

Africa needs BRICS to play more prominent role

By Kwesi Prah Source: People's Daily and Global Times

The mantras and phenomena of "dominating markets" and "maximizing profits" have contributed to reproducing a status quo that many have understood to be "under-development," or the development of a "Third World." Many have also attributed these phenomena, primarily, to the shrewd and dubious prescriptions of the World Bank and IMF, since the terms underdevelopment and Third World are essential economic indicators or descriptors. However, when the dust settles, and the political left and right put down their swords for a parley (in the form of the G8/G20/G77 meetings), the battlefield draws a stark and bloody picture. The steady rise in unemployment, the depletion and pollution of vital resources, unnecessary and unmitigated violence upon the vulnerable in society, and most importantly, the wanton exploitation and disenfranchisement of the majority of peoples in Africa, Asia and Latin America all highlight the pressing need for radical responses to change the status quo.

At face value, China and South Africa are two nations with vastly different capabilities, challenges and plans. Their geo-political footprints and objectives are so different that it is as though one was comparing the Chinese Panda with the tropical African Silverback Gorilla. However, with a more nuanced analysis of interests, it appears there is a binding theme that plays a very important role in positioning these two nations as catalysts of change.

This theme, grounded in the notion of unity, or as Chinese foreign policy dictates, a harmonious world, is more than just idealistic or altruistic posturing. The most successful tool in galvanizing the productive and strategic-planning capacities of African peoples over the past century and a half has been the vision of Pan-African unity. In fact, African nationalism was born out of Pan-Africanism, and any successful institutional achievement has been under the umbrella of Pan-Africanism. It is only under this pre-condition that any meaningful economic development agenda can take root in Africa.

For China, at a time when its soft diplomacy in Africa is being heavily scrutinized, its ability to understand the strategic interests and deficits of the various African nations in fierce competition is crucial. It must realize that it is only through a shared vision of political and economic unity that it would gain any substantial benefit and advantage. In practical terms, this means shifting the emphasis away from dealing with African nations bilaterally. The current neo-colonial political and economic architecture in Africa does not bode well for any development agenda. Therefore denouncing and disregarding it is paramount.

This means that any realistic developmental agenda proposed through the BRICS will have to address these non-productive and unconstructive elements of political and economic organization. Both South Africa and China have in the BRICS, and its corresponding banking platform (the New Development Bank), an opportunity to facilitate the formulation and construction of long-lasting mechanisms. Such mechanisms would have far-reaching consequences for the reform and eventual overhaul of international financial capitalism and trade. By banking on the BRICS, a

meaningful alliance would mean that South Africa and China cooperate on strengthening intra-African parliamentary processes, which at present are under the aegis of the poorly financed African Union (AU). By focusing on this source of political power, one is then able to focus on harnessing the different skill sets within African society, and focus efforts on supporting the necessary regional development plans, such as energy-producing networks, transportation networks and related services.

For the New Development Bank (NDB) to chart new paths and open up new opportunities, it has to defy its operational mandate, which is to primarily accrue profits from lending money, and the investments it makes. Redistributing value by making bonds available to labor unions, collectives and consortiums directly related to development initiatives on the ground becomes crucial to the realization of the agendas set by the AU, and also secures the interests of Chinese investments in Africa. The NDB would also have to invest heavily in indigenous and localized capacities to ensure new business initiatives. By doing this, one encourages the youth within society to take the initiative in how they create business, on their terms.

Lastly, to counter-balance the pressure put on the NDB by the World Bank and IMF regarding profitability, campaigning for the downgrading or erasure of national debt is imperative. The Euro-American financial oligarchies draining African economies have to account for their colonial legacy, and their business interests need to be brought into line. In light of these tasks, China and South Africa can chart new paths and avenues of change through the BRICS.

The upcoming eighth annual BRICS summit, to be held between Saturday and Sunday in Goa, India, represents an auspicious moment to engage with these challenging, but manageable issues.

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