

China-Democratic Republic of Congo Relations: From a Beneficial to a Developmental Cooperation

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Abstract: The relationship between China and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) relations provides a unique case to test China's win-win policy with African countries. A recurring question is how can a win-win partnership be realized between very unequal partners? China is a global power ideologically, economically, militarily, and financially. The DRC is known for its weak state characterized by years of instability and mismanagement. China claims to pursue a win-win relation with the DRC. The DRC's political economy has been dominated since 1885 by an economy of extraction built on the legacy of the Free State. According to this legacy, the DRC serves as an open source of capital accumulation for foreign powers. This pattern of colonial extraction, where the DRC is a source of cheap strategic mineral resources that serve the narrow interest of Western capital remains largely unchanged today. China entered the DRC with a promise to break with this exploitative economic relation. China has acquired financial and economic strengths, which it is using to position itself as an alternative to the West. The paper discusses whether or not a win-win cooperative relationship is possible between China and the DRC.

Introduction

China has become an important player in Africa's economic activities since the turn of the century. It is aggressively competing with the West for the control the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) huge strategic mineral reserves. The DRC is high on China's list of African strategic partners. The DRC is also aiming to attract China to help rebuild the country's infrastructure destroyed by years of colonialism, dictatorship, corruption, and war. China argues that its win-win economic approach and its non-interference in internal affairs of the DRC are the basis of relations between the two countries.

China–DRC relations represent a major shift from that of the West-DRC relations. China privileges economics over politics, and its promise of massive economic investment in infrastructure and mineral extraction is based purely on economic principles without political conditionality. China is a critic of the West's approach of linking economic support to the promotion of democratic principles and values, for it is a proponent of a home-grown political system. China believes the imposition of Western democratic values on Africa in general, and the DRC in particular, is one of the causes of political instability and economic stagnation. In an effort to set itself apart from what it considers as the West unequal political and economic relations with Africa built over centuries, China has set its Africa relations on the basis of what Chris Alden and Daniel Large call "Chinese exceptionalism." This

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exceptionalism is geared toward ensuring mutual benefit and win-win outcomes at the continental and bilateral levels.¹

The DRC is a dysfunctional state par excellence, lacking capacity to organize and conceptualize its future both politically and economically in a manner that differs from its past. China-DRC trade relations are taking place within the confines of a fragile Congolese state lacking in capacity to optimally benefit from opportunities that China brings. The DRC, after years of dictatorship and war, has been working with great difficulties to install democracy as a stabilization tool and a source of economic progress. The main challenge for the DRC is how to build a functional and responsible state without which every development effort whether internal or external is bound to fail. The question is: does the win-win as applied currently by China contribute to state building in the DRC?

The Strengthening of China-DRC Relations

China and the DRC are capable of maintaining a beneficial and interdependent economic relationship because they both have goods that they need to trade with each other. The main interests for the two countries in their relationship are clear. For China, the DRC is a secure source of strategic natural resources, market for its manufactured goods, and space for investment in infrastructure development. For the DRC, China is a source of finance and know-how for its infrastructural, and a source of manufactured goods. This is what China has called a win-win arrangement: “you give me the minerals I desperately need, and I build for you the infrastructure you need.” The DRC fits well into China’s trade policy of securing supply of minerals and energy products and encouraging export of finished products.

China offers considerable opportunities to the DRC, and the DRC is attracted to China for its civil engineering to help with the reconstruction of the shattered infrastructure. The DRC government sees China as an opportunity to help lift the country’s productive capacity, a source of funding for infrastructure development (road, railway, and mining infrastructure), and to strengthen public private sector partnership information and technology investment.²

The fascination with China has been about how it has succeeded in a relatively short period of time in moving so many of its people out of poverty and modernizing its cities so rapidly. For most Africans, the thinking is that because “China has managed to overcome so many similar problems, it knows what it is doing.”³ The economic transformation it has achieved is attractive, and the DRC wants to learn and benefit from China’s successes. The DRC’s fascination and increased cooperation with China are rational especially after years of failed Western imposed interventions. President Joseph Kabila’s model of development “la Modernité” is copied from China’s economic miracle, which is a result of China’s much vaunted priority of modernization. The admiration with China’s successes is fuelled by scepticism of Western development approaches, which many Africans have described as neo-colonialism and exploitative. Intensifying China-DRC relations coincide with China’s economic upswing on the one hand and an economic decline in the OECD countries on the other hand. The DRC has for a long time looked for opportunities to escape Western control.

Since the 2006 elections, President Kabila has worked “to demonstrate progress on the reconstruction of his country’s shattered by two decades of war.”⁴ The DRC’s expectation for China to help with reconstruction has been on the high side but trade between the two countries has been defined by mineral exports from the DRC to China. Minerals are the DRC’s main export to China. The DRC mineral potential, especially copper and cobalt, are

attractive and China wants a secured provision. In 2016, 67.5 percent of China's cobalt production relies on concentrates imported from the DRC.⁵ The table below shows the changing nature of China-DRC trade relations in terms of export between the two countries.

Table 1: CHINA-DRC Dollar Export Figures

	1991(million)	2003 (million)	2014 (billion)
China	63,24	25,420	1,362
DRC	5,08	26,300	2,823
Total	68,34	51,710	4,185

Source: Ntambwe 2016

In 2014, there were fourteen mining projects that contributed to the increase in exports from the DRC to China.⁶ The total investment for the mining projects was projected at \$3.72 billion, including \$320 million for a hydroelectric power station.⁷ These figures are expected to increase even more considering that Sicominis is planning to increase its copper production from the current 100,000 tonnes to 250,000 tonnes when the Busanga Dam starts to produce energy.⁸ Also, in 2014 China's total import of timber from Congo basin reached 2.9 million cubic meters representing 47.5 percent of the region's entire timber export, far exceeding the 2 million cubic meters entering the EU (equivalent of 33 percent).⁹ The recent DRC economic growth has been attributed to China's importation of minerals, mainly copper and cobalt. The DRC posted an annual average economic growth rate of 7.4 percent during the 2010-13 period and 8.7 percent in 2014, both of which are well above the average in sub Saharan Africa.¹⁰ These figures may suggest that China's impact is unquestionably positive. However, a closer look shows that the growth has not provided a significant level of employment jobless growth and it has not changed the poverty level in the country. The DRC ranked second in the Human Development Index (186 out of 187 countries) in 2014, and its per capita income, which stood at \$380 in 2014, is among the lowest in the world.¹¹

China's Ambition in Africa and the DRC

The rapid economic development China has experienced in the last four decades has shaped its appetite for foreign investment and political power in the world in general and specifically in Africa.¹² If China's aspiration is to become the world hegemonic power, the control of strategic spaces in different continents, as the United States has done, is imperative. The interest of China in the DRC is multifaceted and not, as it has been described, driven by a single motive — access to mineral resources.¹³ The DRC occupies a strategic position in China's geo-strategic consideration because of its geographic position, abundant arable land and mineral resources, huge forest reserve, and the size of the population.

The DRC is the fourth most populous African country with an estimated eighty-five million people. It constitutes a big market for Chinese finished products, with exports to the DRC including machinery, textiles, clothing, and consumer electronics. The DRC is also the second largest African country in land mass after Algeria. It is in need of reconstruction after decades of neglect and war. The DRC provides China an opportunity to benefit from massive infrastructure investment in roads, railways, energy, dams, river navigation, and airlines. The DRC is also home to abundant natural resources of various strategic

development considerations. These resources have undergone a long history of plunder and mismanagement, coupled with widespread strife caused by years of conflict. Despite this loss, the DRC still has vast untapped reserves of minerals that need to be optimized. It is estimated that the country's 2.3 million square kilometers of the national territory contains more than 1,100 different mineral substances.¹⁴ The World Bank estimates these mineral resources to be worth \$24 trillion, which is the combined GDP of Europe and the US.¹⁵

Apart from minerals, China is also interested in timber. The DRC has the second largest forest in the world, which has become a primary source of China's wood logs. The DRC is also possesses extensive arable land with rich rain seasons. It could play an important role in resolving China's increasing food insecurity, an issue with which China is increasingly concerned.¹⁶ China has already acquired 2,800 million hectares of land in the DRC to cultivate palm oil.¹⁷ China wants to export to the DRC its agriculture model by positioning itself upstream in the seed production and rice hybrid, research and development, and rural infrastructure.¹⁸ By investing in land and agriculture, China seeks food security for its domestic market. Clearly Beijing's larger interests in safeguarding economic development and increasing political influence drive China's emerging security interests in Africa.¹⁹

History of China's Relationship with the DRC

China has always maintained close and cordial diplomatic relations with the DRC well before the country's independence. During Africa's struggle for independence, China presented itself as a partisan of the world's oppressed and exploited. It is therefore not correct to see China as a newcomer and opportunist. Already in 1965, the Chinese Communist Party told the Congolese people: "They were not alone in their just struggle against capitalism. All the Chinese people are with you. All the people opposed to imperialism are with you.... American imperialism will be concurred."²⁰

China was a staunch supporter of Africa's liberation movements. China used radio programs, propaganda, books, and supplying arms to promote and support African revolts against colonial rule.²¹ China provided an intensive training sabotage, guerrilla warfar and political subversion to young Africans fighting colonial rule.²² In the DRC, China supported "the Simba rebellion" of July 1963 led by "Pierre Mulele."²³ China also supported Laurent Kabila when he created a secessionist Marxist movement, the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) in 1967. While supporting the rebellions, China also provided social support to the government of President Mobutu. Between 1970-1990 China supported Congo's government with small investments linked to education, science, culture, health, and social services.²⁴ In the education sector, China provided schoolbooks. During this period China also provided financial aid to the tune of \$3 million.²⁵ China also invested in agriculture focusing on rice in the Bumba region of Equateur Province.²⁶ In terms of infrastructure, China built symbolic buildings such as the parliament and the national football stadium. The relationship slowed down in the early 1990s due to increased political instability and the decline of the Congolese state.

Relations between China and the DRC regained new momentum when Laurent Desire Kabila took power in 1997. Considering the continued instability during this period, however, China followed an approach of slow penetration preferring to rely on individual Chinese traders to purchase copper and cobalt directly from artisanal miners in the DRC mineral rich Katanga Province. There was an influx of Chinese in the Katanga province in early 2000, which coincided with the commodity boom. By 2011, it was estimated that over

sixty of the province's seventy-five copper processing plants, around 90 percent, were owned by Chinese nationals.²⁷ In 2013, the two countries signed an economic and technical cooperation agreement amounting to of \$9 million which was given as a donation to the Congolese government.²⁸

China-DRC relations are epitomized by the Sicominies deal. Following the DRC's successful general elections in 2006, the Chinese government took a more proactive step to engage its government. This culminated in 2008 in a massive resources-for-infrastructure deal worth \$6 billion.²⁹ According to the deal, China will invest \$3 billion in mining and \$3 billion in infrastructure development—construction of roads, railways, hospitals, schools, and dams, as well as mine development. This agreement remains an emblematic step in the China-DRC relations. The deal gives China access to huge high-grade copper and cobalt reserves. China is expected to get in return 10 million tonnes of copper and 600,000 tonnes of cobalt. The \$3 billion to be invested in infrastructure will be repaid by the benefits from minerals. From 2008 when Sicominies was signed to 2014, the total expenditure on infrastructure development stood at around \$459.764 million.³⁰ In 2015, \$250 million was earmarked for infrastructure projects.³¹ At present the total spending on infrastructure is around \$750 million from a total of \$3 billion earmarked.

The DRC as a Failed State and its Implications

A failed state is a danger to itself and its partners. The DRC suffers from profound internal human, institutional, and structural weaknesses that prevent it from benefiting from the opportunities offered by China. These internal weaknesses are a manifestation of a weak, corrupt, and patrimonial state plus years of neglect and war. The DRC is incapable of planning, financing and building its own development infrastructure despite the abundant natural resources. Claude Ake in *Democracy and Development in Africa* writes:

the assumption so readily made that there has been a failure of development is misleading. The problem is not so much that development has failed as that it was never really on the agenda in the first place. By all indications, political conditions in Africa are the greatest impediment to development.³²

Maybe neither the West nor China is entirely to blame if the DRC is failing to stabilize and develop. The DRC is simply too weak to maintain cohesive and sustained important trade or political relations. The lack of ideological orientation and the corrupt nature of its society allow for the state to be captured by both internal and external forces working in connivance. This nature of the state poses a great danger to Chinese interests in the country. It also opens an opportunity for China to exploit these weaknesses for its benefit. China cannot claim to be pursuing a win-win relation with the DRC by working with a corrupt elite that has no interest in uplifting its own people. China cannot pretend to have high moral standing when it deals with an elite that abuses and steals from its fellow citizens. China's approach to cooperation and doing business with the Congolese elite no matter what it may privately think about their virtues and conduct is an obstacle to a win-win partnership. There is no doubt that the choice as to whether the benefits of cooperation are widely spread among the populace or concentrated in the hands of a "happy few" will also determine the durability of the dynamics, at least in its current form. This is why China's principle of non-interference makes little sense.

While China enjoys accolades from the Congolese political elite, the overall population is turning its anger on Chinese citizens living in the DRC each time an opportunity presents

itself. Congolese have attacked Chinese businesses on at least two occasions. In December 2010, after the local team TP Mazembe lost to the Italian Club Inter Milan, mobs in Lubumbashi angered by the calls made by a Japanese referee who they had mistaken for a Chinese referee attacked Chinese businesses in the city.³³ Between January 19-20, 2015, following the attempt by the National Assembly to change an electoral provision which would have extended President Kabila stay in power beyond 2016, protests erupted that targeted and destroyed Chinese businesses in Kinshasa neighborhoods.³⁴ The Congolese people's dislike of the apparent support China gives to the regime of President Kabila was the motivation for their violence against individual Chinese. The unconditional character of Beijing's support for Kabila's regime is creating tensions in Congolese civil society that is anxious about the government's persistence in restricting the political space in the country as President Kabila attempts to retain power.³⁵ The motivation for violence is also about resentment by local businesses towards Chinese, who violate Congolese law by engaging in small businesses, reserved for locals. Congolese accuse the Chinese of "undercutting the prices of local producers and businesses," which put them out of business.³⁶

The violent attacks against Chinese who have chosen to settle in the DRC are an indication that China's claim of having established relations as equals with Congolese is more political than social and economic. It is clear China does not understand when Africans reject something because the Chinese Communist Party is used to suppressing its people's demands and freedom of expression. This point supports the view that "China's presence in Africa may be increasingly rejected unless the Chinese recognize the importance of taking into account what the majority of Africans want for their continent."³⁷ While in the short-term economic cooperation is helping China to secure mineral resources and market for its manufactured good in the DRC, it is not sustainable in the long run if the DRC remains dysfunctional. China should encourage and support the reconstruction of the Congolese state to create conditions that support its own investment.

Why China's Non-Interference does not Benefit the DRC

China's policy towards the DRC will make a difference only if it represents an alternative to the current corrupt management of the state and state-society relations in the DRC. It is a contradiction for China to suggest that it is helping the DRC through commercial ties and not paying attention to the importance of building vital democratic, functional, transparent, and accountable institutions that are supposed to manage the benefits of the same commercial ties. China cannot simply pretend that these problems do not exist or if they exist they do not undermine the win-win relationship. The weakness of the Congolese state requires that international partners pay attention to these soft issues. This is the biggest failing of China's "minerals for infrastructure policy" in the DRC. The only time a relationship of unequal partners' turns into a win-win relationship is when the dominant partner deliberately takes steps to empower the weaker partner to participate meaningfully in building ties that are mutually beneficial.

The opportunities offered by China are significant, but insufficient to help the DRC on a path to sustainable development. The main reason, as established above, is that the DRC is a failed state and lacks capacity to deal with China as an equal partner. The DRC will not benefit from the opportunities offered by China if the state is not reorganized in one way or another to function as a normal state with capable institutions where corruption is seen as a problem and not as a norm. Put differently, the internal weaknesses of the Congolese state

are an obstacle to China's win-win model. Despite claims by China that its relations with the DRC are built on a win-win model, in reality the DRC loses significantly because of internal weaknesses. These weaknesses include weak state capacity, corruption, instability, and lack of planning and poor management.

Corruption has been one of the fundamental causes of Congo's disastrous economic situation over recent decades.³⁸ China-DRC relations are not rooted in democratic, transparent and accountable governance. One cultural dimension that has undermined the state in the DRC is corruption and lack of transparency. As Bruno Hellendorff argues: "The mutually beneficial label of Sino-Congolese cooperation has nowadays become rather lackluster. Opportunities and challenges in the political, economic and reputational realms have not been similarly managed by China and the DRC, resulting in differentiated impacts which often proved detrimental to the African country."³⁹ China's soft power strategy must also entail the promotion of transparency and good governance, especially in fragile states.

Unless the Congolese state is fundamentally transformed and acquires sufficient capacity to design a China engagement policy that protects Congolese interests, the relationship will remain a one-way street. The Congolese government does not have a national strategy plan to facilitate and coordinate the relationship. In its current situation, the DRC is a recipient of China's policy. The argument here is that the massive Chinese investment in the DRC, especially in the mining sector, can only acquire a transformative agenda for the Congolese society if the Congolese state is empowered to play a central role in defining the nature and the direction of the partnership.

By supporting the reconstruction of the state we are not proposing that China transfers its model to the DRC or imposes itself on the DRC. China could support elements that could shape the transformation of the Congolese state by investing in building strong, functional, and transparent institutions; supporting social forces in an effort to increase constructive bargaining between state and citizens; and work to break the elite capture of both the economy and politics. The DRC has embraced liberal democracy, which it is struggling to consolidate. It will be suicidal if it attempts to abandon it now. China could support the consolidation of this system. Contrary to the system of balance of power with strong states that emerged from the Cold War, which dominated international security issues for some time, today the problematic has been replaced by fragile states and the threat they pose to global security. China cannot abdicate the responsibility that comes with being a superpower. The rebuilding of the Congolese state into a functional, transparent, and accountable institution with the capacity to negotiate and protect its interests is an imperative and a mandatory step toward the effectiveness of the win-win partnership between the two countries.

The China-DRC relationship rests on the flawed assumption that massive investment in infrastructure is sufficient to rebuild the DRC. Rebuilding is only possible if the state is capacitated in a way that it is able to play its role efficiently. Beijing's spirited defense of elite sovereignty certainly runs counter to the growing international consensus that political leaders cannot escape justice for violations against an emerging, if fragile, global norm.⁴⁰ This paper's contribution to China-Africa relations is the point it makes that for the DRC-China relationship to be a win-win one, China must adjust its foreign policy in a way that contributes to solving the fundamental problems that have kept the DRC dysfunctional and unstable, producing poverty, inequality, and unemployment. The point made here contradicts Jeffrey Sachs view that "Beijing's reluctance to interfere was an asset not a liability."⁴¹

Not a Win-Win Situation

The Sicominex deal epitomizes China-DRC commercial relations, for it presents a number of problems. First, it lacks transparency and equity. The Sicominex deal was signed in an environment of great opacity. It quickly created significant outcries from the Congolese and the international community. The secrecy surrounding the deal prompted the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and local and international civil society to request that it be made public. The analysis of the deal shows that “it will increase the DRC’s potential foreign debt to an unacceptable level and the IMF demanded that it be reduced in size.”⁴² After a period of resistance, the two partners agreed. China revised its investment amount downward from \$9 billion to \$6 billion. This act vindicated the critics that the deal was largely unfavorable to the DRC. This reduction did not resolve the imbalance, however, but rather made it worse because the other dimensions of the deal were not revised in line with China’s reduced capital investment. Logically, the reduction of the capital investment should automatically lead to the reduction tonnage of minerals for China. As one Congolese expert explained:

The IMF intervention which changed the terms of Sicominex did more harm to the DRC than to China. The reduction from \$9 billion to \$6 billion investment “reduced the Chinese obligations by 33 percent and the infrastructure benefit to the DRC by 50 percent while China still get access to minerals worth over \$50 billion. . . .The reserves ceded to China under the first deal remained unchanged. China will still receive 10 million tonnes of copper and 600,000 tonnes of cobalt.”⁴³

In this case, the problem lies not with the IMF but the DRC. The IMF created an opportunity for the DRC to renegotiate the development agreement, but the DRC failed. This situation could only mean two things either it is symptomatic of a Congolese state that does not have capacity to scrutinize complex development agreements or a reflection of a state that has compromised its responsibility to interrogate the deal because of corruption. I think it is the combination of these two things. But it is China’s behavior that is shocking, because it also failed to help its weak partner to understand the imbalance inherent in the deal.

Second, Sicominex is not a departure from the type of mining contracts that the DRC has signed with western companies. Chinese companies through the contract have received required holiday, fiscal, and customs exemptions. We know that excessive exemptions deprive African resource rich countries from benefiting from their minerals. Fiscal revenues expected from deepened commercial ties with Beijing are diminished by tax exemptions granted to Chinese state-owned enterprises operating in the framework of the Sicominex deal and by Chinese private entrepreneurs operating mainly in the informal sector.⁴⁴

Third, “neither the Congolese nor the Chinese parties have properly explained how the minerals are to be priced, nor infrastructure is to be built and at what cost.”⁴⁵ The lack of clarity on the benefits that will accrue to the DRC and China is a serious concern. The available analysis of the agreement suggests that the Congolese government will lose out. The problem is that there has never been an internal discussion in the DRC on the political economy of costs and risks of this ambitious investment. The main benefit for the DRC government is that the deal has increased its bargaining power for its minerals by identifying other investment sources beyond the usual western investment.

Fourth, the deal includes a clause exempting the venture from any new laws that might be introduced by the Congolese government. It means that if the DRC changes or reforms its legislation, whether tax, custom, or environmental legislation or its mining code as it is currently doing, Chinese companies will be exempt. Linked to this, the deal also excludes the DRC from benefiting from any possible windfall taxes. Sicominex exposes the DRC's vulnerability to international finance.⁴⁶ It also exposes the Congolese government's weaknesses in negotiating development agreements and mining contracts and equally exposes China's claim to win-win partnership.

Fifth, China administers the entire Sicominex project. The DRC state company Gecamines, which is a partner in the project with Chinese companies, is a passive partner and plays no role in the administration of the partnership. Chinese companies make the decisions regarding operations, including production and exports, the importation of equipment, and deciding on the use of Chinese personnel.

The above discussion shows that the Sicominex barter deal, while a departure from the western model, has not fundamentally altered the colonial extractivism approach of the West. It is clear, despite China's rhetoric about a win-win relation, that this partnership reflects pure international relations where only the pursuit of interests matters, and in which the powerful partner asserts itself and dictates the terms of cooperation. China's intervention in the DRC is perpetuating the old extractivism approach that considers the DRC as reservoir of mineral resources to be accessed cheaply. The biggest problem is not for China but for the DRC, which has no capacity to define, engage and defend its interests.

There is no doubt that the roads, railways, hospitals, and schools that China is building are changing the DRC landscape. Unlike Belgium, which "built roads solely for the extraction and evacuation of resources in the DRC, China is constructing or rehabilitating roads that are suitable not only for the transport of resources but which citizens can also use to travel and trade."⁴⁷ As such the massive investment in infrastructure is "helping to alleviate supply bottlenecks and increase competitiveness."⁴⁸ The infrastructure development is supporting internal production activities and intra-regional trade. But, the approach where China is building this infrastructure using Chinese manpower is problematic. It is perpetuating the dependency syndrome and does not empower Congolese to own their development. China believes that Africans cannot build their own infrastructure and prefers to send its engineers and a strong army of unskilled Chinese labor to build roads and bridges, develop mines, and extract minerals. China's massive investment in the DRC has not been matched with capacity building of the Congolese. Chinese citizens run all major Chinese investments in the DRC. Generally, their investment is accompanied by a massive influx of Chinese citizens. In the process of building infrastructure, no efforts have been deployed to capacitate the DRC's public agencies such as the Roads Office, the Office of Urban Roads and Canalization, and the Office for Country Roads.⁴⁹ The use of imported Chinese labor, unstructured skills transfer, and lack of investment in the DRC institutions are among some of the factors that create scepticism about China's development approach.⁵⁰ The benefits of these mega infrastructure projects are diminished by the fact that most of the people who do the actual work are Chinese who in most cases repatriate their earnings back to China and eventually return home with their skills and expertise. As such, Chinese construction undermines sustainability and transformation of the Congolese society and undermines the win-win partnership. How China is treating the DRC differs from how it operates in other countries, suggesting that China does not have a standard approach. In Ethiopia the Huajian Group has opened a shoe

manufacturing plant in which Ethiopians are employed. In Tanzania Chinese private companies have created more than eighty thousand jobs according to the Chinese Business Chamber of Tanzania.⁵¹ These and other examples suggest that the nature of the state China is engaged with determines its behavior.

The Sicomines agreement is a thorn in a win-win partnership. It undermines it in all its dimensions. For example, one of the six principles that guide the Sicomines cooperation is the transfer of technology. This is not happening despite the claim that China is bringing technology and science to Africa. Contrary to what China is doing in other African countries, for example in Ethiopia where a shoe plant has been put in place and is exporting all over the world, in the DRC, it seems, China controls the technology it exports. IDS sums up this when it argues that “while the DRC economy benefits from improved infrastructure, the deal has resulted in closure of local civil engineering companies.⁵² Chinese investment in the mining sector fails to satisfy key requirements if mining is to benefit the Congolese. These requirements are clearly articulated in the African Mining Vision (AMV).⁵³ They include: increased ownership, diversification, value addition (both downstream and upstream) to the minerals, community benefits, and environmental protection. The AMV envisages an African “knowledge-driven African mining sector that catalyzes and contributes to the broad-based growth & development.”⁵⁴ It represents a paradigm shift away from the liberal foreign direct investment dependent and resource rent centered strategy that has governed African mining for decades. Whilst recognizing the need to improve the fiscal regime of mining, the AMV sets out a multifaceted framework for mineral-based industrialization and structural transformation of Africa’s mineral dependent economies. It also seeks improvements in mineral sector governance, including respect for and protection of human rights and the environment, and greater democratic engagement with and accountability of governments and mining companies to citizens. Unfortunately, the Sicomines deal has not integrated all these requirements, especially the need to use mining as a basis for industrialization. With the political support it receives, it has failed to consult adjacent communities as required in the country mining code; it has also been accused of polluting water. Yet, the DRC government has failed to question and sanction the company.

It is clear from the preceding that China-DRC relations, while beneficial to both countries, cannot be just and equal. As Alden and Large argue, “China’s exceptionalism is a modality of engagement that structures relations such that they may remain asymmetrical in economic content but equal in terms of recognition of economic gains and political standing.”⁵⁵ A win-win relationship in which one partner decides the orientation of the cooperation is problematic.

Because of the interdependence that exists between China and the DRC one would have thought that it would be possible to have a far more complex relationship between the two countries than a straight A-B trade asymmetry. We are in the presence of an asymmetrical relation of power. According to Johnson and Ford, “asymmetrical relationship may exist when there is an imbalance in the relationship characteristics and one of the partners is able to dominate the relationship and influence what happens in it for its own benefits for a very long time.”⁵⁶ A complex relationship is only possible if the weaker partner, the DRC, with all its resources, has the capacities to define and defend its interests. The DRC due to its intrinsic weaknesses is unable to protect its interests, even to consolidate the gains from the collaboration. The DRC is massively losing in its trade relations with China. It is clear it is

not a win-win partnership. The insistence by China that it is, even in the presence of evidence to the contrary, is worrisome.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that China and the DRC are benefiting from established commercial relations. But the DRC's main challenge is not infrastructure development but rather state building. Without a functional state, the infrastructure being built will again collapse in a matter of time. The mega infrastructure that China is building requires a state to maintain it. For the win-win partnership to have any positive meaning for the majority of Congolese, it must also be judged on the progress that the DRC makes away from protracted conflict and bad governance that have characterized it since at least the late nineteenth century.

China has shown no willingness to help reconfigure the DRC state to become able to participate meaningfully in this relationship. China maintains close relations with the political elite and makes no effort to link its investment and the wellbeing of the Congolese people, which can only become a reality through transforming the nature of the state. In the current circumstances the only way for the DRC will benefit from its trade relation with China is if the state is reconstructed to some acceptable levels. What China could do, if it is genuine about the win-win partnership, is to deliberately desist from taking advantage of the DRC's weaknesses and instead invest in efforts to build its state capacity to engage and protect its interests in global trade.

China-DRC relations might be beneficial to both countries but do not represent a win-win relation. What the DRC needs now is a genuine partner that understands its weaknesses and is prepared to support its democratic transformation efforts by capacitating the state with human, institutional, and organizational capacity in order to ensure that it optimally benefits from opportunities being offered by external partners. China's relationship with the DRC would have to achieve simultaneously two things: support the building of a capable state and build an economy that is inclusive and sustainable. The crux of the argument is the following: as long as China does not help the DRC to achieve stability, the infrastructure development approach is not sustainable. China has built its development on the basis of consistent stability. China must help to guarantee stability through the strengthening of democracy by combatting corruption and promoting peaceful transfer of power.

Notes

1 Alden and Large 2011.

2 In 2010 China, through its Telecommunication Company ZTE, financed to the tune of \$35 million the DRC interconnection to optic fibre from the Atlantic Ocean to Luanda and Kinshasa.

3 Soros 2016.

4 Lee 2010.

5 Hellendorff 2011, p. 39.

6 Ntambwe 2016.

7 Ibid.

8 Sicominex is a development agreement signed by a consortium of Chinese state companies and the DRC state companies on behalf of the two governments. In this agreement China promises to build infrastructure for the DRC in exchange for minerals. The deal was

- signed in 2008. It took China until late 2015 to produce the first copper.
- 9 Green Peace 2015.
 - 10 World Bank 2016.
 - 11 Ibid.
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 - 21 "La Politique Etrangère" 1962.
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 - 29 It was signed between two Chinese construction companies and the DRC's state copper company.
 - 30 Ntambwe 2015.
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 - 44 Ibid.
 - 45 Global Witness 2011.
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 - 50 Gu and McCluskey 2015.
 - 51 Ibid., p. 18.

52 Ibid.

53 The AMV is aimed at developing minerals for the transformation of Africa's economy. It is an initiative by Africa to ensure that not only does Africa make the most of its mineral resources but also that it moves the sector from its enclave nature to a comprehensive mineral-led development agenda that helps in Africa's economic transformation. See United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

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