

A Tale of Two Nations

Hard Terms

China-funded projects pushing African countries towards a debt trap

6-8% interest charged by China on loans that are neither soft nor long term

Equal Partner

India's development partnership is based on needs identified by the partner countries in Africa

Focus on key infrastructure projects and not just capacity building

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Africa prefers India's non-interfering development model over China

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NEW DELHI: India's non-prescriptive and non-interfering development partnership model is fast finding favour in resource-rich Africa, where China's push, ostensibly for

capacity building, is receiving bad press for being hard and exploitative, according to experts on Indo-African partnership.

Recent media reports have carried allegations that Chinese business houses are treating African workers as slaves, and that the Asian giant is exploiting local resources, including agricultural, mineral and marine.

On the other hand, the experts cited earlier said India views Africa as a collaborator and an equal partner.

This is also evident from the [Indo-Japan Asia-Africa Growth Corridor \(AAGC\)](#) document launched by Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) and his Japanese counterpart [Shinzo Abe](#) last week.

Although the AAGC is being seen as providing an alternative to the One-Belt-One-Road (OBOR) initiative of China, its key priorities — rural development and agriculture, energy, education and skill development, regional connectivity and quality of life—contrast that of China, which subject experts and media reports say wants to harness resources from the continent.

That apart, China-funded projects are also seen pushing African countries towards a debt trap as the 6-8% interest charged on loans are neither soft nor long term.

Experts pointed out that India's support of development and capacity-building projects in Africa through line of credit has seen 20 major ventures completed in the last two years. The focus under this mechanism is now on key infrastructure projects and not just capacity building.

India's development partnership is based on the needs identified by the partner countries in Africa, like elsewhere in Asia and Latin America. At the last India-Africa summit in 2015, Modi had announced a credit line of \$10 billion for the continent.

"The downslide in the country's image has not pleased Beijing, since these headlines have appeared within days after Djibouti, a naval base, was set up as a logistical support facility in the vicinity of the US's Camp Lemonnier, a special operations outpost in the sweltering east African country," according to a report titled 'Africa: China's Long Game and Bad Press', brought out by Hyderabad-based think tank Centre for Asia Africa Policy Research (CAAPR). According local media reports, there are two elements of "Chinese imperialism" in Africa.

The first being the treatment of workers, both locals and Chinese, as slaves, and the other being exploitation of local resources. Experts said overfishing by Chinese companies is threatening western African economies.

Last month, Nigerian portal Naij.com carried an article saying "workers are treated like slaves, and they are cheated of their wages". The portal quoted a worker of a Chinese company as saying, "I and my fellow workers here at Wempco groups of company, especially at Magboro branch, want to speak out to the public and human rights... Slapping, breaking of backbones, firing and punishing our Nigerian fellow workers has become apride for our Chinese masters."

The slowdown in the Chinese [economy](#) is further contributing to Beijing's exploitative strategy and reduction in salaries paid to workers in Africa, pointed out an expert who has studied Chinese investments globally. But it is not just local media reports. Voice of America carried a report that was critical of Chinese labour practices in Africa. The victims mentioned in VOA's August 24 report included Chinese migrant labourers.

Chinese labourers in Africa are also not spared. China expectedly described the VOA report as western propaganda. However, the VOA report is based on a study undertaken by the Institute of African Studies of Zhejiang Normal University. The study observes that "55% of Chinese firms cannot meet the standard working hours in Africa".

The CAAPR report, cited earlier, quoted a Chinese worker in Angola as saying the Chinese energy major he worked for "treated them like slaves".

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