

The mini-dissertation is separated into five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction and contextual background to the study, by outlining of the research problem, the methodological approaches appropriate for this research and the literature overview.

Chapter two considers the literature on diplomacy and economic diplomacy in order to develop an analytical framework based on the characteristics of economic diplomacy, allowing for concepts like ‘agency’ to be clarified in a way in which it could be operationalised in exploring the extent to which economic diplomacy could contribute to stronger advantage for Africa in its relations with China.

Chapter three provides an overview of the history of China-Africa relations, specifically within the context of FOCAC’s evolution as a multilateral approach, as well as a brief description and analysis on the Forum’s core documents. Applying the analytical framework developed in Chapter two, Chapter four analyses Africa’s efforts within FOCAC, to assess the strengths and weaknesses or challenges in this relationship in terms of the way in which economic diplomacy is utilised in promoting African development within the framework established by FOCAC. This will allow for the identification of economic diplomacy measures that could improve the continent’s agency in, and the benefits accrued from its involvement within the Forum. The concluding chapter summarises the study’s findings and makes policy recommendations for African policymakers and practitioners on how to effectively use FOCAC to promote Africa’s economic development. Areas for further research are also be identified.

1.7 Conclusion

The first chapter provided a brief contextual background on the establishment of FOCAC. Furthermore, chapter one outlined the interpretation of three schools of thought, which define China's role in Sino-African diplomatic engagements as either one of mutual, competitive or post-imperial partnership.

Also, the first chapter introduced the research problem as the continent's restrained exercise of agency within FOCAC which is a result of Africa's missing continental agenda towards China. A brief conceptual framework of the term economic diplomacy – the study's proposed solution to fill in the African approach gap identified in the research problem – was given, and the following objectives were set to drive the research process:

- A. Examining the nature of economic diplomacy – that is, its characteristics, its instruments and the actors/stakeholders it involves
- B. Assessing the provisions FOCAC makes for African agency to be exercised and
- C. Evaluating how the tools of economic diplomacy can be used to address the weaknesses of African agency and advance the strengths of such agency within FOCAC

The next chapter serves to develop an analytical framework, in order to enable an in-depth consideration of the extent to which economic diplomacy is applied by Africa in the FOCAC context in chapters three and four.

CHAPTER 2

A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY AND AGENCY

2.1 Introduction

For decades, literature on mainstream diplomacy paid very little attention to the economic dimension of diplomatic practice (Lee 2018). It is only in recent years that the study of

diplomacy has experienced a conceptual shift away from the realist and neorealist school of thought, which confined international relations to state centrism (Lee 2018). This is because developments such as the 1970s oil crises and the rise of BRICS in the early 2000s show that aside from political aspirations, economic matters matter (Lee 2018). In fact, economic matters can equally be used to better understand how the relationship amongst networks of actors in the domestic and global setting works (Lee 2018). The growing recognition of diplomacy's economic dimension, also allows for the growing recognition of diplomats who are involved in the negotiations necessary for the development and regulation of economic markets (Lee 2018).

The interconnectedness of countries, the liberalisation of trade, the rise in the adoption of new technologies and the openness of borders are all processes of globalisation that have strengthened international competition (Baraney 2009:5). These trends have pushed countries to find innovative ways to participate in the world market, in order to protect their economic interests and remain relevant on the international stage (Baraney 2009:5). The instruments of economic diplomacy, which are observed later in this chapter, provide the practical solutions these countries need to advance their competitiveness in the global economy (Baraney 2009:6).

The Africa-China relationship within FOCAC cannot be evaluated without first exploring what economic diplomacy is, the instruments it has available for state and non-state actors to use, as well as what agency entails – as the study argues that the continent must apply agency in its dealings within FOCAC. For this reason, this chapter will provide a detailed discussion of economic diplomacy in its contextual parts and develop a framework to answer the following question: how can economic diplomacy be used to achieve economic objectives? The answer will be useful in assessing, later on in the study, whether or not all of Africa's economic objectives – in its South-South relations with China – are met and whether it has the agency to engage with China in such a way that it can ensure delivery of promises made.

The first section of this chapter unpacks what modern diplomacy is, shows how economic diplomacy is a specific form of it, and examines its relationship with foreign policy. In the second section, economic diplomacy is defined; it is also differentiated from economic statecraft; the instruments that are used to implement economic diplomacy are explained and the dimensions of economic diplomacy are briefly analysed. The third section, like the second one, applies the very same structure of defining and characterizing the notion of agency.

2.2 Modern Diplomacy

How well informed we are about economic diplomacy; that is, its meaning, methods and effects upon the international arena, highly depends on our comprehension of modern diplomacy and foreign policy in general (Baranay 2009:1). To understand just how dynamic economic diplomacy is, it would work to our advantage to unpack what these terms entail.

2.2.1 The Shortcomings of Classical Diplomacy

Since the age of Enlightenment, diplomacy was considered to be the hub for state-to-state political activity (Kelley 2010:286). In fact, by definition, diplomacy was the process through which sovereign states would peacefully negotiate their way towards mutually meeting each other's political interests, without resorting to military means (Kelley 2010:286). However, as stated by Holsti (2004:206), the diplomatic world has been catapulted into a shift away from traditional norms and practices because of international developments that are altering the way in which countries operate.

There are three key observations that can be made from the work of Barston (2014), about the inappropriateness of the politically centred conception of diplomacy, in the face of a restructured global order. Firstly, Sasson Sofer's (1988:195) article on 'Old and new diplomacy: a debate revisited', informs us that the main idea of traditional diplomacy focuses on the competitive relationship between two superpowers – the US and the Soviet Union (USSR). However, the end of the bipolar era, which collapsed with the Soviet Union in 1990-1991, gave rise to a multipolar international community with much 'looser' networks of actors (Popa 2016; DeYeso 2006:9) - an international arena that does not only prioritize the contributions of traditional superpowers like the US, but also pays attention to the multilateral and regional activities of other emerging and developing states (Popa 2016).

Secondly, the international order no longer solely revolves around security matters, but has also stretched the scope of diplomacy to include other key pillars such as international trade (Popa 2016). Which means that the new challenges of the post-2000 international arena can no longer be understood solely from a traditional point of view – an approach that places much emphasis on hard power (Popa 2016).

2.2.2 Contributors of a redefined diplomacy: Globalisation and multi-stakeholders

Cooper et al (2013) assert that as a result of the new complexities surrounding the 21st century, the form, scope and activities of diplomacy have also had to change to operate differently, in

order to adapt to new demands. Globalisation brought along a series of fundamental transformations – such as the decline of state capacity, the reduced significance of national borders and the rise of modern technology – that have deepened interdependence and anarchy within the environment in which diplomatic actors operate. As a result of these changes, diplomacy has experienced a widening of issues presented at the negotiation table, as well as an increase in the number of issues addressed and negotiation styles used (Cooper et al 2013).

Globalisation calls for government to work alongside non-state actors, so as to better achieve a country's foreign policy objectives (Lamb 2007). The international stage is an increasingly congested space that now comprises of non-governmental actors such as NGOs, the private sector, banks, and business firms (Kelley 2010:287). In other words, the institution of diplomacy has only deepened thanks to a dynamic composition of actors within the circle of international politics (Kelley 2010:287).

The starting point of the diversification of diplomatic actors, began with the embodiment of the League of Nations after World War 1 and the United Nations after World War 2 (Lamb 2007). The latter is an example of intercommunity between official and non-official delegates (Lamb 2007). The environment which modern diplomacy has made possible, is one where state actors are deemed accountable to a wider range of stakeholders on the bilateral and multilateral level of diplomatic engagements (Lamb 2007).

2.2.3 The link between economic diplomacy and foreign policy

For over three decades, foreign policy was established in such a way that the main objective for any negotiation was the balance of power (Kelley 2010:288). However, from the 1990s, this traditional perspective of foreign policy was challenged by the diversification of agents within the international system (Kelley 2010:286). This proves what Chatterjee (2020:viii) asserted when he said that economic diplomacy is indeed a form of diplomacy because it derives from the changes which resulted in the dynamic nature of the institution itself. Economic diplomacy as a subset of diplomacy, is a component of both foreign policy and diplomacy (Baranay 2009:2). In other words, all three terms interchangeably work together. To achieve economic, as well as foreign policy goals, diplomacy cannot be omitted (Chatterjee 2020:vi). Without the reciprocity that comes with dialogue – which diplomacy offers on its various platforms like summits, it is impossible to maintain economic relationships and even harder to align their objectives towards a common interest (Chatterjee 2020:3).

2.3 Defining economic diplomacy

Historically speaking, economic diplomacy is a relatively new development in the study of modern diplomacy, dating back to the 1980s (Lee 2018). However, when we look at the origin of diplomacy, especially its evolution after the Second World War, we realize that commercial activities were only associated with political actions (Baranay 2009:2). Economic diplomacy did not yet occupy a large area of legitimacy, despite historical evidences of trade passed on by ancient Egyptian and Asian civilizations (Baranay 2009:2). In fact, it was trade that stimulated the crossing of borders, as well as the first intergovernmental relationship and agreements between states (Baranay 2009:2). Nonetheless, the realist framework of diplomacy, had compartmentalized the purpose and practice of economic diplomacy to how foreign officials advance the economic interests of the state in the global economy (Lee 2018).

Today's globalized world has allowed for the expansion of the concept of economic diplomacy – creating a bridge between the interdependent relations between actors of both the political and economic sphere (Baranay 2009:2). The growing relevance of regional organizations, as well as the enlarged trade negotiation agenda which now incorporates significantly new challenges like internet gambling, has resulted in the strengthened need to move beyond the traditional framework of economic diplomacy (Lee 2018).

What globalization has done, is to render economies so vulnerable that their openness to trade and investment opportunities would almost be inevitable (Lee 2018). In the context of this study, economic diplomacy needs the kind of definition that also encapsulates the changes that have occurred within the domain of diplomacy (Lee 2018), both in scholarly work, but also in practice.

With that being said, and following Lorenz (2015:1), this study chooses to then define economic diplomacy as the use of economic tools or activities such as energy infrastructure, trade or financial networks, by states, to further their domestic interest while they engage with other state and non-state actors. It is the process through which states make decisions on a domestic level and negotiate on an international level, in order to influence and maintain their economic relations in the global environment (Woolcock and Bayne 2011:1). In respect to this definition, economic diplomats face the daunting task of ensuring that economic policies reconcile the economic interest of state actors to that of non-state actors (Lee 2018). Meaning that economic diplomats are responsible for building a bridge between private and public key players in the global economy (Lee 2018).

2.3.1 Economic diplomacy versus economic statecraft

Lalbahadur (2016:137-138) points to another term that can be synonymously and interchangeably used with economic diplomacy – economic statecraft. He explains that statecraft refers to how states make use of diplomatic, economic or political tools within their reach to control the outcomes of decisions made outside their borders, and defines economic statecraft, like economic diplomacy, to putting economic instruments and economic relations to good use, in order to fulfil or meet a country's foreign policy goals. Economic statecraft is how economic techniques are applied by makers of foreign policy, to shape the behaviour of state and non-state actors within the international arena (Kaminski 2017).

As indicated by the table inserted below, economic statecraft can either be positive or negative. And the difference between the two can be understood as follows: According to Baldwin (1985), economic inducements aimed at influencing the behaviour of one country, in favour of another, is called positive economic statecraft. Christopher Hill (2016:154-155) uses the 'carrots and sticks' illustration to differentiate the two – whilst carrots represent the softer end of economic foreign policy instruments, sticks represent the punitive costs that targets must pay in consequence of going astray from certain economic ends.

Aggarwal and Reddie (2020:5) point out that positive/persuasive economic statecraft can be manifested through trade agreements or the implementation of industrial policies directed towards boosting key economic sectors. Examples of positive statecraft is when a country allocates foreign aid to other countries, in the form of grants, commercial loans or interest-free loans, to enable them to finance domestic projects like that of infrastructural development (Macikenaite 2020:7-11). On the other hand, negative economic statecraft happens when one country makes use of coercive approaches to turn another country's economic decisions against its counterparts – a relevant example of this, is when economic sanctions are utilized (Lalbahadur 2016:137-138). Therefore, whilst the end goal of positive statecraft is to make promises of rewards/acquisitions, negative economic statecraft's end goal is to punish, threaten or withdraw investment, by applying regulatory policies that condition the market activities of foreign competitors (Aggarwal and Reddie 2020:5). The table below not only serves to show how both kinds of statecrafts vary in their use of trade and capital related instruments, but also to examine how economic diplomacy distinguishes itself from them all, regardless of their defining similarities.

Table 1

Type of Statecraft	Trade-related instruments	Capital related instruments
Positive statecraft	The reduction of tariffs	The provision of aid
	Export and import subsidies	Guarantees of investment
	The granting of import and export licenses	Favourable taxation
	Promises to reward with the above	Promises to reward with the above
Negative statecraft	Boycotts	The freezing of assets
	The increase of tariffs	Unfavourable taxation
	Dumping	Expropriation
	Sanctions	The suspension of aid
	Threats to punish with the above	Threats to punish with the above

Source: This table was adapted from the second chapter by Kaminski T; entitled ‘Political players? Sovereign wealth funds’ investments in Central and Eastern Europe’ <https://poseidon01.ssrn.com/delivery.php?ID=249000000081125018122095123086092065040082022002039016066110031100116090109009117095122031018004012045098002029110123123111115051027045019081114106113086111007094126040046041081085069080117084114071068096085072029018008092030094068107029119066070069001&EXT=pdf&INDEX=TRUE>. Accessed: 29 March 2021. However, the information originally comes from the book by Baldwin D; entitled as ‘*Economic Statecraft*’. Published at Princeton by Princeton University Press in 2020

The advantage of using positive economic statecraft over a negative one, ranges from mobilising economic resources cost-efficiently, to enhancing peaceful state-to-state integration – which evidently produces the kind of environment needed to increase one’s sphere of influence within a multipolar world (Lalbahadur 2016:138). In fact, Hill (2016:158) emphasizes that states with weaker resource capacity or limited diplomatic services would heavily need to rely on positive economic statecraft to survive.

The subtle difference between economic statecraft and economic diplomacy is that economic diplomacy leans more towards achieving foreign policy objectives through soft power, whilst literature on economic statecraft profusely emphasizes on coercive means of influencing state behaviour (Lalbahadur 2016:138). Other significant differences between the two are as follows: firstly, Baldwin (1985) asserts that economic statecraft is not concerned about issues at a domestic level; secondly, most actions in economic statecraft are taken by one player – the state.

Conversely, scholars like Woolcock and Bayne (2010) have argued that because economic diplomacy operates within a dynamic environment that seeks to balance the tensions between actors found on the national, as well as international level, it cannot simply rid itself from the domestic context. Neither can it ignore the fact that state activities cannot be undertaken without first being influenced by other non-government actors like private businesses, NGOs and interest groups (Okano-Heijmans 2013:27). It is due to such distinctions that this study prefers to use the term economic diplomacy, rather than economic statecraft, to answer the research questions posed in the previous chapter.

2.3.2 Instruments of economic diplomacy

Economic diplomacy deals with a wide range of issues from investments and information, to trade (Woolcock and Bayne 2011:4). Due to globalization, the economic security of a country, as well as its level of political influence within the anarchic global environment, have become directly related to economic diplomacy (Okano-Heijmans 2011:16). This means that economic diplomacy now consists of a wide range of, both economic and political instruments, that aim at advancing the economic purposes of a state's foreign policy (Okano-Heijmans 2011:16).

Geoff R Berridge and Allan James succeed in showing us the relationship between the economic and political dimension in *Dictionary of Diplomacy* (2003:91), where they define economic diplomacy as the political means by which economic prosperity is enhanced, as well as the economic means through which political stability is achieved. The economic instruments of economic diplomacy include all efforts conducted by government and businesses in advancing national interest through commercial activities (i.e. commercial diplomacy) (Okano-Heijmans 2011:17). The political instruments have to do with regulations that are political in nature and put in place to implement foreign policy (Okano-Heijmans 2011:16). To better understand how both instruments are used, they will be further explained under the following headings:

Commercial diplomacy

It is important not to confuse economic diplomacy, the main field, with commercial diplomacy – the subfield. Chatterjee (2020:68) draws attention to two main differences between them: firstly, whilst policy-making is the primary priority for economic diplomacy, commercial concerns such as those brought up during transnational deals, are the priority of commercial diplomacy. Secondly, whilst economic diplomacy is based on mutual benefitting, commercial diplomacy is more profit-driven. The differences between commercial diplomacy and economic diplomacy are nonetheless no reason to treat one as being more important than the other. In fact, an interaction is needed between them in order for the relationship between sending states and receiving states to grow and be maintained (Chatterjee 2020:69).

Although commercial diplomacy, along with trade and financial diplomacy, are all concerned with reaching economic objectives that will enhance the prosperity of the home-country, commercial diplomacy is more specific about the activities being conducted or pursued (Ruel and Zuidema 2012). These activities include trade, FDI, intelligence, networking and tourism (Ruel and Zuidema 2012). The practice of commercial diplomacy entails the funding and support of exports and investments, in order for economies to respond to the pressures caused by the competitive nature of the global economy (Lee 2018). Through commercial diplomacy, a network of business officials, as well as diplomats, is created to facilitate trade and business, as well as mobilize FDI abroad during overseas missions (Lee 2018).

The diversified merging of official agencies like ministries and consulates, as well as non-government players like businesses and industry bodies, is to facilitate navigating the profit-driven world of foreign markets (Rana and Chatterjee 2011:6-7). Businesses are able to help government maintain their political relationships through entrepreneurship and government can help businesses maintain strong commercial presence and build a reputable image by facilitating their access to foreign markets (Ruel et al 2013:15). Nonetheless, commercial diplomacy is not just limited to trade, but also prioritizes enhancing ‘foreign investment attraction’ by making use of instruments like tourism (Baranay 2009:7). Therefore, commercial diplomacy creates a positive perception of a country’s domestic identity (Baranay 2009:7).

Trade diplomacy

Trade diplomacy is the manner in which trade regimes (free trade and protectionism) and factors influencing the market as a result of these regimes, are managed (Tussie 2012:625). It allows for governments all over the world to multiply their commercial representation in other

countries (Tussie 2012:625). Since trade diplomacy allows for a pathway of collaboration between political authorities and the market, decision-making is driven by both market interests and political considerations (Tussie 2012:625)

Traditionally, trade has been analysed from a political, as well as an economic perspective (Pigman 2016:4-7). From an economic point of view, trade is observed in terms of profitability – who wins or loses and how (Pigman 2016:4-7). From a political point of view, it is observed as a means by which political systems best represent the commercial interests of their home countries (Pigman 2016:4-7). Furthermore, the political perspective on trade also emphasizes on how political bargaining serves as a bridge to reconcile trade objectives to other foreign policy objectives (Pigman 2016:4-7). There is however, an absence in the diplomatic perspective of trade. The best way to fill this gap is by answering the question: how has trade changed over the past decades? (Pigman 2016:4-7).

Trade, since the era of the Peace of Westphalia, as well as the Cold War, has been broadly defined as the ongoing exchange of goods and services (Pigman 2016:4-5). However, as a result of the new developments accompanied by globalization, the emergence of non-state actors has revolutionized the concept of trade diplomacy as the integrated negotiations that go on between official and non-governmental bodies, for the purpose of enhancing national growth through the increase of exports and diversifying of production channels (Pigman 2016:4-6).

It does not just end there, but developments in the contemporary world have even allowed for trade diplomacy to be an instrument used by international organizations such as the World Trade Organization, in order to reduce the inequality gap between developed and developing countries, through development (Pigman 2016:6). In other words, trade diplomacy is inclusive of less industrialized economies (Lee 2018). It draws our attention to the diplomatic practices that are often neglected within the study of economic diplomacy (Lee 2018).

Finance diplomacy

As a subset of economic diplomacy, finance diplomacy has to do with the coordination of foreign policy and banking regulations (Smart 2018). Finance diplomacy is governments' attempt to maintain financial stability in an anarchic regime of international trade (Lee 2018). Key players in finance diplomacy include finance ministers, as well as dominant institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Bayne 2008:1). Their active participation tends to reinforce the idea that financial diplomacy is state-centric. In fact,

sometimes the study on finance diplomacy tends to overemphasize the failure of finance diplomacy; especially with regards to its past inability to prevent various series of financial crises like that of Asia's in the 1990s (Lee 2018).

In fact, there is much work needed within the discipline of economic diplomacy to analyse the processes of diplomatic negotiation. However, what is certain is the fact that there are also central banks that play an important role in figuring out how complex markets work (Bayne 2008:12). Nevertheless, the inclusive networks of actors and transparency between them does not erase the fact that the series of financial crises which began since the 1990s, were as a result of failed diplomatic negotiations between them (Bayne 2008:12-13).

2.3.3 Dimensions of economic diplomacy

Decision-making in economic diplomacy operates in multiple dimensions: the unilateral dimension, the bilateral dimension, the regional dimension and the multilateral dimension (Bayne and Woolcock 2011:8). The unilateral dimension entails economic policy decisions that are made at the domestic level; the bilateral dimension deals with treaties or agreements made between two governing bodies over a range of economic issues; the regional dimension focuses on countries belonging to a similar regional grouping and with the same policy preferences; whilst the multilateral dimension consists of many governments voluntarily working together towards reconciling their domestic interest with their international objectives (Bayne and Woolcock 2011:8). This study intends to, later in this chapter, particularly look at the last dimension – multilateralism. From the outcome of this observation, it will be easier to clarify how constrained or open Africa's ability is to exercise agency in the Forum.

2.3.4 Economic diplomacy's models of hierarchy

This study argues that the models of economic diplomacy are significant to this research because they explain how the mechanics of economic diplomacy work, and who delegates these economic activities using one or a combination of three possible models (Spruds and Bukovskis 2014:12). First is the united model. It comprises of ministries dealing with foreign affairs, who are at the top of the leadership chain and hold institutional capacity to define what strategy or priorities other state institutions need to follow (Spruds and Bukovskis 2014:12). This classical model pays more attention to the political approach of diplomatic practice, rather than its economic factors (Spruds and Bukovskis 2014:12).

Secondly, there is a partially-united way of dealing with economic diplomacy (Spruds and Bukovskis 2014:12). This is where ministries dealing with foreign affairs and with economic affairs respectfully, share the burden by dividing tasks that are related to trade and development between themselves (Spruds and Bukovskis 2014:12). The last model is one of task delegation, where a combination of external agencies and unofficial third parties are delegated assignments by the ministries that deal with foreign affairs (Spruds and Bukovskis 2014:12). In this case, the role of these ministries during diplomatic missions is more passive because assignments are handed over to the agencies and third-party delegates, to ensure that the trade situation is adequately monitored in the host country, (Baranay 2009:8).

2.4 Defining and characterising the notion of agency

Agency is a significant point of departure to measure the effect of the unevenness that comes with globalization in world politics (Van Staden et al 2018:6). Theoretically speaking, there are contested interpretations for what agency is and what exercising this agency entails (Braun et al 2018:788). For instance, constructivists like Wendt (1987) see agency as the power an individual/collective possesses to transform the imposed structures of the international environment. This definition links agency to freedom – the freedom that an agent holds to shape the very structures that constrain it; the freedom of “individual choice-making” (Wendt 1987). The works of rationalists like Goffman (1959), as well as Karin Fierke (2013) – who similarly to structuralists like Jackson and Nexon (1999) see agency as a product of social interaction – define agency as the ability to represent or frame a social situation. Put simply, this kind of agency does not only observe what actors do, but who these actors are and how they respond to the positive or negative influence from other agents.

These traditional concepts of agency have three things in common: firstly, they prioritise material power; secondly, they put emphasis on instrumentality and lastly, they treat the state as the sole individual involved in the exercise of agency (Acharya 2018:13). However, this study does not intend to dwell on the theoretical debate surrounding the term. Instead, in favour of acknowledging the complexities around the nature of agency, it chooses to define the term as the radical, collective response to the imbalances of a global hierarchy (Van Staden et al 2018:6). There are two particular reasons for incorporating this definition. Firstly, it associates agency to the ability to foster change in an environment (Acharya 2018:13).

Secondly, it incorporates two points which Colin Wight (2006:180-182) identifies as key aspects in constructing a broadened understanding of the term: the agent’s ‘freedom of

subjectivity’ and the ‘socio-cultural’ environment within which they are adapted to since birth. Agency, is more than just about power or state wealth; it comes with resistance to the status quo that has been imposed by the international environment (Acharya 2018:13). Therefore, a multi-layered view of agency is one that should be able to explain how both state and non-state actors either make, break or reform the global order (Acharya 2018:13-14).

There are three main traits by which agency can be characterised. Firstly, agency is a weapon. It can be used by emerging powers as an instrument of resistance, to rewrite the rules that were imposed by the institutions, norms and practices of great powers (Acharya 2018:14). Although we are used to hearing about how actors resist what a system puts on demand, Antje Wiener (2014:74-77) argues that when agency is exercised, contestations can also occur between or among systems, for instance, how Western and non-Western actors disagree over principals like sovereignty (Acharya 2018:15). This very same weapon called agency, can also be used to foster cooperation between involved stakeholders (Acharya 2018:14). In other words, agency can be utilized as an instrument to create the necessary space for opposing interests to be organized in an integrated manner (Acharya 2018:14).

Secondly, agency is not limited to a domestic setting; it can also be manifested on a global or regional scale (Acharya 2018:14). In fact, the local and regional level at which agency can be exercised, is actually a key point of departure for ‘weaker agents’ to form a unit that will facilitate the way in which they articulate their concerns before the hegemonic ones (Acharya 2018:22).

Lastly, agency cannot be confined to a one-way process because it is constantly changing (Acharya 2018:23). Over time and space, the instruments of agency; which are norms, ideas and institutions; have evolved and faced great contestation over their meanings and applications (Acharya 2018:23). Therefore, ‘the multiplicity of agents and plurality of contexts’ accounts for the broadened framework of agency (Acharya 2018:23).

2.5 Conclusion

Chapter two significantly served as an extended review of literature on diplomacy, economic diplomacy and agency; so as to form an analytical framework for each of these terms. The main arguments that were drawn from this chapter are the following: Firstly, economic diplomacy is a vast concept and its origins are connected to the changes in the dynamic nature of modern diplomacy and foreign policy.

Secondly, the chapter defined economic diplomacy as the use of economic instruments to engage with state and non-state actors alike. Moreover, it differentiated economic diplomacy from economic statecraft, which chapter two argued, is largely concentrated on finding coercive measures to achieve foreign policy goals, rather than economic diplomacy's dominant use of soft power. Thirdly, it identified these economic instruments as commercial diplomacy, which includes activities such as tourism, business and FDI; trade diplomacy, which takes care of trade activities between various economies and finance diplomacy which relates to funding provided by financial institutions.

Fourthly, chapter two looked at the three levels at which economic diplomacy can be exercised; that being, the unilateral dimension in which policy decisions are reached at a domestic level, the bilateral dimension where policies are decided between two economies and the multilateral dimension which incorporates the voices of various governments and international bodies. Additionally, the chapter also explained how ministries dealing with foreign affairs go about delegating economic activities through the united model, where they lay out the strategies that state institutions should follow; the partially united model, where they share the task-burden with ministries dealing with economic affairs and the task delegation model which invites the efforts of external or unofficial stakeholders.

To round off the chapter, agency is defined as a state and non-state actor's ability of freedom to apply change in their environment, and subjectively make its own decisions or resist an imposed decision already made. Chapter two concluded by characterising agency based on the criteria of weaponry – that is, the use of agency to challenge the interest or norms of a particular environment, setting – that is, agency exercised on a domestic, regional and international scale, and process, which is agency evolving in methodology as a result of time, space and the multiplicity of key players involved. In the following chapter, the study provides a brief overview of Africa's diplomatic relationship with China, as well as the evolution of FOCAC, in order to investigate whether or not the continent has, to this day, fully benefited from its relationship with China.

CHAPTER 3

FACTS AND FIGURES PERTAINING TO EACH FOCAC MEETING

3.1 Introduction

There have been, in total, seven FOCAC meetings held since the inception of the Forum in the year 2000. FOCAC's first conference of 2000, second conference of 2002, fourth conference of 2009 and fifth conference of 2012 were held at ministerial levels; whilst the 2006 and 2018 Beijing conference, as well as the 2015 Johannesburg conference were held as summits (Aiping and Zhan 2018:88) Although China-Africa relations under the FOCAC umbrella take various

forms – that being, political, cultural and economic – this chapter focuses on the economic aspect of China-Africa relations as manifested within FOCAC.

This is for the purpose of investigating what these FOCAC meetings reveal about economic diplomacy – the main focus of the study, to be covered in detail in the subsequent chapter. Therefore, this chapter gathers facts and figures of what has been happening during FOCAC’s seven meetings, by making use of primary documents in databases like foreign ministry and information centre websites, as well as FOCAC and DIRCO’s website, to be analysed in chapter four.

The chapter is divided as follows: in the first section, each meeting is summarized under two categories that all seven FOCAC meetings have in common: achievements and Implementation challenges that need further attention. These categories are subdivided into four other important elements: Infrastructure, Investment, Trade and Financing. The second section concludes by providing a brief comment about these findings and explaining how this information will be dealt with in chapter four.

3.2 Economic instruments used during FOCAC discussions

As mentioned in the previous chapter of this study, there is a wide range of economic tools/elements that countries manage when they engage with one another (see also Bayne and Woolcock 2011:4). Infrastructure, investment, trade, debt relief and tourism are some of the focus areas of economic diplomacy. For instance, trade diplomacy looks at any trade related activities such as imports and exports. Finance diplomacy observes bank related activities such as debt relief, and commercial diplomacy is connected to activities that mobilise domestic Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), such as investment and infrastructure. Therefore, all of these activities were chosen because they appear in the China-Africa dialogues during their FOCAC engagements.

3.2.1 The 1st FOCAC meeting (Beijing, 2000)

Although the details of FOCAC’s inaugural meeting do not entail findings on past achievements or challenges because it was the first to be launched, FOCAC’s first meeting is still important to mention in this chapter because the documentation forged from this gathering, held in Beijing in 2000, served as the foundation or starting point for all the FOCAC ministerial conferences and summits that would follow. Less than ten African heads of state, including the AU’s secretary general, Salim Ahmed Salim, were present at this first meeting (Monyae and Ndzendze 2021: 335; IDE-JETRO 2003). Furthermore, information regarding FOCAC’s

inaugural conference, is largely confined to Chinese sources; which reveal no reporting on the part of Africa's representatives – a rather telling factor which will later in chapter four be developed.

In connection to trade, both the Chinese and African leaderships agreed that through the establishment of the China-Africa Joint Business Council – working together with Africa's Chambers of Commerce – communication channels between their relevant trade organizations would be strengthened (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004). This would intentionally be to ensure that their active role in developing Africa's economy was rendered effective (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004).

Furthermore, to address the trade inequalities between China and African countries, so as to “move towards a more balanced” trade relationship (see 3.2.2), the Ministers agreed to work towards increasing Africa's production capacity, promoting the diversification of the continent's exports and enhancing its markets' competitiveness (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004). Notably, the Chinese and African governments pledged to give ‘preferential treatment’ to each other's markets (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004).

In relation to investment, the Chinese leadership undertook the responsibility to assist the African continent's development agenda, by creating employment opportunities, as well as promoting the products and expertise of its local industries (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004). Chinese leadership stated that they would avail ‘special funds’ to initiate projects that would lead to job creation in African countries (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004). They also pledged to support the modern construction of Africa's infrastructure, by offering their skills and technologies (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004).

On the subject of financing, Beijing's agenda of the year 2000 shows that China's government reassured that their development assistance to Africa would take the form of loans – ‘concessional, as well as interest-free’ (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004). With that being said, to ease the continent's financial burden, China offered debt relief worth 10 billion Yuan, to Africa's least developed countries that were heavily indebted (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004). All the FOCAC meetings that followed, would use the first as a guideline to what promises needed to be reinforced or changed.

3.2.2 The 2nd FOCAC meeting (Addis Ababa, 2003)

Achievements from previous years

a. Infrastructure

In the 2004-2006 Addis Ababa Action Plan, which was forged during this second FOCAC conference of 2003, it is reported that China had already, in the previous four years, effectively contributed to the economic development of African countries that had been recipients of their “loans and grant assistance” (China.org 2004). This included, initiating infrastructural projects that would create, improve or maintain ‘roads, bridges, hospitals, and schools’ (China.org 2004). However, the document does not provide a list of the African countries that China has assisted in this regard – they are not mentioned anywhere under the infrastructure section of the Action Plan.

b. Trade and Investment

It was mentioned in the same Action Plan that there had been “continuous increase” of Chinese investment made on the African continent (China.org 2004). The investment measures made by both leaderships prior to the second FOCAC meeting, “produced initial results” as stated in the document (China.org 2004). Moreover, according to the Institute of Developing Economies (2003), whose website provides a brief summary of the additional developments China promised to achieve after the second FOCAC meeting, 11 African countries had already benefitted from Beijing’s establishment of business centres. These business centres would allow for China-Africa trade and investment operations to take place (IDE-JETRO 2003). However, these 11 countries are not named in the institution’s records, nor in the Addis Ababa Action Plan – making it difficult to trace where China’s funds for the project had been transferred.

c. Financing

The 2000 Beijing Declaration of FOCAC not only declared Africa’s debt burden to be a stumbling block for the continent’s ‘development efforts’, but that same year, the agenda of Cooperation in Economic and Social Development briefly stressed that the ‘obligation’ lied within the hands of the international community, to “help solve the African debt problem” (China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004). During his keynote address at the second FOCAC conference, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao re-stated China’s commitment to debt relief by referring once again to the 10 billion Yuan relief package that was announced during FOCAC’s inaugural meeting – which had ahead of time covered 31 deeply indebted African countries (China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004).

Implementation challenges in need of further attention:

a. Infrastructure

Underdeveloped infrastructure was mentioned as an aspect that both the Chinese and African leadership acknowledged needed more attention (China.org 2004). That being said, the Chinese leadership made a commitment to ensure that its enterprises would “take an active part in Africa’s infrastructure projects” and “explore diversified forms of mutually beneficial cooperation” in fields such as transportation and water supply (China.org 2004).

b. Trade and Investment

With relation to trade, the issue of imbalanced China-Africa trade – which also appeared in the first FOCAC conference – was brought up a second time in the Addis Ababa Action Plan as one that required more responsiveness (China.org 2004). This response included making the trade market more accessible for African countries and “enhancing their supply capabilities” (China.org 2004).

In response to this, China initially made the commitment to assist Africa’s Least Developed Countries with zero-tariff accessibility for some of its export products (China.org 2004). This pledge would follow from the 2004 meeting and would require that the Chinese government negotiates, with the concerned African countries, what exactly these commodities should be, on a bilateral level (China.org 2004). The Action Plan stated that Africa in return, accepted the offer and gave the assurance that they would adhere to these rules (China.org 2004).

The issue of double taxation was also brought up in the Addis Ababa Action Plan, under investment. The Action Plan highlighted that the African side needed to pay more attention to concluding bilateral agreements with China; bilateral agreements that would guarantee investment protection (China.org 2004). In response to the issue of double taxation, the Action Plan stated that Africa’s Industry and Commerce chamber would directly consult with China in order to join their efforts towards addressing the matter (China.org 2004).

c. Financing

Aside from infrastructural development, Africa’s debt burden seems to be a topic that holds great magnitude on the FOCAC platform; as indicated by the number of times it is repeated during the continent’s engagement with China. Like the 2001-2003 Beijing Declaration had already stressed, the Addis Ababa Action plan also called for “greater attention” to be paid to

debt relief (China.org 2004). In response to this urgency, the Addis Ababa Action Plan reaffirms China and Africa's joint effort to "appeal to the international community – particularly developed countries" to implement the HIPS Debt Initiative, which serves to alleviate the burden of Africa's economic development capacities (China.org 2004).

3.2.3 The 3rd FOCAC meeting (Beijing, 2006)

Achievements from previous years

a. Financing

Although the 2006 Beijing conference was the first since FOCAC was launched in 2000 that witnessed South Africa – a key player of the continent – report on the FOCAC meetings, these reports made possible by the DIRCO website are not detailed. For instance, during the 2006 FOCAC meeting, SA President Thabo Mbeki stated in his keynote address, that there had been "tangible and concrete results" shown with China's promise to provide Africa's developing countries with debt relief (DIRCO 2006). However, there no concrete facts and figures from DIRCO's reporting that explain in which African countries and in which manner these results were manifested.

Implementation challenges in need of further attention:

a. Infrastructure

From the 2007-2009 Beijing Action Plan that was forged during FOCAC's 2006 Beijing conference, a significant point was made about Africa's need to improve its "self-development capacity" through infrastructure, over the following three years (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006). This being said, the Chinese government assured African countries in the document that they would continue to support Chinese firms that would work towards equipping Africa with the necessary technical and managerial tools to achieve the goals and objectives of this agenda (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006).

b. Trade and Investment

Some of the key issues that the African leadership insisted needed more attention, was the lack of diversification in Africa's traded commodities, as well as "supply side constraints" (DIRCO 2006). As a suggestion to how this situation could be addressed, SA President Thabo Mbeki called for China and Africa to engage in more "joint ventures" that would facilitate communication between their trade networks (DIRCO 2006). Moreover, the issue of a "fair

and equitable trading system” was also brought to the fore (FOCAC 2009). Both the African and Chinese side agreed that there was a need for more transparency, “corporate governance and predictability” in their trade dealings with one another (FOCAC 2009). Therefore, it is clear that issues of trade were prominent on the agenda, as was the case in the previous meetings, with an emphasis on the part of Africa on the imbalance in this relationship.

In response to these implementation challenges, China presented measures in the China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan of 2007-2009, that would over the following three years be applied to explore what new modes of cooperation are needed to achieve a fair trading system (FOCAC 2009). One of these measures included providing Africa’s heavily indebted counties or least developing countries, with ‘preferential credit’ for their export agreements with China (China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006).

Additionally, China made a promise to further facilitate market accessibility to Africa’s least developing countries by increasing the number of materials that could be exported to China from 190 to more than 440 items “eligible for zero-tariff treatment” (China Law Information website 2012)

c. Financing

Another implementation challenge that was mentioned during the meeting, was that of “pervasive poverty and underdevelopment” (DIRCO 2006). The African leadership encouraged more attention to be paid to the frameworks of NEPAD in order to address the problem (DIRCO 2006). In his keynote address, Mbeki proposed that both China and Africa make use of FOCAC to advance the objectives of NEPAD, which are: integrating the African continent to the global economy, eradicating poverty and putting a stop to Africa’s economic marginalization on the international stage (DIRCO 2006).

The debt burden issue was once again brought up, but this time, with China’s promise to double the level of financial assistance it provided Africa in 2006, by 2009 (China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006). This included, cancelling the ‘government interest free loans that had become due by the end of 2005’, as well as undertaking bilateral and multilateral operations with Africa that would prioritize ‘post-war reconstruction, and poverty reduction’ (China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006).

3.2.4 The 4th FOCAC meeting (Sharm El Sheik, 2009)

Achievements from previous years

a. Infrastructure

The 2009 FOCAC conference in Sharm El Sheik witnessed the progress in the participation of African representatives. For instance, while FOCAC recorded the formal address of a single African leader – President Thabo Mbeki – who contributed to the discussion in 2006, China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2009) provides information of three African heads of states; the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe, the President of the Republic of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and the Vice President of the Republic of Ghana, Mr. John Dramani Mahama. In his keynote address, Mahama applauded China for providing the country with a brand new construction of the “Headquarters Complex for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration”, after its offices had suffered from severe losses subsequent to a massive fire outbreak in October 2009 (China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009).

In the same light, both Mugabe and Sirleaf praised the Chinese government for the success of its Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centres (ATDCs) built in respectively in Liberia and Zimbabwe, as well as other unlisted countries within the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) region (China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009). The ATDC is a “Chinese agricultural aid-programme” with both a diplomatic and commercial agenda; it serves as a bridge to facilitate the exchange of agro-technology, research, expertise and training between China and African countries on a bilateral level (Jiang et al 2016:9-11). President Mugabe congratulated the ATDC for assisting Zimbabwe and other unlisted COMESA countries with the necessary mechanisms to tackle the threats posed on Africa’s agricultural sector – threats such as extreme poverty (China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009).

Aside from the success stories mentioned by African stakeholders, the Chinese government also contributed to the list of examples concerning the achievements of the Forum in the area of infrastructure. During his opening speech at the 2009 FOCAC meeting, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao noted that prior to the 4th FOCAC meeting, China had already made efforts to assist African countries in infrastructural projects such as the Tanzania-Zambia railway project (FOCAC 2009).

b. Trade and Investment

Premier Wen Jiabao mentioned that China-Africa trade relations were by 2008, worth \$100 billion by 2008 (FOCAC 2009). Additional to that comment, President Robert Mugabe highlighted that this was remarkable growth in contrast to the year 2006 when trade volumes were only worth US\$55.4 billion (China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009). Moreover,

Jiabao notes that in the same year, the number of African countries trading with China had increased to a total of 53 (FOCAC 2009). Also, China's project to establish "six economic and trade cooperation zones" already looked promising for African countries such as Mauritius, Nigeria, Zambia, Ethiopia and Egypt (FOCAC 2009; 2021). According to FOCAC's follow up-actions report of the 2006 Beijing summit, the implementation of China's tariff free policy was smoothly undertaken and was steadily promoting trade balance between both partners (FOCAC 2009).

c. Financing

The Chinese leadership also highlighted that regardless of the global economic crisis which began in 2008, China had doubled its financial assistance to Africa, with 168 debt burdens the continent owed the Chinese government, lifted from Africa's 33 developing countries (FOCAC 2009). Even their plan to provide African countries with concessional loans worth US\$ 5 billion, was nearly 'fully in place' (FOCAC 2009).

Implementation challenges in need of further attention:

a. Infrastructure

As agreed in previous FOCAC meetings, as well as FOCAC's Sharm el Sheikh Action Plan of 2010-2012 issued at the 2009 FOCAC conference in Egypt, Africa's "underdeveloped infrastructure" continued to be a persistent challenge that required more attention from both the Chinese and African leadership alike (FOCAC 2009). In response, the Chinese leadership made provisions for US\$10 billion of loans to assist African countries with their infrastructural projects (FOCAC 2009).

The 2009 FOCAC meeting sees African representatives using the Forum's platform to advocate for regional integration through infrastructural development. For example, in response to the issue of underdeveloped infrastructure, Ghanaian Vice President Mahama, encouraged China to strengthen its relationship with the AU through the AUC, as well as to continue supporting Regional Economic Communities' (RECs) infrastructural development in his speech (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009). In his keynote address, President Mugabe of Zimbabwe expands on how China could express this support, by suggesting that the Chinese government invests in infrastructure-related initiatives, such as the "North-South Corridor", under COMESA and the RECs.

b. Trade and Investment

Africa's trade downturn in the wake of the global financial crisis was one of the concerns expressed by the Chinese leadership during this FOCAC meeting (FOCAC 2009). They claimed that more attention would be paid from the Chinese to increasing African exported commodities to China (FOCAC 2009). According to FOCAC's Sharm el Sheikh Action Plan of 2010-2012, the two leaderships suggested the broadening of trade; that is, the diversification of goods, services, as well as technology (FOCAC 2009).

To address Africa's trade downturn, China also made a promise to further permit Africa's products to access the Chinese market, by making provisions for zero-tariff treatment of more than 95% of these products coming from the continent's least developed countries (FOCAC2009). This would start with 60% in 2010 and carry on from there (FOCAC 2009).

In connection with investment, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, made two recommendations in her speech that inclined more towards helping Liberia's economic diplomacy towards China, rather than the continent as a whole (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009). Firstly, Sirleaf encouraged China to invest in the country's natural resources (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009). And lastly, she requested for Chinese investors to involve themselves in the endeavours of Liberia's private sector (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009). President Robert Mugabe's focus was rather on how China could increase the level of accessibility it initially granted to RECs to operate in the Chinese trade market, as well as how China's provision for concessional loans should also include countries found outside the LDC grouping (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009).

c. Financing

The Chinese government made mention of Africa's domestic challenges; which they were convinced, made it difficult for the continent's economy to live up to the UN's Millennium Development Goals (FOCAC 2009). These challenges included: "financial market volatility, sharp economic slowdown and the drastic decline in foreign capital" (FOCAC 2009). China concluded on this topic by calling on the international community to pay more attention to how they could create a favourable 'external environment' under which Africa's trade and finance could be enhanced (FOCAC 2009).

Furthermore, to increase Africa's financial capacity, China pledged concessional loans worth US\$10 billion; which would initially make provision for Africa's small and medium-sized businesses (FOCAC 2009). China also cancelled the loans that were due in 2009 by African states (FOCAC 2009).

3.2.5 The 5th FOCAC meeting (Beijing, 2012)

Achievements from previous years

a. Infrastructure

As acknowledged by the Chinese leadership, during their representative's keynote address – President Hu Jintao – infrastructure projects had been covered in 50 African countries, due to China's cumulative investment (China Daily News 2012). President Hu Jintao mentioned that this included, but was not limited to, China's assistance in building the AU's conference centre, as well as other infrastructures such as health facilities and schools (China Daily News 2012)

On the side of the African leadership, SA President Jacob Zuma, highlighted China's resilience in its demonstration to commit to Africa's infrastructure agenda through President Hu Jintao's eight measures for development¹ (The presidency of the Republic of South Africa 2012). According to Zuma, the result of such resilience was the tremendous growth rate the African continent at large, had experienced in areas such as infrastructure expansion of agricultural, energy and technological facilities (The presidency of the Republic of South Africa 2012).

b. Trade and Investment

Hu Jintao also mentioned that in 2011, China-Africa's 'two-way-trade' had tripled its figures from the year 2006, and reached US\$166.3 billion by 2012; surpassing Africa's trade relations with other external partners like the US and Europe (China Daily News 2012). According to the 2013-2015 Beijing Action Plan, China and Africa shared positive feedback regarding the 4th Conference of Chinese and African Entrepreneurs (FOCAC 2012). The document stated that the conference, which happened within the same time frame as the 4th FOCAC meeting, had actively been guiding Chinese enterprises found within Africa, towards giving back to the continent's local employment levels (FOCAC 2012). Moreover, since the 4th FOCAC meeting of 2009, the 2013-2015 Action Plan attested to 'the growth of two-way investment' between

¹ It was during FOCAC's Beijing Summit of 2006 that President Hu Jintao put forward eight measures that China would undertake in the following three years to support Africa's development (Zhou and Xiong 2017: 148-149). These included: "expanding the scale of financial assistance, providing preferential loans, setting up the China-Africa Development fund, assisting in the construction of the AU'S Conference Centre, forgiving the loan debts of HIPC's and LDC's which would have matured by the end of 2005, granting market access and zero-tariff treatment to LDC's, establishing three to five trade and economic cooperation zones and training Africa's workforce in various sectors such as agriculture, as well as building new infrastructure and promoting new technology" (Paraphrased using Zhou and Xiong 2017: 148-1149)

both partners, as well as the economic ties which had been reinforced since the Forum's last gathering (FOCAC 2012).

Implementation challenges in need of further attention:

a. Infrastructure

In his final remarks, Zuma mentioned a major challenge that had already been reiterated during FOCAC's previous meetings, namely infrastructural development (The Presidency of The Republic of South Africa 2012). He called on the Chinese leadership to work closely with the AU Commission – which had been championing 'cross-border infrastructural projects' with NEPAD – in order to pay more attention to 'priority projects' like PIDA (The Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa) (The Presidency of The Republic of South Africa 2012). In response to this urgency, the Beijing Declaration of FOCAC's 5th meeting stated that on behalf of the Chinese government, Hu Jintao pledged to assist Africa in developing its infrastructure through the provision of US\$20 billion (FOCAC 2012). Not only that, but China also made a promise to make an effort towards establishing a partnership with the AU and NEPAD, for the purpose of developing "transregional infrastructure development" (FOCAC 2012). We see here that SA was driving the effort to get China to work through NEPAD and the AU, just like it had done during FOCAC's Beijing Summit of 2006.

b. Trade and Investment

The end-of-summit FOCAC Action Plan of 2013-2015 noted both China and Africa's commitment to address illegal trade – more particularly, the circulation of arms exports (FOCAC 2012). In order to address the issues pertaining to the matter, China and Africa's governments joint forces during the FOCAC meeting, by agreeing to establish partnerships such as "The Africa-China-EU expert working group on small arms and light weapons" (FOCAC 2012).

Still within the same topic, Zuma alerted China to the "increasing imbalances" that continued to be visible in China's trade patterns with African countries – especially in regards to China's "exporting of manufactured goods" in exchange for the continent's raw materials (The Presidency of The Republic of South Africa 2012). He pointed out that these patterns were "unsustainable" and would hamper the long-term relationship of their partnership, if left unaddressed (The Presidency of The Republic of South Africa 2012). The issue of imbalanced trade is a problem that poses much threat to the growth of China-Africa economic diplomacy,

as it appears to be another one of FOCAC conferences' most mentioned concerns. No massive progress has been recorded since it was first raised before the FOCAC assembly of the year 2000.

3.2.6 The 6th FOCAC meeting (Johannesburg, 2015)

Achievements from previous years

a. Trade and Investment

According to the opening address of President Xi Jinping, the end of 2014 marked the beginning of a large surplus of Chinese investment – about US\$101 billion in total – in 3100 African enterprises (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015). Trade was at US\$221.9 billion; which resulted in China becoming Africa's largest 'cooperation partner' (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015).

Implementation challenges in need of further attention:

a. Infrastructure

FOCAC's 2016-2018 Johannesburg Action Plan resurfaced yet again the issue of underdeveloped infrastructure (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015). In their efforts to attend to this "development bottleneck" with immediate attention, Africa's leadership, as well as that of China's, decided to merge the expertise of their business and financial institutions, in order to support transportation, railway and communication projects in the continent (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015). Furthermore, both sides agreed for Agenda 2063 of the AU to be put forward in the 2016-2018 FOCAC Action Plan to reconcile China's commitments with Africa's development agenda (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015).

b. Trade and Investment

The 2015 Declaration of FOCAC's 6th meeting strongly advocated both leadership's opposition to trade protectionism (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015). In their agreed efforts to attend to the matter, China and Africa stood in favour of "the development negotiations" under the World Trade Organisation, which promote the advancement of an open world economy (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015). Moreover, the Chinese and African partners pledged to increase the China-Africa trade volume by US\$ 400 billion by 2020 – with guarantee of mutual equality in their trade deals (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015).

c. Financing

According to the 2016-2018 FOCAC Action Plan, poverty reduction on the continent was yet again a major “arduous task” to achieve by both partners (China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015). But regardless of its own struggles with alleviating poverty on a domestic level, China pledged to attend to the task by assisting Africa’s least developed countries through projects themed “Happy Life” – that would promote employability for African locals as well as cancel the outstanding debts of African countries to China, due to mature by 2015 (China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015).

3.2.7 The 7th FOCAC meeting (Beijing, 2018)

Achievements from previous years

a. Infrastructure

The 2019-2021 Beijing Action Plan that emanated from this summit, mentions that both the Chinese and African leadership applauded the “China-Africa Infrastructure Cooperation Plan”, for successfully implementing the construction and maintenance of numerous infrastructural programs in Africa (China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018). Particular examples of these programs are not mentioned in the document, however, the Action Plan notes that the programs include, yet are not limited to, providing Africa’s sub-regional organizations with facilities that enable the operations of their services (China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015). In his keynote address, President Cyril Ramaphosa also appreciated China’s efforts to build, as well as upgrade trade cooperation zones on the continent, through the ‘China-Africa Industrialization Plan’ (China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015).

b. Trade and Investment

The Beijing Declaration of 2018 congratulated both partners’ undertaking of the Belt & Road Initiative², which had mutually benefitted market openness and transparency (China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015). Also, the African leadership appreciated China’s efforts in enhancing

² The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as the New Silk Road, is a key infrastructure and development initiative launched and announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 (Van Staden 2018: 18). The BRI’s aim is to form a trade route between China and Europe via Africa and was formally recognized as one of the central priorities of FOCAC at the Beijing Summit of 2018 (Van Staden 2018: 21)

trade connectivity and expanding the continent's market accessibility through the 'Trade and Investment Facilitation Plan' (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015).

c. Financing

Africa also recognized the support which the Chinese government had shown through the 'Assistance Fund for South-South Cooperation', which enabled the agenda to reduce poverty within their countries to become more effective (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015). China asserted that it would continue to provide such help on behalf of African countries that adhered to the AU's Agenda 2063 (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015).

Implementation challenges in need of further attention:

a. Trade and Investment

As brought up during all six FOCAC meetings prior to 2018, SA President Cyril Ramaphosa also made a remark that the trade deficit was still an issue for Africa's relationship with China (DIRCO 2018). For instance, Ramaphosa highlights that China's imported "finished products" were being exchanged for Africa's exported "primary products" – a pattern which he thought would affect the "full value" of Africa's domestic economy; especially in terms of employability (DIRCO 2018).

In response to this challenge, the African leadership suggested that more local partnerships between Chinese investors and African businesses should be created (DIRCO 2018). This, as Ramaphosa states, would expand the continent's 'production capacity' and generate new economic industries (DIRCO 2018). Ramaphosa called for a more inward look at investment, one that would enable the exporting of products that were more "value-added" (DIRCO 2018). Moreover, he encouraged the 2019-2021 Action Plan to incorporate the African Continental Free Trade Area framework, in order to create a single global market in favour of Africa's role as a global competitor (DIRCO 2018). Such emphasis on continental effort reveals how Africa has attempted, over time, to insert an African position within FOCAC and be more assertive with China.

Furthermore, on behalf of the Chinese leadership, President Xi Jinping remarked that the issue of "universalism and trade protectionism" was still a challenge to Sino-African relations and as an approach to combat these two major issues, he announced that in the following three years, China would finance US\$5 billion to trade imports from Africa and contribute US\$10 billion to investment (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018).

3.3 Conclusion

Chapter three examined China-Africa's economic relationship under FOCAC, through the lenses of each of the Forum's summits and ministerial conferences, as well as its core documents – declarations and action plans. The chapter not only established that all the activities of economic diplomacy – that being trade, debt relief, FDI and many more – were mentioned during FOCAC engagements, but it also listed a number of similarities as well as differences that distinguish each meeting from one another.

For example, one of the patterns identified throughout all FOCAC gatherings, was the continuous pledging of grandiose financial grants to Africa, provided by the Chinese leadership – with numbers vastly increasing since the Forum was launched in 2000. Another signature that each meeting seemed to hold, was the repetition of key development issues, such as Africa's debt crisis and the China-Africa trade inequality.

However, the primary characteristic that made the FOCAC meetings of 2003 to 2018 highly distinctive from the inauguration of the year 2000, was the active reporting and participation of African stakeholders. From all the findings that the chapter gathered, it concluded that although the opportunities for Africa to exercise agency within the Forum has varied over the years, African agency has nonetheless been existent in the continent's economic diplomacy with China, under the framework of FOCAC.

Therefore, what the next chapter focuses on, is to use the information provided in this chapter, to evaluate what the strengths and weaknesses of Africa's economic diplomacy with China have been within the FOCAC framework, in the context of the analytical framework developed in chapter two. In doing so, it hopes to reveal what opportunities there are within the Forum for African agency to be exercised and to what extent there might already be indications of such agency being exercised. It will also, though, identify some of the weaknesses and challenges to African agency in dealing with a superpower such as China.

CHAPTER 4

OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS OF AFRICAN AGENCY WITHIN FOCAC

4.1 Introduction

Scholars such as Chipaike and Knowledge (2018:1-4) have observed that literature on Africa's international relations with external actors, tends to focus predominantly on a version of the continent that is 'supplicant' of the great powers. From this angle, Africa does not have the capacity to exert agency towards development partners like China because the economic imbalances between them essentially accounts for their neo-colonial relationship – with China as the new colonist and Africa as the heavily aid-dependent peripheral (Wu et al 2018).

However, this chapter argues that African countries have exercised a measure of agency in their economic diplomacy with external actors like China; and that FOCAC is one of the platforms that extends such an opportunity to the continent. This chapter does not dwell on the

opportunities alone; additionally, it demonstrates that the continent also faces some restraints for exercising agency, in its economic engagement with China, through the FOCAC platform.

The first section of this chapter deals with the strengths of Africa's efforts within FOCAC and assesses what factors tend to turn these strengths into weaknesses. It does so by discussing four themes that reveal what these positive and negative aspects are of African agency within FOCAC: the performance of the AU and its initiatives vis-à-vis FOCAC; the implications of Africa's numerical participation; China's communication strategy during FOCAC discourses, and Chinese bilateral initiatives outside FOCAC's multilateral scope. To conclude, the main arguments of the chapter are reiterated and the intentions of the final chapter are briefly discussed.

4.2 The strengths and weaknesses of Africa's economic diplomacy within FOCAC

Africa's ability to make independent decisions in its relationship with China, both during and after FOCAC's ministerial conferences and summits, can be investigated by looking at areas of strengths and weaknesses, of the continent's efforts within the Forum. Strong efforts by the continent are aspects such as: the performance of the AU, as well as the implications of Africa's numerical participation, whilst weak efforts by the continent are influenced by aspects such as: China's rhetoric during FOCAC discourses and its bilateralism outside the Forum's multilateral scope.

These aspects have been identified on the basis of several facts and figures noted in chapter three of the study: 3.2.1 and 3.2.5, which in comparison show progress in the participation of African stakeholders during FOCAC engagements; the Forum's acknowledgment of Agenda 2063's development goals in 3.2.6; 3.2.3 which demonstrates the tension between FOCAC's multilateral scope and China's bilateralism, as a result of ambiguities surrounding which African countries have or have not received China's pledged infrastructural assistance; and 3.2.3 as an example of China's diplomatic rhetoric.

4.2.1 The implications of Africa's numerical participation

In 2016, the AU decided that a reform within the institution was urgently needed to better "drive and achieve the objectives of Africa's Agenda 2063 vision" (The African Union Commission 2021). Rwandan President Paul Kagame was appointed for this purpose, and along with his "pan-African advisory team", led the continent's heads of state, into a process of reform that advocated for projects aimed at addressing the challenges hindering Africa's economic growth and development (The African Union Commission 2021).

One of the proposals submitted was a call to heighten Africa's bargaining power in relation to China during FOCAC negotiations (Wu et al 2018). To achieve this, the proposal requested that the continent's voice become unified, through the modification of the number of stakeholders negotiating with China during FOCAC meetings (Van Staden et al 2018:11). Put simply, the recommendation was to adopt a 'less is more' approach in the delegation of strategic responsibilities within the AU's division of labour, for better coordination of intra-African diplomacy (Mthembu 2021:31).

One of the factors that has hindered Africa from taking full advantage of its global partnerships with external stakeholders such as China, is the continent's struggle to merge the voices of its diverse developing economies, so that they forge into a single common position (Wu 2017). Therefore, Wu (2017) argues that the Kagame reform, formally known as 'The Imperative to Strengthen Our Union' report, is commendable for the way it encourages more effectiveness within the AU through fewer voices.

The information provided in section 3.2.5 of chapter three, indicates that the reform is far from reaching concrete results in its operations, as the number of African actors who participated in the FOCAC meetings following that decision, has only grown gradually. The number has gone up from 50 represented African countries at FOCAC's 2015 Summit in Johannesburg, to 53 by the 7th ministerial conference in Beijing, in 2018 (China's Ministry of foreign affairs 2015; 2018). This maintained the status quo in the high number of participants at the 2018 Beijing FOCAC conference, confirming that the reform is still ongoing because of contestations between the AU and several member countries that want to preserve their bilateral relations (see 4.2.4) (Wu et al 2018).

Even the interview with President Paul Kagame, following the 2018 Beijing FOCAC conference, provides no feedback regarding what structural changes had been applied and how this would subsequently affect FOCAC's traditional method of undertaking its diplomatic negotiation process with China (Xinhua News Agency 2018). Nonetheless, Kagame expresses at the end of the interview, that the continent is "looking to China to strengthen this quest for unity". As stated in chapter two of the study (see section 2.4.1), the exercise of agency is not bound to a single setting; agency can be manifested at all levels – domestic, regional, continental and even global (Acharya 2018:14). Africa's ability to foster continental change within the AU's division of labour, ultimately affects its global environment – the FOCAC negotiation process.

So, Kagame encouraging China to support the ‘less is more’ principle, shows Africa’s attempt to involve its global partner to the integral part of the reform planning, due not only to affect the dynamics of the continental body – the AU – but also the dynamics of China-Africa relations in FOCAC. Kagame’s response reveals the importance of getting both African and Chinese stakeholders on the same page, so as to cement the reform through a shared partnership.

Secondly, Kagame’s call to partner with China on these matters, goes to show the importance of dialogue in diplomatic relations and negotiations. Section 2.2.3 of chapter two explains that economic diplomacy, as a subset of diplomacy (see also Baranay 2009:2), cannot be sustained without dialogue because dialogue makes room for reciprocity (Chatterjee 2020:3). Unless there is clear communication between the AU and China about what Kagame’s reform recommendations will entail for FOCAC negotiations, they will suffer the same fate as previously failed attempts to reform the AU.

4.2.2 The performance of the AU and its initiatives vis-à-vis FOCAC

African agency cannot be analysed without taking into consideration the complexities surrounding China’s interaction with the AU (Wu et al 2018). This section divides the information on such an interaction into two parts: the symbolism behind China-AU relations within FOCAC, and the incorporation of AU policy documents to the FOCAC framework.

4.2.2.1 The symbolism behind China-AU relations within FOCAC

It is worth noting that China has been engaging with the AU prior to the organisation’s transition from its former name, the OAU (Organisation of the African Unity) in 2002 (van Staden et al 2018:9-10). The presence of the organisation, represented by former Secretary General Dr Salim Ahmed Salim, who came along with 44 other African heads of state at FOCAC’s conference of 2000 in Beijing, serves as proof of their early engagement (China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004).

Chapter two of the study (see section 2.2), states that modern diplomacy does not only comprise of methods, but also meanings and effects (Baranay 2009:1). In relation to meanings and effects, Faizullaev (2013:91-114) introduces us to the significance behind symbolism in diplomacy. Symbolism forms part of the important features/characteristics of diplomatic practice – more particularly, diplomatic communication (Faizullaev 2013:91).

Symbolism can be defined as the usage of objects – such as flags; words – such as anthems and discourses; and actions – such as rituals and ceremonies, by official state representatives, for the purpose of appealing to the masses (Faizullaev 2013:91-94). Therefore, China forming allegiance with the OAU through FOCAC, was a form of symbolism because the OAU was a representation of Africa’s self-reliance; the embodiment of African agency in the form of independence from ‘colonial power politics’ (Ndzendze and Van Zoeymissen 2018). And China using its interaction with the OAU, served to communicate a message of unity and togetherness to the continent.

One could almost suspect that the presence of such African leadership at FOCAC’s inaugural meeting, would be accompanied with an opportunity for African stakeholders to be vocal in their contributions towards FOCAC’s first project formation. But the very opposite happened. From section 3.2.1 of chapter three, this study has not only observed that Chinese government sources dominate the literature about FOCAC’s inaugural meeting, but that the information from these confined Chinese sources reveal the absence of any reporting done by African countries. Based on this observation found in section 3.2.1 of chapter three, it is safe to conclude that Africa’s ability to assert itself as China’s equal partner within FOCAC – at what symbolised the foundation of China-Africa’s growing relationship – was not off to a great start.

However, it would also seem, based on the information provided in section 3.2.2 of the previous chapter, that as the Sino-African dialogue exchanges progressed along the FOCAC years, so has China’s engagement with the continent transformed qualitatively. For a start, Ethiopia’s capital city, Addis Ababa, which also happens to be where the headquarters of the AU is located, was symbolically selected to be the host for the 2nd FOCAC ministerial conference of 2003 (Wekesa 2015:3). This is yet another example of the significance of symbolism in diplomacy and how certain actions are symbolic and create particular exceptions. The effort by the Chinese leadership, to ensure that the second FOCAC interaction happened on African soil, was to create within the consciousness of African stakeholders, a perception of what Faizullaev (2013:95) calls “mutual understanding and common benefit”. China showed the continent that the FOCAC mechanism was not solely made for China to exercise agency upon, but was a joint ownership that both leaderships could benefit from (Wekesa 2015:3).

4.2.2.2 The incorporation of AU policy documents to the FOCAC framework

Another way in which FOCAC has served as a key area for Africa to exercise agency is the fact that there are certain AU policy documents, within the FOCAC agenda, which set out

clearly the continent's development aspirations in areas such as industrialisation and integration; and in each case China has supported these (Wu et al 2017). For instance, the Addis Ababa Action Plan of 2004-2006, in section 3.2.2 of chapter three, noted that China would make use of the FOCAC framework to not only concretise its relationship with regional organizations like the AU, but also to prioritise the development objectives of African countries under the mechanism of NEPAD (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004). Even at the most recent Beijing summit of 2018, President Cyril Ramaphosa affirmed that China had been a strong advocate of 'Africa's development aspirations', which are embedded within the AU's Agenda 2063 (Xinhua News Agency 2018).

Additionally, FOCAC officially adopted Africa's aspirations for sustainable economic development which are stated in the AU's vision document of Agenda 2063 (The African Union Commission 2021). Agenda 2063 identifies industrialisation as a priority area that the AU aims to develop in order to achieve transformative economies within the continent (The African Union Commission 2021). This study has observed that prior to FOCAC's 6th ministerial conference of 2015 in Johannesburg, which according to Aiping and Zhan (2018:88) was upgraded to a summit, there is no mention of substantial efforts launched to assist African countries with industrial development. However, during FOCAC's 6th meeting, Chinese leadership had not only announced a "10-point cooperation plan" purposed to enhance industrialization – one amongst other areas such as agriculture – in Africa, but they also pledged \$60 billion to bring the plan to completion (FOCAC 2020).

Evidence of how far China has been responsive to the continent's development agenda, is the way in which it has turned the 2015 FOCAC discussion on African industrialization into a key initiative, during its G20 presidency in 2016 (Wu et al 2018). Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that China's plans have reached unlimited success. It just goes to show that Africa has made use of FOCAC on various occasions through agenda-setting; therefore proving that it has indeed exercise agency towards China (Wu et al 2018).

Regional integration forms part of the key aspirations that are adopted in the AU's vision document of Agenda 2063 (Ndenze and Van Hoeymissend 2018). And one of the ways in which China has shown its support of African agency exercised through African consensus, was by adopting the African Union Commission (AUC) as an 'institutional channel' (Ndenze and Van Hoeymissend: 2018). Moreover, on October 2011, prior to FOCAC's 5th ministerial conference, the AUC was officially recognised as a full member and not a mere observer

(African Union Commission 2021). China has also committed to accelerate Africa's integration agenda at the 2006 Beijing Summit, when former Chinese President Hu Jintao, made a pledge to begin with the construction of the new AU's Conference Centre, which would be located at the Addis Ababa Headquarters in Ethiopia (China.org 2018).

4.2.3 China's communication strategy during FOCAC discourses

Section 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 of Chapter 2, show that negotiation is the very essence of both classical and modern diplomacy (Kelley 2010:286) (Cooper et al 2013). Jacobs (2016:5) develops that argument and says that negotiations, the exchange between sovereign entities, necessitate the use of language or communication for diplomacy to work. Furthermore, discourse not only reveals the "preferences, objectives and strategies" of diplomatic actors towards each other, but also shapes the decisions of these international actors (Jacobs 2016:5). With that being said, section 3.2.1 to section 3.2.7 of chapter three, observes that another aspect that reveals the measure at which African agency is exercised within the framework of FOCAC, is China's choice of rhetoric when it addresses Africa.

The kind of communication strategy that China uses when it speaks to its African counterparts, happens to be one of the tools that has given Chinese stakeholders a competitive advantage over alternative Western actors on the global stage (King 2018:4-5). To make a brief comparison, this study identifies in bold, some of the economic related terms used for Africa in the 2002 G8 Africa Action Plan of Kananaskis, and distinguishes them from FOCAC's 2006 Beijing Declaration. The FOCAC declaration writes (i.e. the study's emphasis of the original text is in bold):

"We maintain that in the new era, China and Africa have **common development goals** and converging interests, which offer a broad prospect for cooperation. In the new century, China and the African countries should enhance their traditional **friendship** and expand mutually beneficial cooperation to achieve **common development and prosperity**." (FOCAC 2009)

Whilst the G8 document states:

"The case for action is compelling. Despite its great **potential** and human resources, Africa continues to **face some of the world's greatest challenges**. The many initiatives designed to spur **Africa's development have failed to deliver** sustained improvements to the lives of individual women, men and children throughout Africa" (US Department of State Archive 2002)

What the study gathers from the above mentioned documents, is how Western development actors address Africa not as an equal, but a continent with development hindrances that prevent it from moving beyond economic potential. China on the other hand does not belittle Africa's interests in relation to theirs, but speaks to the continent from a place of mutual effort for the benefit of both. As the following extract from FOCAC's Beijing Action Plan of 2007-2009, another way in which China's development perspectives during Sino-African exchanges, appear to be a better alternative for the continent compared to that of Western stakeholders, is because it refuses to put much stress on the rhetoric of "aid" and would much rather refer their financial contribution as "development assistance" or just "assistance". This means that China avoids by any means possible, identifying itself as a financial donor and Africa, its recipient (King 2008:2)

"The Chinese government decided to continue to provide **development assistance** to African countries to the best of its ability and by 2009, double the size of its **assistance** to African countries in 2006" (FOCAC 2006)

The opposite is true for several Western partners, as indicated once again in the 2002 G8 Action Plan of Kananaskis

"We call on other **creditor countries to join us**. Once countries exit the HIPC process, we expect they will not need additional relief under this initiative. We support an increase in the use of grants **for the poorest and debt-vulnerable countries** and look forward to its rapid adoption" (US Department of State Archive 2002)

However, this study does not dismiss the possibilities of China essentially making use of such diplomatic terms to conceal just how bilateral the core of their development cooperation with Africa really is (King 2008:4-5). In fact, China tends to minimize the complexities surrounding what Africa's agency in its relations with the continent should constitute of, by simply overwhelming FOCAC addresses with 'funding announcements' (Van Staden et al: 2018:6). It has observed that although every FOCAC declaration and action plan makes use of terms such as "the two sides have agreed" or "the two sides have decided", such multilateral approaches in language still do not reduce the gravity of the situation regarding the modalities of their bilateral agreements with China. In fact, numerous economic activities outlined in the FOCAC action plans, have a country-to-country approach rather than a continental one.

One can also look at the same aspect of rhetoric, but from an African perspective, and observe that most responses by the continent's representatives, during their FOCAC keynote addresses (see sections 3.2.2 to 3.2.7 of chapter three), frame Africa's relationship with China as that of an equal partnership. For instance, during the opening ceremony of FOCAC's 2015 conference in Johannesburg, President Jacob Zuma phrased Africa's negotiations with China as a "win-win partnership for development" or a "shared advantage"; also referring to China as the continent's "comrades in arms" (The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa 2015). This kind of diplomatic language, has been the pattern adopted by African governments whose countries have witnessed the tangible results of Chinese investment in areas such as infrastructure, trade and employment opportunities, made possible by FOCAC agreements (see 3.2.4).

4.2.4 Multilaterally declared commitments versus bilateral dealings

Economic diplomacy tends to distinguish the three dimensions under which decision-making operates (see 2.3.3 of chapter two): the unilateral dimension which focuses on policy decisions made at the domestic level, the bilateral dimension being an agreement between two governing bodies over various economic issues and the multilateral dimension consisting of multiple stakeholders working together towards reaching certain international objectives (Bayne and Woolcock 2011:8).

Although, according to Wekesa (2015), FOCAC has a strong element of multilateralism – considering the fact that it promotes summit diplomacy – it is difficult to separate it from its bilateral component when one takes into account the number of country-to-country engagements that have been happening between China and individual African states. What can be observed, is neither a case of a more dominant measure of bilateralism than multilateralism, nor vice versa, but a strange mix between bi-and multilateralism. Such is the case with FOCAC, where we have China, the superpower, on one hand, and Africa as a group on the other.

Since receiving permanent membership within FOCAC, the AU has been responsible for the hard task of reconciling Africa's best interests with the Forum's various activities (Wu 2017). In other words, the AU has done its best to ensure that China-Africa diplomatic activities function at a continental level for two reasons: to safeguard the continent's ability to maximize the relationship, but also to cement regional integration amongst African stakeholders (Ndendze and Van Hoeymissen 2018). However, this seems to be otherwise since clashes have emerged between the summity level at which China announces its rather gravitating financial

commitments, and the bilateral level at which FOCAC agreements are undertaken on the sidelines (Wu 2017).

What this means is, for the past 18 years, China has engaged with the African continent as a bloc on the FOCAC platform and publicly announced several pledges to execute development-related promises, during FOCAC's multilateral summits and ministerial conferences (Wu 2017). However, the Sino-African agreements that are subsequent to these multilateral gatherings, are negotiated on a bilateral level between some of the continent's individual countries and the Chinese leadership – limiting the role of the AU as an independent channel of communication with China, through FOCAC.

This is what Johannes Maim (2020:3-4) calls “China-powered African agency” or “circumscribed agency”; and a crucial example of how this is made manifest is the case study of the Sicominex agreement, which is officially recognised in French as *La Sino-Congolaise des mines*, between China and the DRC (Malm 2020:1-2). Therefore, the reason this study has selected examples such as the Sicominex agreement of the DRC, The Belt and Road Initiative and Kenya's SGR, is because they demonstrate that African agency is indeed exercised, but only to the extent that it stems from China's strategic economic interests.

4.2.4.1 China and the DRC's Sicominex bilateral agreement

According to section 2.3.3 of the study's second chapter, economic diplomacy can also operate within a bilateral level, between two economies. The Sicominex agreement, is an illustration of how challenging it is for Africa to exercise agency as a unit, as a result of China's tendency to work bilaterally with certain African countries such as the DRC, in order to keep the agreements to its own economic interests. It also demonstrates that when such economic deals with China are without the proactive governance and monitoring of the AU, or under the subjugation of Agenda 2063, African countries are most likely not to fully maximise the benefits they accumulate from the Forum.

The DRC happens to be one of the aid-dependent countries that benefitted from the commercial loans promised by China's Exim Bank during FOCAC's first two ministerial conferences – although not explicitly named (see 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 of chapter three). In September 2007, this loan was finalised through the signing of the Sicominex Agreement between Exim Bank; which is China's main export bank; and several Congolese mining companies (Jansson 2011:6-9). The loan would apply as follows: China would make generous provisions for the reconstruction

of the DRC's infrastructure, and in return, the country would reimburse this loan from the profits it retained from its mines (Jansson 2011:6-9).

In the event that Sicomines could no longer repay its debt, the Congolese government would step in as another source of guarantee (Malm 2020:5). After much controversy between the IMF and China over the DRC's debt burden accumulating to \$13.1 billion in 2006, the Sicomines Agreement was renegotiated and eventually granted (Jansson 2011:14). That means, regardless of the fact that the DRC's then government of President Joseph Kabila underestimated the risk Congo was getting its debt-relief profile into, the regime saw this deal as an opportunity for African agency to be exercised (Malm 2020:5).

The Congolese government knew for a fact that China's long term plan to "secure its access to Africa's natural resources" in order to sustain its growing economy, was enough reason for the Chinese government to make every necessary compromise to concretise the Sicomines Agreement (Malm 2020:5). At the time, the Kabila regime needed to score political points to win-over the Congolese population in the upcoming elections (Malm 2020:7). Knowing how severe the DRC's post-conflict infrastructure was getting, the Sicomines agreement would allow for the Kabila regime to fund refurbishing initiatives that would provide its electorate with a competitive advantage (Janson 2011:8-9).

Another way in which the DRC was able to exercise agency through the Sicomines Agreement, was by playing off the IMF and China against one another. China's commercial loan clashed with the IMF's agenda – the IMF has managed Africa's public debt for many years - to extend the HIPC DRC with debt-relief status (Malm 2020:7). However, as soon as Chinese investors could see how the "operational risks" of the country were hindering its accessibility to mining concessions and a secured repayment of debt, China's Exim Bank officially withdrew itself from the deal in 2012 (Malm 2020:7).

This meant that the Kabila regime could no longer count on China to back up the infrastructure agenda it planned to gain leverage in the elections. One "operational risk" that severely affected China's long-term commitment to the Sicomines Agreement, was the increase in the cost of minerals such as cobalt and copper, in the year 2008 (Malm 2020:7). The persisting changes in the prices of raw materials at the time, affected the profits acquired from the mining venture – profits that were initially supposed to be used to repay the loan (Malm 2020:7). Therefore, it is safe for this study to conclude that when Chinese stakeholders face insecurities around the certainty of their financial gain, they limit Africa's ability to exercise agency.

Since the Sicominex experience, there has been no contact between large-scale Chinese loans that are state-backed, and any mining project with the commercial purpose of financing public infrastructure like roads, or healthcare facilities (Malm 2020:7-8). Instead, China has placed more emphasis on private Chinese investment aimed at supporting the development of Africa's private sector (Malm 2020:8). For the DRC, this meant that from 2010 to 2019, China's provisions for development aid would come in the form of donations or cultural exchanges with development partners, other than mines (Malm 2020:10).

4.2.4.2 China and The BRI's influence upon African agency

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is also a case study that reveals constrained African agency as a result of regional pressures surrounding the effects of bilateral agreements (Wu et al: 2018). The BRI is a "central expression of Chinese foreign policy strategy" that entails geographically connecting Asia to Europe via Africa, across both land and sea (Van Staden et al 2020:115-116). This Chinese-driven multilateral agenda first made an appearance in paragraph 25.2 of FOCAC's 2015 Johannesburg Declaration, where it is briefly mentioned as an area that would be explored through the construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and much more (FOCAC 2015). And in FOCAC's 2018 Beijing Declaration, more emphasis is made in paragraph 4.2 on how to better expand the BRI to incorporate the AU's agenda 2063 – a demonstration of China's willingness to integrate Africa's perspectives into the BRI framework (FOCAC 2018).

As a result of the complexities surrounding the number of stakeholders involved in the BRI's key initiatives; a combination of European, Chinese and Middle-Eastern actors; it would at first hand seem unlikely for African agency to be exercised (Van Staden et al 2020:115-116). However, what shows us otherwise is the opportunity that the BRI has offered African development, in the exponential growth of its infrastructure (Van Staden et al 2020:115-116). Nonetheless, the continent's agency in relation to China is, amongst other factors, further complicated because the BRI's promise of accessibility into Asian and European markets through trade, as well as its promise to provide Chinese-built infrastructure, comes at the cost of Africa's debt sustainability (Van Staden et al 2020:123-125).

4.2.4.3 Kenya's SGR agreement with China

The China-Kenya Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) agreement, is an example of constrained African agency. As a result of the failing railroad between Nairobi and the Mombasa port, which subsequently led to the competitive loss of Kenya's transport economy, the need arose for the country to request loans from China, to develop its infrastructure (Irindu and Owilla

2020:466). So in 2014, the Kenyan government and Beijing signed an agreement to build a SGR line between Mombasa and Nairobi of approximately 472 to 485 kilometres (Irindu and Owilla 2020:466). 90% of the \$3.6 billion loan reserved for the project's funding was already provided for by China's Exim Bank in the first financing phase of the SGR (Irindu and Owilla 2020:466).

That is to say that the beginning of the SGR project was not driven by China's BRI alone; in fact it also formed part of Kenya's "flagship project under its own Vision 2030 development framework" (Carmody et al 2021:9). The SGR was Kenya's economic tool in its diplomacy with China, to strengthen regional integration across East Africa through infrastructure and global trade (Irindu and Owilla 2020:466-472). The end goal was to connect Mombasa – the industrial city of Kenya, to Kampala of Uganda, Juba of South Sudan and Kigali of Rwanda (Carmody et al 2021:11). Kenya's SGR agreement with China demonstrates how African stakeholders are able to use Chinese initiatives such as BRI to exercise their own agency – more precisely, to ensure that their own agenda is incorporated to Sino-African agreements. Nonetheless, Kenya's debt story goes on to show that this agency came with its own limitations.

By 2014, Kenya was already in debt to \$756 million; and this was before the inauguration of the SGR construction in 2017 (Carmody et al 2021:9). Between the launch of the project in 2017, and the year 2019, the numbers only went up to a total of \$6.47 billion (Carmody et al 2021:9). Kenya's debt situation is unlikely to be reversed, as the SGR profits accumulated along the years are still nowhere close to repaying the loans related to its construction; which are due by 2030 (Carmody et al 2021:11). Consequentially, this puts Kenya's regional integration plan for Vision 2030 to a pause (Carmody et al 2021:11).

4.3 Conclusion

By making use of the facts and figures unpacked in chapter three, chapter four discussed what the strengths and weaknesses of Africa's role within FOCAC are, as well as what caused them, before arriving at how economic diplomacy could serve as an asset to answer to the challenges of the continent's fractured economic advantage towards China, in the following chapter.

The chapter's core argument was that Africa has shown strengths in its efforts to make independent decisions within FOCAC, in areas such as the performance of the AU's initiatives and the numerical growth of the continent's participants at the Forum's negotiation table. Nevertheless, chapter four also mentioned that these strengths have been turned into weaknesses as a result of various factors such as China's choice of communicative strategy and

Chinese bilateralism vis-à-vis FOCAC's multilateral agenda. Aside from the symbolic decision to host FOCAC 2003, 2009 and 2015 in respective African countries, or the incorporation of several objectives from Agenda 2063 appearing within the Forum's action plans, the chapter also identified the increased number of African stakeholders involved during FOCAC diplomatic dialogues, as a strength factor under the aspect of AU performance.

Although chapter four mentioned that the numerical growth of African stakeholders shows an improvement in the quality of reporting by African voices, it also acknowledged that this poses a problem in reaching a collective continental approach towards China. The chapter went on to show that President Kagame's proposed 'less is more approach' being far from concrete in terms of its implementation; proves that the deepening issue of division amongst AU member countries is still unresolved. Under the aspect of Chinese rhetoric, chapter four revealed that China's language of togetherness towards its African counterparts during FOCAC key note addresses, not only accounts for its friendly diplomacy, but could also possibly serve as a distraction away from the private bilateral deals that often dominates the Forum's multilateral agenda.

The chapter then concluded by using the example of the DRC's Sicomines agreement, as well as China-Kenya's SGR agreement, to demonstrate how China's bilateral dealings with certain African countries further complicate the pledges it publicly declares on the multilateral setting of FOCAC. By making use of all the information above, what the last chapter provides, is a summary of all the findings of the dissertation, as well as a brief list of policy suggestions for African decision-makers, on how economic diplomacy tools can be used to enhance this agency and acquire benefits from it.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this last chapter, is to briefly outline the core findings of the study's preceding chapters, as well as to propose a number of policy recommendations that African policymakers and practitioners involved within FOCAC, can take into account to enhance the continent's agency in its economic diplomacy with China. Finally, chapter five culminates in shedding light on the several areas that scholars are encouraged to explore for the purpose of further research.

5.2 Summary and findings

The primary focus of the study was to analyse the measure at which the tools of economic diplomacy could be utilised to maximize African agency in the continent's engagement with China through FOCAC. The first chapter presented the literature overview, the problem statement and research question and sub-questions, the limitations of the study, the research methodology and the structure of the mini-dissertation.

Through chapter one, the main focus of the study was introduced – this being, creating more space for African agency to be exercised within FOCAC through economic diplomacy. The literature review not only provided a contextual background on Sino-African relations – specifically by looking at how China's policy towards Africa has developed over time – but it also unpacked what different schools of thought predict China's role in Africa to be. In doing so, chapter one was able to identify the policy gap on the part of the continent's engagement with China, and explain how economic diplomacy – the solution to this study's research question – can be utilized to fill this gap.

The entire study was based on a non-interactive or qualitative approach. From several press releases and reports on FOCAC summits, Chinese and African government websites, selective journal articles and many more primary, as well as secondary sources, the following findings were gathered:

5.2.1 Facts and figures covering all seven FOCAC meetings are predominantly one-sided and heavily ambiguous

As mentioned in the limitations of the study (see section 1.4 of chapter one), information on China-Africa relations – that is, information on FOCAC's seven triennial conferences (see

sections 3.2.1 to 3.2.7 of chapter three) to date, to be more precise – were largely Chinese-based, with only a few African sources, such as DIRCO’s website, the Presidency of the Republic of South Africa website and the AU website, that could be counted.

Moreover, chapter three of the study not only found that proactive African participation only began showing forth from the Addis Ababa FOCAC conference of 2003 (compare section 3.2.1 to 3.2.2), but also that the reported achievements of FOCAC’s development projects leave unanswered questions around which African countries for instance, have received financial grants from China for infrastructural purposes (see section 3.2.2).

Another example, is how the 2010-2012 Sharm el-Sheik Action Plan stipulated that a development fund of US\$ 5billion was pledged for Africa’s infrastructural undertakings – such as the construction of schools, hospitals and training centres – yet there is no proof of how the disbursement of FOCAC’s aid was implemented (see section 3.2.4)

Therefore, chapter three showed that there is a lack of information disclosure on the part of both the Chinese and African leadership, regarding how the flow of financial aid is transferred from China to African countries, following the implementation of FOCAC action plans.

5.2.2 Several development issues repetitively discussed during FOCAC’s respective meetings, are still left unattended

Chapter three listed what decisions and promises, on behalf of China and Africa, came out of the various FOCAC ministerial conferences and summits. FOCAC continues to confront a status quo of unattended challenges that have been discussed during all seven FOCAC meetings, but still remain unresolved. As identified in chapter three of the study, these development issues include Africa’s debt crisis (see sections 3.2.1 to 3.2.2), China-Africa’s unequal trade balance (see sections 3.2.1 to 3.2.7), as well as underdeveloped infrastructure (see sections 3.2.5 to 3.2.6).

Therefore, chapter three of the study revealed that only a few out of the many development promises that were made in all seven declarations and action plans up to 2018 were delivered – especially from the side of the Chinese leadership. Furthermore, chapter three has shown that there are still major challenges that demand the attention of both partners.

5.2.3 African agency within FOCAC is more theoretical than real

As previously stated in section 1.2.2 of the study’s first chapter, FOCAC has, since its launch, been advocating for a multilateral scope of mutual benefit, through a series of collective

exchange guided by equal dialogue and joint effort. Although, according to section 4.2.1 of chapter four, China largely steered the discussions of the Forum's first formal interaction, the following triennial conferences witnessed the increased input of African stakeholders.

Section 3.2.6 of chapter three confirms how FOCAC has encouraged Africa's voice to be expressed through the recognition of Agenda 2063's objectives on the 2016-2018 FOCAC Action Plan. On paper, the benefits for fair dialogue seem to be equally distributed, as the Forum provides opportunities for both China and Africa to vocalise their strategic interests. However, in the African countries where these FOCAC policies are implemented, section 4.2.4.1 of the study's fourth chapter gives the example of the China-DRC Sicomines agreement, as one of the many cases where China-Africa relations under FOCAC privileges bilateral engagements unsupervised by the AU (which is supposed to be first in command to guide how development initiatives agreed upon between Africa and its external partners, are undertaken).

As a result thereof, agency exercised by individual African stakeholders such as the Congolese government, working together with China on the side-lines, is still in fact subject to China's strategic interest because there is no governing body ensuring that their partnership abides by the conditions of Agenda 2063. Little to no room is left for Africa to shape, to its advantage, the very structures imposed by China to follow in such agreements. In 2.4 of this study's second chapter, agency was defined as the ability to rewrite the rules enforced upon a particular environment and make independent decisions. Clearly, given China's powerful position and the lack of clarity as to the status of Agenda 2063 within a FOCAC context, implementing or exercising agency on the part of Africa is difficult, if not near impossible.

Therefore, chapter four has demonstrated that one of the weaknesses in not having a continental China policy, as mentioned in section 1.1 of chapter one, is the conflict of interest between those individual countries who want to maintain bilateral engagements with China on their own, and those who concur with the AU's leading role as the continent's primary negotiator.

5.3 Policy recommendations

With the eighth FOCAC summit, which according to the China Africa Project website (2021) is at hand for November 2021, the following recommendations can be taken up by African policymakers and practitioners, and possibly be passed down to their respective governments, so as to turn them into commitments that can be advocated:

5.3.1 To reduce the impact that bias has on China-Africa research related to FOCAC, as mentioned in 5.2.1, an increased participation of African stakeholders, from government actors to civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at the micro/grassroots level, should be involved within the process of implementing FOCAC action plans, so as to allow a diversity of African views to develop into strategic dialogues and academic writing. Communication between China and independent voices from the African public, needs to be encouraged in order to inform all African stakeholders on the successes, failures and lessons of FOCAC

In this regard, the FOCAC partners might perhaps learn from the BRICS; which as stated by BRICS government (2021), is an association that places heavy emphasis on the participation of academics and researchers, especially through the medium of the BRICS Academic Forum. As acknowledged by the North West University (2021) – a member of the BRICS University Network – the BRICS Academic Forum has been harnessing the unique knowledge, skills and ideas of various experts in the private sector, government and academia altogether, since its establishment in 2009. Just as the Academic Forum aims to address the pressing development issues within those BRICS countries, FOCAC could also serve a similar purpose for China and Africa, by generating policy solutions from a collaboration of research communities, prior to its summits and ministerial conferences.

Following from such collaboration, African communities will be able to set conditions, push for answers and encourage reforms that can be used to monitor the progress of China's development projects, so as to not leave Africa in a disadvantaged position to China. The proactive presence of non-state actors during the FOCAC negotiation process is of paramount importance because they not only play a role in complementing the efforts made by African governments, but they also push for Chinese government accountability over their development pledge.

To address the issue of ambiguity also mentioned in 5.2.1, which undermines researchers' ability to accurately evaluate the successes or failures of various FOCAC projects, accuracy of facts and figures regarding the China-Africa flow of development assistance, need to be encouraged within the framework of the Forum.

This means that both Chinese policymakers, as well as, and especially, African policymakers at the FOCAC negotiation table should increase their efforts in providing information about aspects such as the names of African countries receiving the financial grants promised by China, the exact amount of aid that has been distributed and used for the correct purposes by these respective African governments, as well as the precise amount of debt still owed. All partners should be encouraged to strive for transparency in their negotiations and agreements, rather than insisting on confidentiality as the latter might promote further skewed relations between China, as the ‘strong’ and individual African countries as the ‘weak’.

Accuracy on such information will allow for African policymakers to better measure and address the infrastructure deficit in their sub-regions, as well as elevate the the importance of relying on their own supply of financiers, in order for recipients of Chinese loans within these sub-regions to address their dependency on China as a main source of finance for development.

- 5.3.2** To assist with the tackling of unaddressed development issues reiterated in 5.2.2, African policymakers could make use of Agenda 2063 as an instrument of evaluation and monitoring, that will not only allow for the impact of FOCAC infrastructural, trade and financial related projects upon Africa’s Regional Economic Communities to be measured, but will also confirm whether or not these projects are aligned to the continent’s development aspirations.
- 5.3.3** In order for Africa’s agency towards China to be maximised, African stakeholders can again make use of Agenda 2063, as an evaluation and monitoring toolkit that every agreement developed under FOCAC dialogues, are subordinate to. What this means is that every economic engagement between China and Africa under FOCAC should be fashioned after Agenda 2063’s vision for long-term prosperity within the continent, and not just some of its objectives as mentioned in section 4.2.2.2. Achieving this would place the interest of African stakeholders at the heart of the continent’s economic diplomacy with China.

These policy recommendations in a sense address the issue mentioned in 5.2 above, viz. the lack of a comprehensive Africa policy towards China. Agenda 2063 in many ways could address this shortcoming, or be utilised as the foundation for the development of an African policy towards China.

5.4 Recommendations for further research

Firstly, although this study only examines China-Africa relations before and throughout the seven FOCAC engagements that have taken place since the year 2000, up to and including the summit of 2018, further research is necessary to analyse the extent to which changes pertaining to Covid-19 have either reinforced or weakened Sino-African economic diplomacy within the Forum.

Secondly, although this study does not dwell on what Africa's China policy should consist of, it aims to be a point of departure for more scholarly discussions on elements that might guide how this policy should be framed, and how the continent can make use of such a policy to advance its economic-development goals. Academics and researchers could play a crucial role in exploring such a policy development effort.

Thirdly, although the study's predominant focus was on Africa's economic diplomacy with China, it suggests a comparative study on the impact that the summits of other large commercial partners like the US, France (see Africa News, 2021) and the EU, have on the strength of Africa's bargaining power within the international stage. Africa's agency might also be weak when negotiations between the continent and other external partners are examined, and might not be a function only of China's superior power. It would seem that what is required of the continent is to focus both on the development of a continental negotiation strategy with external partners and to hone the negotiation skills of its diplomats involved in promoting the economic and development needs of the continent.

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