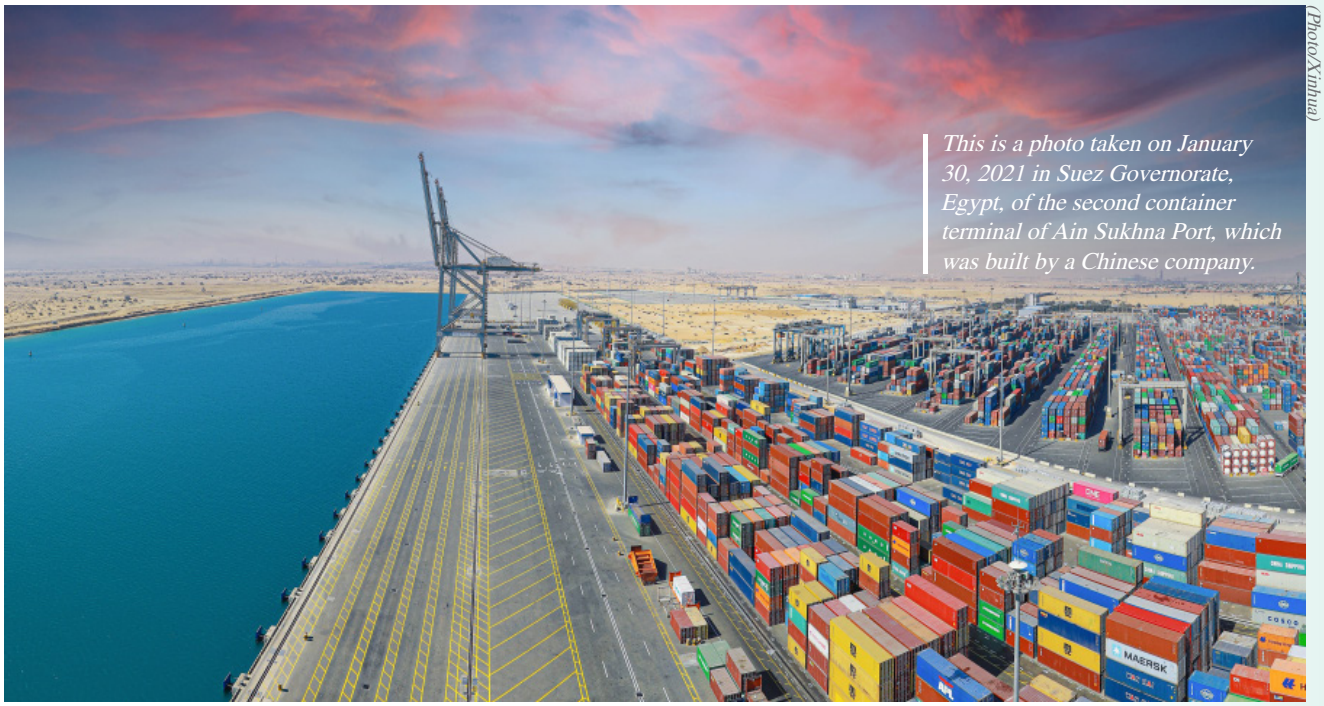

This is a photo taken on January 30, 2021 in Suez Governorate, Egypt, of the second container terminal of Ain Sukhna Port, which was built by a Chinese company.

(Photo/Xinhua)

VISION AND PRACTICE OF CHINA-AFRICA BELT AND ROAD HIGH-QUALITY COOPERATION

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The Belt and Road Initiative is China's proposition for seeking common development with other countries in the world. The year 2023 marks the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative. Over the past ten years, the initiative has connected more than 150 countries in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America, covering two-thirds of the world's population and accounting for about 40% of the world's GDP. Looking from a global perspective, the investment in sub-Saharan Africa in Belt and Road cooperation has increased by 130% in sub-Saharan Africa over the past decade, among which the amount of construction contracts has increased by 69%. Sub-Saharan Africa has become the second largest destination of the Belt and Road Initiative-related investment after Southeast Asia, and China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation has moved from the periphery to the center

(Photo/Xinhua)

On October 20, 2023, Mozambique's Prime Minister Maleane (front second left) visits Huaxin Cement Co. in Wuhan.

stage. As the development demands of the African continent are highly complementary to the Belt and Road Initiative, African countries and China have both gained development opportunities in Belt and Road cooperation. In October 2023, the 3rd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation was held in Beijing, with the theme of "High-quality Belt and Road Cooperation: Together for Common Development and Prosperity". President Xi Jinping announced eight steps by China to support high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, including building a multi-dimensional Belt and Road connectivity network, supporting an open world economy, carrying out practical cooperation, promoting green development, advancing scientific and technological innovation, supporting people-to-people exchanges, promoting integrity-based Belt and Road cooperation and strengthening institutional building for international Belt and Road cooperation. From the perspective of the achievements, Belt and Road cooperation between Africa and China has been fruitful, which has laid a solid foundation for building a China-Africa community with a shared future. Gearing up China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation for a stage of high-quality development is in the interest of both parties for economic upgrade.

CHINA'S VISION ON BELT AND ROAD COOPERATION WITH AFRICA

Marginalized in the world economic system, Africa has long lacked effective growth and sustainable development dynamics. China has brought new opportunities for Africa's development through Belt and Road cooperation. China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation features seeking development through cooperation, complementing each other's advantages and achieving mutual benefit and win-win results.

First, the vision of China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation originated from China's new concept of international order. China sympathizes with the development path of Asian, African and Latin American countries, opposes hegemony and advocates democracy-based international relations. Africa is regarded by China as a truly equal partner. President Xi Jinping's first overseas visit after taking office in 2013 was to Africa and he put forward the idea of building a "China-Africa Community with a Shared Future". The vision is regarded as "a 'development re-balancing strategy' based on China's wisdom and farsightedness, which focuses on building and shaping of new international relations for the common and cooperative development of mankind, and it is essentially different from the outdated international relations system based on law of the jungle and hegemony dominated by the Western countries in modern times."

Second, common development and win-win cooperation represents the core value for China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation. China's concept of cooperation with Africa, while taking into account China's own development, is based on Africa's needs, focusing on areas in urgent need of development, and constantly broadening and consolidating the foundation of cooperation. At the Johannesburg Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2015, President Xi Jinping put forward the "ten cooperation plans" which marked the formal integration of Africa into the Belt and Road Initiative and embody the core principles of common development and win-win results for cooperation between the two sides.

Third, by honoring its commitment in Belt and Road cooperation with Africa, China showcases its strong faith in the program. At the High-level Dialogue between Chinese and African Leaders and Business Representatives and the Sixth Conference of Chinese and African Entrepreneurs in 2018, President Xi Jinping pointed out that China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation is pragmatic and in good faith. Shortly before the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2018, the China government announced that the "ten cooperation plans" for China and Africa had been fully implemented, and China had become Africa's largest trading partner for nine consecutive years. China's commitment and trust-

worthiness is the underlying reason for Africa's cordial support for the Belt and Road Initiative.

Fourth, China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation also features phased progress. At the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2018, it was proposed that Belt and Road construction should be connected with the implementation of the African Union's Agenda 2063, the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the development strategies of African countries, and that efforts should be made to cement traditional advantages and create highlights in new economic fields. On the basis of the "ten cooperation plans", the summit also put forward "eight actions" to beef up support for industrial development, diversified financing and youth vocational training in extremely underdeveloped countries in Africa. In June, 2020, in view of the shortage of vaccines and difficulties in the economy and people's livelihood in Africa, the Chinese and African leaders held an Extraordinary China-Africa Summit on Solidarity against COVID-19. President Xi Jinping proposed to speed up Belt and Road construction, focusing on health and hygiene, resuming industrial production and improving people's livelihood, and at the same time, write off some African countries' interest-free loan debts to China by the end of 2020 while accelerating digital economy and new energy cooperation.

Fifth, the goal of China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation is to build a China-Africa community with a shared future. The ultimate goal of China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation is to promote the building of a China-Africa community with a shared future. The pragmatic cooperation under the Belt and Road framework has laid a solid foundation for accelerating construction of these efforts. At the Eighth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation held in 2021, President Xi Jinping made a keynote speech themed as Uphold the Tradition of Always Standing Together and Jointly Build a China-Africa Community with a Shared Future in the New Era, unequivocally linking China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation with the goal of building a China-Africa community with a shared future, which has been widely acknowledged by African countries.

Jiangsu Provincial People's Hospital takes gastrointestinal endoscopy as a clinical technology pilot, and carries out Belt and Road medical pilot cooperation with medical institutions in Pakistan, Egypt and other countries and regions.

(Photo/Xinhua)

THE FOUNDATION FOR CHINA-AFRICA HIGH QUALITY BELT AND ROAD COOPERATION

After nearly a decade of practice, China-Africa high-quality Belt and Road cooperation is underpinned by a solid material foundation, a multi-level cooperation system and wide public support.

The first is a solid material foundation. Thanks to the support lent by the Belt and Road projects and the increasing political mutual trust, China and Africa have formed close relations of mutual benefit with win-win results. On the whole, the trade between China and Africa showed a rapid growth trend. Although trade volume between the two sides temporarily declined under the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, it has then quickly recovered to the original level and rebounded rapidly. In 2022, the bilateral trade volume between China and Africa reached US$ 282 billion, up by 11.1% year-on-year. Specifically, China imported US$ 117.5 billion from Africa and exported US$ 164.5 billion to Africa, up by 11% and 11.2% respectively. China has maintained its position as Africa's largest trading partner for 14 consecutive years. In 2022, China's direct investment in Africa was 3.43 billion US dollars. China's new contracted projects in Africa amounted to 73.2 billion US dollars, with a turnover of 37.8 billion US dollars. According to a report by the Economist, in 2020, 31% of the infrastructure projects valued at US$ 50 million or more in Africa were undertaken by Chinese enterprises, and the percentage was a mere 12% in 2013. Belt and Road cooperation has made important contributions to African industrial development.

The second is a multi-level cooperation system. China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation is a model of

multilateralism, which demonstrates multiple levels of cooperation. On the one hand, China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation mechanism relies on the overall growth of China-Africa relations. By November 2021, China has established comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership with nine African countries, comprehensive strategic partnerships with three countries, strategic partnerships with six countries and partnerships of comprehensive cooperation with seven countries. China has also established bilateral committees, diplomatic consultations or strategic dialogue mechanisms with 21 African countries and the African Union Commission, and set up economic and trade joint (mixed) committee mechanisms with 51 African countries. The elevation of overall relationship between China and Africa has laid the foundation for Belt and Road high-quality development and institutionalization efforts. On the other hand, in addition to signing Belt and Road cooperation documents with specific countries, China has also set up cooperation mechanisms to engage with Africa as a whole. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, established in 2000, has become a solid institutional foundation for China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation. The Forum covers wide-ranging areas of cooperation such as politics, economy, people-to-people and cultural exchanges which has fully integrated with the concept and mechanism of the Belt and Road Initiative.

The third is wide public support. China adheres to the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, honors its commitment to Belt and Road cooperation with Africa and has made remarkable achievements. According to the 2022 African Youth Survey, 77% of the respondents believe that China is the most influential foreign country on the African continent, and 76% believe that China's influence is positive. Therefore, Belt and Road projects enjoy relatively positive evaluation in Africa. According to Afrobarometer, from 2019 to 2021, 63% of Africans in 35 African countries found that China's economic and political influence in Africa was "positive" or "fairly positive". A German polling agency found that 62% of African respondents wish to be involved in Belt and Road projects. The agency also found that Africa's satisfaction with Belt and Road projects was higher than that of any other region that also partners with China. The positive recognition from Africa has arisen from Belt and Road projects' contribution to the local economic development, and naturally from strengthened cultural and people-to-people exchanges between China and Africa.

DIFFICULTIES AND SOLUTIONS OF CHINA-AFRICA HIGH-QUALITY BELT AND ROAD COOPERATION

From Belt and Road Initiative to high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, the endeavors serve the inherent need of economic development for both China and Africa, and represented the future path for sustainable cooperation between the two sides. However, some difficulties in current China-Africa cooperation that need to be addressed.

First, China and Africa face sustainability challenge to the existing cooperation model. Financing the Belt and Road projects in Africa mainly relies on China and the vehicle is relatively single, which has brought big pressure on China. Some scholars point out that construction model of the contracted infrastructure projects

(Photo/Xinhua)

The Mwanza Satellite City water supply project in Tanzania is an important livelihood project under the China-Africa Belt and Road Initiative.

funded by China's state loans would be unsustainable. The limited-scale trade between Africa and China and the long-standing trade deficit are not conducive to sustainable Belt and Road cooperation. The current situation of China-Africa trade is essentially hampered by the backward industry status and structural problems of the African countries, and may easily trigger nationalism in some of the African countries, and even resistance to investment, products and technology from China.

Second, some African countries suffer from unstable political situation, poor social security and unsustainable policies. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the socio-economic situation in some African countries has deteriorated with widening wealth gap, rising youth unemployment rate, and coup d'état. From August 2020 to February 2022, there were seven coups or attempted coups in Africa. Some African countries (such as Mali, Burkina Faso, etc.) have been attacked by Islamic State and the remnants of Al Qaeda on substantially more occasions, and the number of attacks by radical Islamic organizations in African countries has increased by 70% from 2020 to 2021. Changes of governments often cause existing Belt and Road projects to be reviewed, which adds uncertainties to implementation of the projects. The local social security issues increase security costs and construction risks.

Third, African countries have different perceptions of China. Although African countries generally hold positive views of China, there are big differences among different countries in their perception of China. According to the Afrobarometer survey in 2021, more than half of the population in Kenya, Ethiopia, Morocco, Sudan, South Africa, Zambia and other countries believe that their governments have borrowed too much from China and there is a risk of "debt trap". A few Chinese businesses having not enough knowledge of the local laws and regulations are involved in labour environmental disputes. Some Africans have xenophobic views towards Chinese workers taking jobs in their countries. Many factors, such as the narrative about the so-called China mounting "neo-colonialism" and "debt trap" in Africa by the Western political communities and media, have affected local people's feeling and perception of China.

Fourth, competition among major countries in Africa has become ever more intensified. In recent years, the United States, the European Union, India, Japan, among other countries and regions, have been increasingly worried about development of Belt and Road Initiative in Africa, and have launched Africa strategies in obvious competition with China.

Although facing many challenges, China-Africa cooperation has a solid foundation. By solving the difficulties, the two sides will have a very broad prospect for high-quality Belt and Road cooperation. In the future, the two sides need to focus on the following issues.

First, high-quality Belt and Road cooperation needs to focus on industries that are in urgent need of development in Africa. China-Africa high-quality Belt and Road cooperation requires more attentions to the weak links in African industrial development and boosted collab-

(Photo/Xinhua)

On September 27, 2023, the Second Conference of the Belt and Road Economic Information Partnership and 2023 Shanghai Entrepreneurs Conference for the Belt and Road High-quality Development kicked off in Shanghai.

oration in infrastructure construction, food supply and manufacturing development. Efforts need to be made to improve the empowerment of science, technology and digital technology, develop green eco-agriculture and high value-added manufacturing, and achieve a high degree of integration of infrastructure projects with the local industries.

Second, it is necessary to further improve the systems for China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation has served as the major platform of promoting Belt and Road cooperation between the two sides. However, at present, it is faced with challenges such as mechanism and system innovation, cooperation scale re-adjustment, cooperation expansion, as well as the pressure of competition in international rules and norms dominated by the Western countries. Therefore, China and African countries should strengthen institutional cooperation at overall and industrial levels.

Third, China-Africa high-quality Belt and Road cooperation requires more independent development on the part of African countries. China's aid to Africa has been in place for decades, and the sustainability of the current cooperation model is being challenged. High-quality Belt and Road cooperation requires more attentions to the independent development ability of African countries, and efforts should be made to explore diversified and flexible ways in investment, financing and profit return, actively involve African domestic enterprises, and improve the standardization and transparency of the financing process.

Fourth, it is imperative to narrate to the general public stories of China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation. The Western media's false reports on China and Belt and Road projects have caused negative impacts on some African people. At present, there has been a cognitive gap on China and Belt and Road projects in Africa where the governments remain much interested while the civil society remain indifferent. The Chinese government and enterprises need to strengthen communication with the local communities through multiple channels and tell stories of China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation compelling to the general public.

What happened in the past shows that China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation has a clear path and pragmatic results. A stable and close cooperation mechanism has been established, making Belt and Road projects the sure course towards a China-Africa community with a shared future. Under the current complex international situation, China needs to improve the quality of Belt and Road cooperation with Africa up to the standard of "high standards, sustainability and benefits to people's livelihood" and to make steady progress. China-Africa high-quality Belt and Road cooperation also requires targeted engagements with African industries, innovation in institutional platforms, ensuring the sustainability of cooperation, and narrates the stories of China-Africa cooperation in compelling ways. In August 2023, the 15th BRICS Summit was held in Johannesburg, South Africa. It's decided to add two more African countries, i.e. Egypt and Ethiopia, to the BRICS cooperation mechanism. With the strong synergy formed by the Belt and Road Initiative and BRICS plus cooperation mechanism, China-Africa cooperation will continue to upgrade and pace up, and lend impetus to building a China-Africa community with a shared future.