

Greening Africa-China Relations: African Agents Punching Below their Weight?

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Abstract: China is changing the global metabolism of goods and resources. In the last few decades, China has launched an unprecedented and unparalleled economic engagement with Africa. The level of Chinese investment on the continent is still very low relative to its investment in other regions whereas, for many African countries, China has already become the leading trading partner in terms of both import and export business. In fact, China has surpassed the U.S.A. as the single largest trading partner of Africa in 2009. One key area of debate in this evolving relationship has been the growing environmental footprint of the partnership. Unlike in the past, environmental issues have now taken center stage in world politics mainly due to the increasingly daunting challenges nations are confronted with in terms of environmental and climate change crises. It has taken China quite some time to realize that environmental protection is a matter of survival and not a luxury. Hence, the Government of China has been issuing rules, regulations, and guidelines to encourage more sustainable economic development. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been vigorously introduced to the business sector since the mid-2000s in an attempt to achieve this objective. The outcome of this policy direction has been positive in that many businesses have been forced to adhere to the strict guidelines; it also reflects burgeoning social activism against pollution and environmental destruction at home. This has, however, had its downside because companies started to expand to regions with poor governance and weak environmental regulations, notably Africa. There is already some evidence that Chinese investment in Africa, if not regulated properly, would repeat the history of pollution in China. This article argues that the limited success that CSR has registered in China could be repeated in Africa only when African states start to engage strategically with rising powers like China. African governments need to strictly enforce environmental policy and empower non-state actors, particularly civil society organizations (CSOs), to actively monitor developments and safeguard the environment.

Introduction

In the current decade, there is a growing body of literature arguing against the longstanding assumption that Africa's agency has been too weak to impact on the choice and decision that the continent needs to take regarding its development. In line with this, Brown and Harman (2013: 1) posit that "in the second decade of the 21st century, when African actors established a sustained

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track record of assertive, high-level diplomacy and during which the continent has seen long-term economic growth, the [weak African agency] approach has started to look ever more anachronistic.” The central tenet of this argument is that African engagements with external powers have become increasingly more balanced rather than being dominated by the latter so structural constraints do not eclipse agency altogether. Some processes cited as evidence are the growing assertiveness of developing countries (including Africa) in the UN reform discussions, the global climate change negotiations (Zondi, 2013), and the global trade negotiations under the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Lee, 2013). Shaw (2013) emphasizes that evolving African agency is showcased by “new regionalisms” involving non-state actors like the Nile Basin Initiative; “new multilateralisms” in the areas of conflict diamonds, landmines, fisheries, trade in small arms; and the emergence of “innovative sources of finance” including global solidarity fund, climate change fund, remittance taxes, and of course, emerging donors prominently China. Another innovative aspect of finance mobilization worth mentioning is the construction of the Renaissance Dam by Ethiopia, the largest in Africa, with 100 % of its \$4.5 billion contribution coming from domestic sources, involving no external development support. As a development practitioner who served as an advisor in a bilateral development agency in Ethiopia, I have had the opportunity to witness that the level of assertiveness by the government has been unusually high.

There is a growing receptivity to CSR processes by Chinese businesses. China currently being a leading trading partner to Africa, this positive trend in CSR receptivity will have implications in greening the China-Africa relations. This article looks at the state of CSR evolution in Chinese overseas businesses as it specifically applies to Africa-bound investments; it tries to gather some evidence on harmful practices of Chinese investments in Africa; and it analyzes whether there has been any role played by African agency in minimizing negative impacts. I draw exclusively on a desk review of the available literature on the environmental footprint of China in Africa, and the ongoing debate on whether CSR initiatives have been effective in ameliorating environmental impacts of expatriate businesses in Africa. Owing to the fact that there is limited published information available on this topic, my review points to the need for systematic empirical research that involves Chinese investment in various parts of Africa in order to get a clearer and more precise picture of what is really happening in terms of both environmental impacts and the role of African agency in the process.

China's Economic Development: The Environmental Externalities

China's consistent economic growth of 8 to 12% over the last two decades (Mol, 2011; Simons, 2013), which brought millions of people out of poverty, has come at a great environmental cost both domestically and globally (Tan-Mullins and Mohan, 2013; Zadek et al., 2012). Turner and Ellis (2007) illustrate that its economic success has cost it dearly with ecological destruction characterized by smoggy cities, black rivers, pervading deserts, and degraded coastal waters, causing a serious threat to China's economy, public health and social stability. Examples abound. According to Turner and Ellis, sixteen of the world's 20 most polluted cities are found in China due to air pollution from cars and coal and Linfen, a major coal-mining city in Shanxi Province, is the most polluted in the world. Air pollution causes as many as 400,000 premature deaths and 75 million asthma attacks every year. Sulfur dioxide induced acid rain is not only affecting two-thirds of the country and may be reducing crop yields by as much as 30 %, but also nearly 50 % of it in Korea and Japan is traceable to China. Industrial dumping of untreated wastewater into rivers is rarely abated and municipal wastewater treatment rates are appallingly low, at 30 % nationwide. Thus, unchecked emissions have left half of China's rivers so polluted that their water cannot be used by either industry or agriculture. Moreover, 25 % of the Chinese population, mainly in the rural areas, is drinking unclean water.

Chen et al (2013) conclude in a recent study that China's explosive economic growth has led to relatively anemic growth in life expectancy. As such, air pollution from coal use has reduced life expectancy by about 5.5 years in northern China due to an increased incidence of cardiorespiratory mortality. An official of the Beijing City Municipality has recently stated that China will need to spend nearly US\$817 billion to fight air pollution (Yongqiang, 2013).

The global metabolism is changing due to the ascent of China (Simons, 2013: 20). Its fast economic growth and rising middle class have also made China one of the top consumers of resources such as oil, copper, aluminum and iron ore, tropical wood, and agricultural raw materials; thus raising the global environmental footprint of China (Mol, 2011). As the impact of this growth is being dramatically felt all over the world, the hitherto peripheral economies of the sub-Saharan Africa also share some of the costs as it happened during the ascent of earlier economic powers such as the Dutch Republic, the British Empire, Japan, and the United States. What makes the ascendance of the emerging economies like China different is the fact that

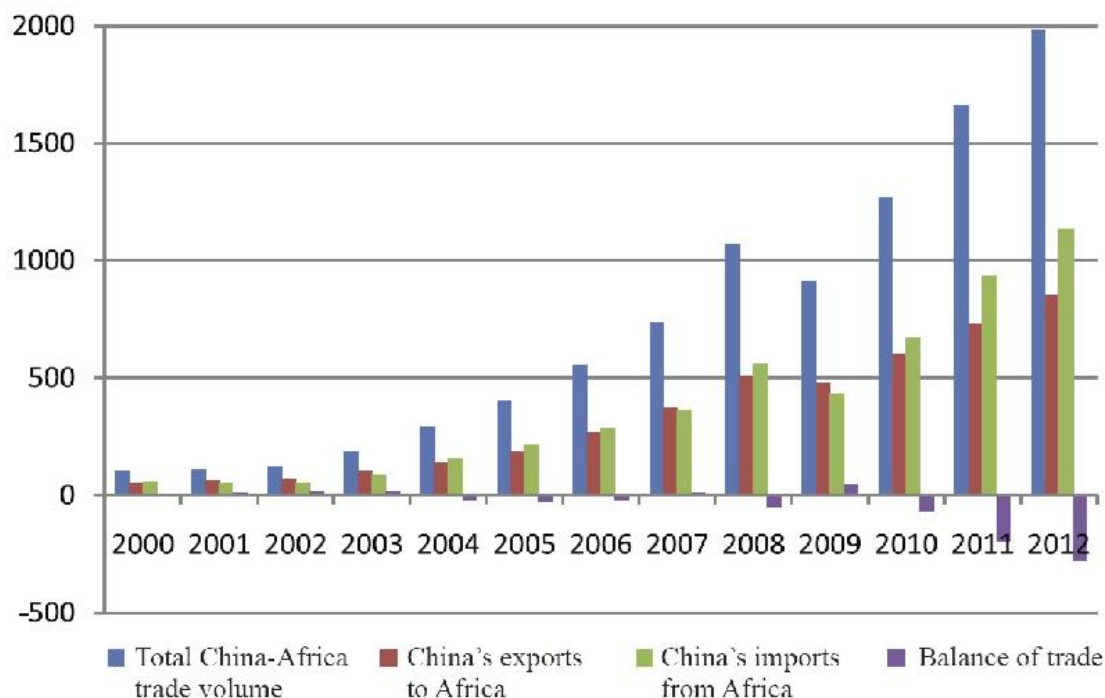
today's environmental degradation is too big a global concern to ignore compared to past centuries.

China's "going out" has been driven by a mixture of economic, political and environmental factors. First and foremost there is the shortage of domestic commodities and global oil price spikes (Tan-Mullins and Mohan, 2013). Urban et al. (2013) concur that China's rapid economic growth and population growth have depleted domestic resources and raised the resource exigency. Moreover, saturation of the Chinese market in some sectors and rapid technological progress at home have driven the expansion of companies overseas. In this regard, Mol (2011) suggests that institutional support by the government is a major driving force. Shinn and Eisenman (2012) add a couple of political factors driving the expansion overseas: developing good relations with other countries so that China can count on their support in regional and international forums; and promoting the "One China" Policy through curtailing Taiwan's official diplomatic ties and replacing them with recognition for Beijing.

The Environmental Footprint of China in Africa

China's economic engagement with Africa has shown dramatic progress in the past three decades with the total trade volume growing from about US\$1 billion in 1990 to \$200 billion in 2012 (Figure 1). As a result, China surpassed the U.S.A. as the single largest trading partner for Africa in 2009 (Shinn and Eisenman, 2012).

Figure 1: China-Africa Trade Volume 2000-2012 /unit US\$ 100 million (Xinhuanet. 2013a)



China's interest in Africa shifted gradually from political and ideological to largely economic with a special focus on the extraction of natural resources, the relative import of which is still small, but increasing rapidly with clear concentration on energy, minerals, metals and agricultural raw materials (Mol, 2011; Tan-Mullins and Mohan, 2013). Extractives (Table 1) have been the main focus of China's foreign direct investment (FDI) flows to Africa over the past decade, resulting in a negative balance of trade for those countries with fewer natural resources (Thomas, 2013).

Table 1: China's trade with Africa: Raw materials

Country	Raw material
Angola	Oil
Sudan	Oil
Congo Brazzaville	Oil, Timber, Base Metals
Equatorial Guinea	Oil, Timber
Gabon	Timber, Iron Ore, and Manganese
Zambia	Copper and Base Metals

Nigeria	Oil
South Africa	Iron Ore, Diamonds, Base Metals, Platinum, Manganese Copper, and Aluminum
Ghana	Manganese
Namibia	Copper
DR Congo	Raw Materials (miscellaneous)
Cameroon	Timber

Source: Thomas (2013)

Now there is a growing awareness and concern regarding some of the negative implications of Chinese investments in Africa. Accordingly public and private reactions are mounting, with some governments becoming more assertive in their interactions with China. In some countries, Chinese companies have been forced to stop operations due to economic and environmental disputes (Mol, 2011).

Concerns revolve around illegal and/or unsustainable resource extraction, lack of transparency and labor disputes. Peh and Eyal (2010) suggest that new environmental problems could emanate for two reasons. Firstly, Chinese companies have already set a bad precedent at home, and hence the legal restrictions placed on their overseas operations are likely to be even looser. Secondly, China might be tempted to “export” pollution to other continents as a result of the growing concern for the environment and mounting public uproar on polluting companies at home.

The environmental footprint of China in Africa touches upon various sectors. For example, Alden (2012) citing Kelley (2009) states that the unwillingness of Chinese mining companies based in Katanga Province of DR Congo to incorporate basic health and safety regulations, local labor laws and even industry environmental standards received harsh criticism. The following sectoral cases illustrate the emerging environmental dynamics in China-Africa relations:

Forestry: Simons (2013) explains why China, which was self-sufficient in lumber until the 1990s, eventually engaged in imports from other countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa. This was due to the heavy summer rains in 1998 that flooded the Yangtze River basin, killing thousands of

people and destroying enormous amounts of resources, which alerted Chinese leaders to the impacts of deforestation and soil erosion, and prompted them to take measures to ban local logging in most of the nation. As a result, for instance, 90% of log exports from Mozambique and 70% from Gabon and Cameroon are destined for China. While timber from Africa makes up only less than 5% of the Chinese imports, the forest degradation is quite alarming with more than half of global losses of forest cover between 2000 and 2005 happening on the continent (Asche and Schüller, 2008). More importantly, Taylor (2007) establishes that most of the African timber heading for China is illegal; i.e., Cameroon (50%), Congo Brazzaville (90%), Equatorial Guinea (90%), Gabon (70%), and Liberia (100%).

Mining: An assessment conducted in eleven African countries where there are active mining operations underlines that there is still a major gap with regard to how the companies address environmental issues associated with their extraction activities while, acknowledging that there is growing awareness and interest in CSR and environmental impact mitigation policies by Chinese companies operating outside of China (Scott, 2012). It is also further underscored that “[o]perations owned by state owned enterprises (SOEs) tend to be better run, more interested in and capable of implementing environmental impact mitigation and CSR programs than privately owned Chinese mining operations” (Scott, 2012: 4).

Wildlife: China ranks as the number one market for illegal wildlife or wildlife parts (McMurray cited in Felbab-Brown, 2011: 1). The wildlife trade monitoring network, TRAFFIC (2012), is deeply concerned about the illicit trade in wildlife from Africa to China which is exported as part of legitimate shipments of other natural resources, such as timber, more so because only less than 2% of cargo traffic is inspected before leaving Africa. These resources include ivory, rhino horn, abalone, sharks, sea cucumbers and pangolins.

Fishery: A study conducted by Pauly et al. (2013) reveals that Chinese deep-water fishing (DWF) is significantly under-reported. The annual average catch from 2000 to 2011 was estimated to be about 4.6 million tons, which is 92 % higher than the reported figure. Out of this, two-thirds of the catch comes from West Africa, which Pauly et al. (2013) call the “looting of Africa”. What is worse, about one-third of the Chinese DWF vessels were reported from West

African waters, 75 % of which are bottom trawlers, the most ecologically destructive types of fishing vessels. In terms of foreign currency, the loot from West Africa is worth more than US\$7 billion just from the Chinese DWF. It is worth noting, though, that China is the major, but not the only culprit in this business. For example, over half of all IUU fishing vessels observed fishing illegally in Guinean waters were Chinese.

Oil: Sinopec's experience in the Loango National Park of Gabon in 2006 is worth mentioning. After having been awarded a block located in the National Park, and upon completion of an environmental impact assessment (EIA), Sinopec started seismic exploration activities before the Gabonese Ministry of Environment approval was issued. A protest by local conservation groups concerned that the exploration activities threatened rare plants and animals led, in September 2006, to a decision by the Gabonese National Park Service to halt the company's operation and take subsequent measures (Jansson, 2009).

Infrastructure: According to Kaplinsky (2010), many infrastructural projects have been linked to resource extraction, and subject to criticism on environmental grounds. Tan-Mullins and Mohan (2013) also illustrate the "Angola mode" to show that the environmental situation is potentially exacerbated by the Chinese preference for using oil resources as repayment for concessional loans. However, Brautigam (2009) argues that the Chinese business design is flexible enough to accommodate such repayment methods and only opts for resources when they are the most secure means of ensuring a return. Besides, she adds that 'resource for repayment' is not the only model of concessional lending adopted by China.

Evolution of CSR Policy in China

Dahlsrud (2008) analyzed 37 definitions of CSR and identified five key dimensions; namely, environmental, social, economic, stakeholder and voluntariness. The first environmental dimension includes considerations such as: a cleaner environment, environmental stewardship, and environmental concerns in business operations. The most frequently used version that comes from the Commission of European Communities defines CSR as a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis. For the purpose of this paper, CSR is treated as

analogous to similar terms such as corporate responsibility, business sustainability, and corporate citizenship.

According to WEF (2012), the concept of CSR is relatively new in China, used widely as a formal concept only around the year 2000. Some “corporate citizenship” practices predated the institutionalization of the concept. But these were somehow abandoned owing to the dominance of profit-orientation in companies, to be later re-introduced following catastrophic local problems and China’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. WEF (2012: 10-12) suggests that the concept of CSR in China has passed through three stages since then:

i) 2001-2005: Re-Introduction of “CSR” after Joining the WTO

The re-introduction was driven by growing domestic demands and, more significantly, due to substantial influence from foreign companies. As a result, the central government launched the *Scientific Outlook on Development*, which is a “people-centered approach to development” (WEF, 2012: 10). This theory was initiated by ex-President Hu Jintao and successively endorsed by the Third Plenum of the 16th Central Committee and the Politburo in 2003 (Fewsmith, 2004). This has since then inspired some states like Shenzhen and Changzhou to take more action and academics, NGOs and other researchers in China to begin paying more attention to the citizenship efforts of large companies. There is evidence that the “Scientific Outlook on Development” still remains one of the key theoretical guidance tools. In a recent meeting of the Politburo of the Communist Party of China (CPC), President Xi Jinping reconfirmed the leadership’s commitment by beseeching members and officials to strengthen studies and practices around this theory (Xinhua, 2013b).

ii) 2006-2007: Evolution of the Corporate Citizenship Concept

This second period is marked by some major shifts, which include the following, among others (WEF, 2012: 11):

- The central government developed regional guidelines and revised the Company Law of 2006 to require companies to launch social responsibility initiatives.
- The Communist Party of China urged the enhanced social responsibility of citizens, enterprises and other organizations.

- The Shenzhen Stock Exchange (SZSE) introduced a set of *Guidelines for Social Responsibility of Listed Companies*.
- Chinese SOEs started to issue CSR reports, the forerunner being the SOE, State Grid.
- President Hu Jintao re-emphasized the importance of CSR following his 2007 visit to Sweden, after which the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) took the initiative to develop social responsibility standards.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs donated US\$10,000 to the UN Global Compact which led to a dramatic increase in the number of Chinese companies joining the initiative.

iii) 2008-Present: Accelerated Development (Stronger Standards)

A set of domestic and global factors has led to stronger consideration for CSR practices since 2008 (WEF, 2012). Government decided to close the Fujia Petrochemical Plant located in Dailan following public protests against leaking chemicals. The Wenchuan earthquake of 2008 and the Beijing Olympics triggered more alarm on the need for stricter regulations. Consequently, the State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) introduced a formal set of CSR reporting guidelines for central government owned enterprises (CSOEs). Then the SZSE and the Shanghai Stock Exchange (SSE) followed suit and, in 2009, both published social responsibility indices that aimed to help Chinese investors factor CSR into their investment decisions (WEF, 2012). SASAC then required all CSOEs to publish corporate citizenship reports by 2012. These measures have ushered in an era of stronger standards with much more awareness and active participation of the public through social media outlets.

Is CSR Working in China and beyond?

There is a mixture of views regarding China's CSR performance. Some analysts maintain that the recent proliferation of CSR regulations and guidelines in China simply represent window-dressing designed to greenwash vandalizing activities at home and overseas. Other scholars hold a more optimistic view that China has evolved to become a more responsible and accountable partner, which is demonstrated by the issuance of policy instruments and growing efforts towards their implementation.

Kolk et al. (2010) argue that there is a difference between domestic Chinese and international retailers, the former reporting more on economic conditions including philanthropy while the latter focus on product responsibility. Thus, they conclude that labor and environmental issues receive relatively little attention. Tang (2012) contests that, unlike in the West, CSR is primarily a government-guided activity in China rather than a private sector initiative; and hence CSR initiatives are more prominent in SOEs. Therefore, private companies should welcome and invite oversight from government, society, customers and other stakeholders, he recommends. Noronha et al. (2013) contend that CSR reporting in China is at a very preliminary stage and hence there is still substantial room for improvement through the concerted efforts of government, enterprises and researchers. Lin (2010) underscores the historical foundations and many real incentives for Chinese companies to introduce CSR, and equally stresses the numerous political, social and economic constraints that hinder CSR from developing at a quicker pace.

Finally, Mol (2011) optimistically argues that China is not yet one of the leaders in sustainability, but has increasingly considered environmental protection in its modernization program since the mid-2000s, along three strategies instituted in new environmental policies and institutions. These are: first, reducing the natural resource, energy and carbon intensity of economic processes via increased efficiency; second, shifting to renewable resources that are more sustainable and less polluting; and third, recycling and re-using materials through the adoption of the circular economy concept. Sustainability measures are being seriously introduced into both domestic and overseas investments, Mol concludes.

Overall, there are indications that CSR in China is not just a window-dressing exercise anymore, although the process has been protracted so has yet to take full effect. Zadek et al. (2012) posit that there are clear indications that CSR in China is moving fast from the compliance stage to strategic stage (endeavoring to gain competitive advantage by incorporating societal issues into business strategies) and onto the civil stage, where broad industry action is aligned to national sustainable development priorities. Even then, environmental issues have a better chance than human rights (Lin, 2010). Kuo et al. (2012: 284) concur that environmentally sensitive investments (ESIs) and SOEs pay more attention to disclosure of environmental protection issues, particularly in the areas of energy saving and carbon emission reduction.

When it comes to overseas investments, Tan-Mullins and Mohan (2013) argue that the outcomes of the CSR strategy in environmental protection vary widely due to the operating

procedures of the Chinese SOEs in combination with specific local political and economic structures. They further underline that in the presence of active advocacy groups empowered by local legislation, there is a propensity towards better CSR implementation.

A report compiled by the World Economic Forum (WEF) assessing Chinese overseas investments establishes that some Chinese companies, including SOEs, have made significant progress towards corporate citizenship, boosting local markets, creating jobs, launching environmental initiatives and helping to foster a new breed of social entrepreneurs. It also documented the best practices of 75 Chinese overseas companies, and noted that the participation of Chinese companies in the UN Global Compact is on the rise. And it noted that an increasing number of Chinese companies are publishing corporate citizenship-related reports based on sophisticated global standards such as the Global Reporting Initiative (WEF, 2012). On a similar note, Zadek et al. (2012) concur that CSR is already a mainstream concern in China and that the number of Chinese companies producing CSR reports is increasing. Along this line, policymakers are advancing policy measures in support of CSR, business leaders have developed positive attitudes toward CSR, capital markets have issued CSR guidelines and, most important of all, consumers are responding to CSR practices by changing purchasing practices. In a nutshell, the authors underscore that there is a rapid evolution from considering CSR as a foreign requirement and barrier to trade and investment towards embracing it as a key tool to augment competitive advantage and international standards, more so because it is increasingly perceived as a state-supported expectation for doing business.

So the China story in Africa is not altogether gloomy when it comes to CSR issues. There have been some positive stories, all earned through some effort, which may help in formulating future engagement strategies with Chinese investments. Gu (2009) posits that China's dramatic economic growth came with high environmental costs because CSR practices had received little interest and Chinese businesses in Africa were launched from this bad precedent. The growing interest in enforcing CSR by the Chinese government, however, has pushed some local companies out of business, which has resulted in the relocation of such businesses to other regions, including Africa, where regulatory measures are less stringent and barely enforced. Cases in point are the fisheries and forestry sectors. The introduction of new regulations due to the depletion of Chinese fishery resources prompted local fishers to move to aquaculture and distance water fishing. Similarly more stringent restrictions on domestic logging, again due to

resource depletion, led to increased imports from overseas (Power et al., 2012). Both these policy changes have environmental implications for Africa because China has become a leading trading partner to some of its countries.

However, this does not mean that all businesses from China are bad apples. The march of Chinese companies into Africa followed a process, which Gu (2011) calls the “Three Jumps”. Businesses in China first started exporting to Africa; then they started investing in production in Africa; and consequently they started to set up industrial parks (special economic zones). Whereas businesses are rushing into Africa, CSR performance is still trailing, one can conclude.

African Agency at Play and the Eminent Challenges

Scholars have documented the unsustainable practices of Chinese investments in a few countries. Equally importantly, in some countries, such unsustainable corporate behavior was received with a coordinated response and, sometimes, assertive action by various actors; these have proven to be instrumental in improving the behavior of these companies. The following are a few examples of these success stories:

i) Ghana: Multi-stakeholder consultation contributed to a good outcome (Hensengerth and Scheumann, 2011)

A multi-stakeholder consultation process has proven to be effective in minimizing social and environmental impacts in Ghana. The Chinese company, Sinohydro, was involved in the construction of the Bui hydropower dam in Ghana, a project that had immense social and environmental impacts. The Bui Power Authority, which was responsible for the planning and resettlement of local communities, had not complied with the recommendations of the Resettlement Planning Framework, particularly pertaining to proper consultation processes. Having prioritized speed in the construction of the dam, the authority rather deliberately avoided negotiations and opted for the hurried resettlement of the communities. The Ghana Dams Dialogue, a cross-stakeholder platform, was then initiated to address the lack of public consultation whereby representatives of affected people, government and NGOs took part. The civil society pressure from this process is believed to have contributed a great deal in improving the resettlement plan drawing on experience from failures in Ghana’s biggest dam, Akosombo, that was constructed in the early 1960s.

ii) Gabon: Civil society activism paid back (Jansson 2009; Mol 2011)

Sinopec, one of the three major Chinese SOE oil companies, was awarded a block located in the Loango National Park, Gabon in 2006. The company then undertook an environmental impact assessment (EIA) and proceeded to seismic exploration activities before the EIA got approval from the Gabonese Ministry of the Environment. This led to an uproar by conservation groups, which consequently led to the suspension of the company's operations. Jansson (2009) concludes that this process was crucial because the company was forced to revise its EIA in collaboration with the WWF and EnviroPass, a local Gabonese organization. Sinopec was only permitted to resume its activities after producing a better quality EIA document. Mol (2011) documented that, in 2010, Brainforest, a national environmental NGO in Gabon, successfully campaigned against the environmental impacts of the massive Belinga iron-ore development project combined with hydropower dam that is supported by the Exim Bank of China. Gabon has since then been delisted from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) for its poor reporting performance. Sinopec's Addax Petroleum is in a legal dispute with the Gabonese Government after it was accused in May 2013 for failing to pay customs duties and comply with other laws, which could result in Addax losing its license (Farge, 2013).

iii) Tanzania and Kenya: Government assertiveness stirred positive reaction from China (Kapama, 2013)

The Government of Tanzania impeached three Chinese nationals in early November 2013 for the unlawful possession of 706 pieces of elephant tusks that represented the slaughter of about 400 elephants and with a value of over US\$ 3 million (Kapama, 2013). The Chinese Embassy in Tanzania then reacted by requesting its citizens in Tanzania to strictly abide by Chinese and Tanzanian laws, and refrain from ivory or other smuggling. The statement from the Chinese Embassy also reconfirmed China's commitment to the protection of wildlife, through allegiance to the CITES Convention (Peoples Republic of China, 2013). There are other evidences indicating that China is responding positively to the concerns of illegal wildlife trade in Africa. In a landmark event, China helped arrest a Chinese man suspected of wildlife smuggling in response to allegations by the Kenyan government (Burgess, 2014). Furthermore, the China Endangered Species Import and Export Management Office seized tons of illegal wildlife products mainly including rhino horns and elephant ivory, and arrested over 400 suspects in January 2014

(Xinhua, 2014). In the same month, for the first time ever, China publicly destroyed over six tons of confiscated ivory in the Guangdong Province, which is a major hub of ivory trade in China (New York Times, 2014 cited by Lawson and Vines, 2014). The authors, however, argue that this number constitutes a small portion of the total volume of ivory confiscated between 2009 and 2013, which is estimated at 45 tons.

iv) Sudan: At times, some corporations are generous

In Sudan, the Chinese oil company, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), supported some CSR activities like construction of schools, hospitals and setting up the world's largest biodegradable wastewater treatment facility in some oil fields to eliminate discharge of effluents (CAITEC 2010 cited in Power et al., 2012).

v) Zambia: Strong government reaction prompted positive response (Mol, 2011)

In 2006, the Government of Zambia shut down a coalmine run by Collum Coal Mine Industries of China for its sub-standard working conditions and failing to implement environmental and safety regulations. Also, in May 2007, the Zambian government closed Chimam Manufacturing Plant, a manganese mine in Kabwe run by a Chinese trans-national corporation (TNC), as a response to local concerns over high levels of air pollution and failures to implement pollution control measures (Mol, 2011). Against this backdrop, Mol (2011) argues that these daunting environmental challenges have prompted Chinese state agencies, financial institutions and the larger state-owned and private companies to introduce voluntary and self-regulatory CSR measures. Apart from such policy instruments, an initiative to incentivize model enterprises was launched for Chinese TNCs operating in Africa, such as the 2010 Green Banking Innovation Awards and the 2010 Top Chinese Enterprises in Africa Award.

Challenges abound, though, in both China and investment destinations in Africa when it comes to environmental issues. Tan-Mullins and Mohan (2013) posit that China's CSR initiatives fall short in the implementation and enforcement of policies, mainly owing to the decentralized system of governance in China that eventually devolves authority to local governments. To make matters worse, the performance of local governments is assessed through economic targets, which undermines and de-prioritizes CSR initiatives.

Compagnon and Alejandro (2013) suggest that the matter becomes more complex because there are at least five categories of actors from China with varying levels of CSR performance: SOEs closely controlled by the Chinese Communist Party; private Chinese investment banks with government connections; PRC sovereign wealth funds (SWFs) such as the China-Africa Development Fund; medium-sized enterprises owned by Chinese local government structures; and small, private companies and individuals. They then argue that the debate usually fails to make any distinction between the types of actor involved, who exhibit varying levels of performance in Africa. Regardless of the policy instruments in place, the Chinese government is incapable of controlling the last two categories. Tang (2012) agrees that there is an imbalance between SOEs and private companies in the conduct of CSR. Mallory (2013) holds that, today, 70 % of the Chinese DWF industry is small and medium-sized private companies, as opposed to 25 years ago when the industry was exclusively state-owned, a dynamic that has made the rules less stringent. And Kapama (2013) stresses that there is also the issue of individual Chinese migrants who get involved in illicit activities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

China's environmental footprint in Africa is growing largely due to the environmentally sensitive nature of its trade and aid projects, which include infrastructure and public works, oil and gas, and mining (Tan-Mullins and Mohan, 2013). The current body of literature suggests that there is a growing appreciation of the challenges and the urgent need to rectify them, a process that needs to take into account the following key lessons for both Chinese and African actors and interests:

- Not all Chinese companies are SOEs, and there is discrepancy in CSR performance among the different types of businesses (Tang, 2012; Compagnon and Alejandro, 2013).
- The government of China does not currently have full control of all types of investments reaching Africa and lacks a proper coordination mechanism. Particularly, private companies, SMEs and individual Chinese immigrants must be viewed very carefully because they have demonstrated poor CSR performance and weak public accountability (Peh and Eyal, 2010; Mol, 2011; Mallory, 2013; Compagnon and Alejandro, 2013).
- Regional SOEs show a tendency to falsify and exaggerate information because there is always the temptation to want to be regarded as economically successful, which oftentimes

happens through deliberate understatement of externalities including environmental costs (Peh and Eyal, 2010; Mallory, 2013).

- Unlike in the West, civil society activism in China is exclusively focused on domestic issues and may not be counted on as a reliable advocacy tool to monitor and bring into account companies investing overseas. Creating an enabling environment for vibrant civil society in Africa, though, if positively employed, can reduce impacts and enlarge the gains for Africa (Alden and Alves, 2009; Jansson, 2009; Tan-Mullins and Mohan, 2013).
- The loose environmental policy of African governments is a major impediment in implementing CSR instruments by Chinese companies. There is, therefore, an urgent need to ensure the enforcement of national policy even when tensions arise among local actors driven by different, but not necessarily conflicting objectives (Alden and Alves, 2009; Jansson, 2009; Hensengerth, 2013; Tan-Mullins and Mohan, 2013; Compagnon and Alejandro, 2013). In line with this, African governments need to pay greater attention to local civil society voices, and encourage the creation of platforms to deliberate on these issues.
- African countries need to be aware that they have stronger bargaining power if they stand united; they need to be more assertive in speaking against environmental destruction by foreign companies (Tan-Mullins and Mohan, 2013; Vickers, 2013).
- Unilateral measures in enforcing CSR programs might be risky in terms of prompting disinvestment by companies (Cornelissen, 2013), which reinforces the need for concerted action by African states.

The current literature also attests that there is room for more African agency in the implementation of CSR programs of Chinese businesses. However, the lack of relevant policies and their implementation presents a tremendous challenge for most African countries. China's CSR policies provide that all Chinese companies should strictly abide by the local laws, which also reflects well in the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) (Mol, 2011; Compagnon and Alejandro, 2013). However, most African states neither strictly enforce environmental policy nor do they have a vibrant civil society that can advocate against environmental misdeeds. Worse still, "China has an Africa policy... [while] Africa doesn't have a China policy" (Vickers, 2013: 673).

In order for CSR policies of Chinese overseas companies to be properly implemented and environmental impacts minimized, the principal responsibility lies in African state and non-state actors. The CSR performance of Chinese companies in Africa is a function of the governance, policy and institutional circumstances of the destination economy (Hensengerth, 2013; Tan-Mullins and Mohan, 2013). Cornelissen (2013: 125) argues that African states also need to productively participate in intergovernmental CSR processes, which include, among others, more strategic engagement with transnational corporations so that the latter could incorporate CSR programs into their investment plans; encouraging regional economic communities to seriously consider and harmonize regulations in Africa around CSR; and actively promoting the CSR discourse in the bilateral and multilateral talks with emerging partners.

Some sporadic successes registered owing to active African agency notwithstanding, there remains an urgent need to address at least three currently outstanding challenges: illegal fishing, illegal timber and illegal wildlife trade, all of which are costing Africans a lot of money and resources. The bottom line is that African agents could still play greater and better roles by strengthening national policies and institutions; coordinating policies and actions collectively at regional and continental levels; and by using the FOCAC platform to deliberate on issues and seek solutions. “Africa must set terms of China’s engagement”¹ as Raila Odinga, the former Prime Minister of Kenya rightly stated.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Professor Tim Shaw for his consistent guidance, technical support, provision of information/documentation, and useful comments in the write-up of this article.

Notes

¹ Source: <http://www.chinaafricaproject.com/china-africa-raila-odinga/>

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