

# ANALYSIS OF CHINA'S FOOD SECURITY COOPERATION WITH AFRICAN COUNTRIES IN THE NEW ERA

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Since 2020, due to the compounding effects of the COVID-19 epidemic, climate change and the Ukraine crisis, the problem of food security in Africa has deteriorated in a spiral and has featured the issue of people's livelihood, which has been a key concern for the development of African countries. International cooperation is an important path to ensure food security in Africa. As a major partner in food security cooperation with African countries, China has pledged to help Africa enhance its food self-sufficiency, and the white paper "China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals" released in November 2021 lists "helping Africa's agricultural development" as an important area of cooperation. In the new era, China-Africa cooperation on food security will become more in-depth and serves the building of the China-Africa community with a shared future and the development of the China-Africa strategic partnership.

## THE PHILOSOPHICAL GUIDANCE OF CHINA'S COOPERATION WITH AFRICA ON FOOD SECURITY

Food security is an important area where China-Africa security cooperation directs and China contributes its philosophical wisdom. China's cooperation on food security in Africa is an important part of China's participation in solving the global governance deficit and addressing non-traditional security threats. It is conducive to

supporting the lengthening of the South's slab of the cask of global governance system, pooling the strength of South-South cooperation, as well as promoting a more balanced global governance system that reflects the wishes and interests of the majority of countries, especially developing countries. As an important participant, builder and contributor to the current international system, China adheres to the philosophical guidance with Chinese characteristics in the process of food security cooperation with Africa. The ideas and propositions not only fully reflect China-Africa joint efforts to build a comprehensive strategic partnership and a China-Africa community with a shared future, but also accord to China's outlook of global governance, i.e., extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits.

### I. China's diplomatic philosophy towards Africa stresses the importance of sincerity, real results, affinity and good faith

Food security is an important area for China's cooperation with Africa, and its cooperation process reflects China's "sincerity, real results, affinity and good faith" approach to Africa. First, "sincerity" is reflected in China's posture towards African food security cooperation. China has always defined itself as Africa's most reliable friend and partner in its food security cooperation with Africa. In China's view, agricultural technology, agricultural equipment and high-quality seeds are tools rather than weapons to help African countries improve their food self-sufficiency. China respects Africa's food development strategies at the integrated and country level and, on this basis, strengthens the exchange of experience with African countries in agriculture, especially in food security. For example, China supports the implementation of the African Union's Agenda 2063 in the area of agriculture and the implementation of Algeria's "one million hectares" food cultivation program, etc.

Secondly, "real results" is reflected in the

original aspiration of China's food security cooperation with Africa. China's cooperation with Africa on food security focuses on maximizing the value of China's agricultural advantages and governance experience in Africa, so as to fill Africa's shortcomings in agricultural science and technology, agricultural infrastructure and agricultural talent. A number of agricultural research institutions such as China Agricultural University, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences and Northwest Agriculture and Forestry University have undertaken agricultural training programs in Africa, helping Africa to solve the problem of shortage of agricultural talents; the rice farms established by China in Mauritania, the African Agricultural Demonstration Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the rice demonstration projects in Uganda, Burundi, Madagascar and other countries have all contributed to increasing local agricultural production and farmers' income.

Thirdly, "affinity" is reflected in the state of China's food security cooperation with Africa. Addressing the issue of food security is a core concern of African people. China's cooperation with Africa on food security deepens the good feelings between the Chinese and African peoples and strengthens people-to-people ties between China and Africa. Chinese agricultural enterprises, agricultural research institutions, agricultural experts and other private actors actively participate in food security cooperation with Africa, building a harmonious and stable social state and a foundation of mutual trust in Africa. For example, as non-profit earning, highly policy-driven and de-personalized "state-class agents", agricultural experts help African countries solve their agricultural technical problems and share their experience in food production with African agricultural practitioners, while at the same time drawing closer to each other through daily informal contacts with partners in the countries. This not only enhances the rapport and effectiveness of formal cooperation, but also helps to

reverse the negative perception of China in African countries due to the influence of Western discourse.

Fourthly, "good faith" is reflected in China's attitude to African food security cooperation. Unlike other industries, agriculture is greatly affected by natural factors such as topographic, climatic and hydrological conditions, and Chinese agricultural production models and technologies are not universally applicable in Africa, leading to many difficulties in China's food security cooperation with Africa. China's consistent attitude of "treating each other with sincerity and dealing with the issue appropriately" is an indication that China's cooperation on food security in Africa is not a "political show", but a serious commitment to Africa and an effective responsibility of a great power. It also shows that China is a solution provider rather than an escapist to the problem of food security in Africa. It also demonstrated that China is often able to overcome difficulties in the face of the very different agricultural environments of certain countries. For example, China has sent agricultural experts to Africa to participate directly in crop cultivation and technology trials.

## II. China pursues a "security-development" approach

Food security is a complex non-traditional security that overlaps security and development, and its governance needs to be carried out simultaneously in both security and development dimensions. In 2019, the China-Africa Agricultural Cooperation Forum was held in Sanya, and China-Africa reached a consensus on the key outcomes to be implemented in the next phase, including continuing to dispatch 100 senior agricultural experts to Africa by the end of 2021, training 10,000 agricultural talents for Africa in the next three years, and promoting the establishment and upgrading of agricultural demonstration parks in Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, Mozambique and Tanzania while supporting the establishment of a full production-processing-marketing agricultural industry chain in Africa, and promote the establishment of a number of new agricultural industrial parks in Africa in the next five years. As can be seen, China's cooperation with Africa on food security aims to integrate the two main issues of food security and agricultural economic development. On the one hand, technical guidance and training reflect China's governance experience of "hiding food in technology", with a view to solving Africa's production dilemma through technology diffusion, so that Africa can shift the root of its sense of food security from being given by others to being given by itself. On the other hand, the construction of agro-industrial parks is an effective way to diversify the agricultural economy and increase local employment, generating income for African governments and increasing the income of African people, thus increasing the purchasing power and risk-survival capability of countries and individuals.

To sum up, "sincerity, real results, affinity and good faith" is the

guiding philosophy of cooperation based on a strategic perspective, which is thoroughly embodied by the actions of the state, agricultural enterprises, agricultural research institutions and agricultural experts, and is the fundamental guideline for China's food security cooperation with Africa. The "security-development" concept is a concept of cooperation based on a sustainable perspective, aiming to achieve both food security and sustainable agricultural economic development. The two concepts are interdependent and together form the conceptual framework for China's food security cooperation with Africa.

### THE MAIN MODELS OF CHINA'S FOOD SECURITY COOPERATION WITH AFRICA

Guided by the principles of "sincerity, real results, affinity and good faith" and "security and development", China has always adhered to the principles of "assuming joint responsibility, pursuing win-win cooperation, delivering happiness for all, enjoying cultural prosperity and common security, and promoting harmony between man and nature". China has been helping Africa improve food security by contributing Chinese solutions, intelligence and efforts. From a comprehensive perspective, China's cooperation with Africa on food security mainly includes the bilateral cooperation model of "China + African country" and the multilateral cooperation model of "China + international organisations + African countries".

The first is the bilateral cooperation model of "China + African country". Under the bilateral cooperation model, China's food security cooperation with Africa is mainly carried out through the establishment of agricultural technology demonstration centers in Africa and the dispatch of agricultural technicians to Africa.

Agricultural technology demonstration centers are an important platform for China's food security cooperation with Africa. On the one hand, the establishment of agricultural technology demonstration centers in Africa is both an embodiment of Chinese local gov-

ernment serving the national foreign exchanges and a strategic opportunity to promote local agricultural outreach. Each province hopes to showcase its own agricultural characteristics, embed its technological advantages in the demonstration centers and make them an important entity in improving food security in African countries. This has prompted localities to choose more suitable agricultural enterprises to help Africa escape from its production difficulties and improve its food self-sufficiency rate, thus increasing its agricultural influence in Africa. For example, the China-Mozambique Agricultural Technology Demonstration Center, run by Hubei Province, has established a standardized and sustainable industrial chain in Mozambique, driving local farmers to increase production and income. It has become a pilot project for the construction of an overseas agricultural cooperation demonstration zone by the Ministry of Agriculture of the People's Republic of China. At the same time, it has enabled the province's agriculture to enjoy a good development mode where domestic and foreign markets and resources interact well.

On the other hand, in order to ensure the sustainable operation of the demonstration center, agribusiness will take the initiative to innovate agricultural technology and actively explore farming models that are in line with the actual needs and natural environment of the target countries. The China-Tanzania Agricultural Technology Demonstration Center, run by Chongqing Sino-Tanzania Agricultural Development Co., Ltd, has demonstrated high rice yields of 580kg per mu (about 3500kg per acre), nearly six times the local yield, and the vegetables it grows in the country are supplied to major supermarkets and Chinese-funded institutions, which not only improves the self-sufficiency rate of food in the

*Rice expert from China Overseas Group Green Agriculture West Africa Limited shows mature rice in Abuja, Nigeria.*



Photo/Xinhua

country, but also ensures the economic returns. Meanwhile, China also adopts a “turnkey” approach, allowing the government of the target country to take ownership of the demonstration center and directly participate in its management, providing the necessary supervision and services to regulate the behavior of its contractors, thus achieving sustainable operation of this institution.

The dispatch of agricultural technicians to Africa is China’s intellectual path to food security cooperation with Africa under the bilateral model. The ultimate goal is to promote sustainable agricultural development in African countries and to prevent Africa from developing external dependency by striking a reasonable balance between food security and the agricultural economy. This is also in line with the principle of “supporting Africa in cultivating its endogenous growth capacity, accelerating its autonomous and sustainable development, and supporting Africa in exploring its own development path that suits its own conditions, formulating national development strategic plans, strengthening capacity building and improving governance”, which China has been emphasizing in its support for Africa’s development. The agricultural technicians have been highly praised by the governments of Egypt, Uganda, Guinea-Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe, Burundi and many other African countries for their outstanding contribution to the improvement of food production and agricultural economic development in Africa, and have been described by American scholar Beborah Bräutigam as “China’s gift to Africa”.

The second is the “China + International Organizations + African countries” multilateral cooperation. In 2020, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has made “multilateral cooperation under the international food and agriculture mechanism, with a focus on supporting African countries to improve their comprehensive food production capacity” a priority for international cooperation in agriculture. It demonstrated China’s commitment to Africa. This indicates that China’s multilateral food security cooperation in Africa has become an important element of its overall planning and macro strategy.

From a comprehensive perspective, the “China + FAO + Africa” model of food security cooperation has become more diversified, mainly including the economic path based on financial donations, the intellectual path based on the dispatch of experts and providing trainings, and the institutional path based on institutional innovation. For example, the South-south Cooperation Trust Fund donated by China to the FAO has benefited several projects in Africa, and the cooperation model of “experts exploring the way, government providing the platform and enterprises acting” jointly established by the Chinese government, expert groups and enterprises has helped to improve rice production in Uganda and other African countries. The joint mechanism of equal participation and

shared responsibility between China and FAO has helped African countries to cultivate a sense of self-development and self-blood generation. The “China + WFP+ Africa” model of food security cooperation mainly focuses on sharing China’s experience in agricultural value chains and food supply chains with African countries through the WFP China Center of Excellence. It conducted training on value chain management in Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya and Senegal in 2018. The “China + IFAD + Africa” model of food security cooperation is more oriented towards financial support. In February 2018, China donated US\$10 million to set up the China-IFAD South-South and Triangular Cooperation Fund at IFAD to support South-South food and agriculture cooperation like experience sharing and ability building. It has funded 17 South-South cooperation projects covering more than 30 countries, including African countries.

The bilateral and multilateral cooperation models reflect the hard, soft and smart capacities of China’s food security cooperation with Africa. Firstly, the hard capacity refers to the capacity to cooperate mainly in terms of funding and agricultural science and technology. It demonstrates China’s ability of material giving on food security cooperate with Africa. The dispatch of agricultural technicians, the establishment of agricultural technology demonstration centers and training of skills cannot happen in a sustainable way without economic, scientific and technological support. At the same time, China’s food security cooperation with Africa also pushes for the improvement of the hard capacity and the rethinking of the application of it. The former mainly manifests itself in the secondary creation of agricultural technology by Chinese experts according to the natural environment of Africa, while the latter is mainly reflected in the fact that China’s financial investment in Africa makes doing within the capacity standard. For example, the Chinese government will only bear the operating funds of an agricultural technology demonstration center for



*The site of the hanging ceremony in Matanjitisa village, Nakuru County, Kenya.*

the first three years, but let it will be self-financing in the later years.

Secondly, soft capacity is the capacity for cooperation based on the supply of methodological public goods and agenda setting. It is an important manifestation of China's conceptual contribution on food security cooperation with Africa. If Africa is to transform itself from a passive role relying on support out of the region to an active player that develops by itself and thus achieves endogenous long-term sustainable development, it is far from enough to rely on material assistance alone; it also needs intellectual support. Agricultural training and farming experience sharing hosted by China both at home and in Africa is in essence a sharing of governance experience. It aims to facilitate the docking of China-Africa governance concepts and development method and help Africa to adjust its mindset of governance and independently explore and innovate techniques and models that are in line with African farming.

Finally, smart capacity refers to the capacity that skillfully combines hard and soft capacities. It's a combination of material giving and methodology sharing. Some scholars believe that it takes smart capabilities for a country to participate in global governance because global problems are diversified and interrelated. They spill over and bring harms broadly. This understanding actually tells the incentives for China to cooperation with Africa on food security in this smart way. Food security is a multidimensional, diverse and spillover issue. Multidimensionality refers to the fact that food security

is measured in terms of adequacy of supply, availability, effective use and stability, and insecurity at any single level threatens the entire food security system; diversity refers to that food security concerns countries, households and individuals, and insecurity at any single level threatens others; and spillover refers to that food security is measured in terms of adequacy of supply, availability, effective use and stability, and insecurity at any one level may threaten others. Spillover refers to the tendency for food security problems to affect the overall security of a country. It is on the basis of these three characteristics that China has also adopted a combination of hard and soft approaches to its food security cooperation with Africa. For example, the agricultural technology demonstration centers and farms discussed above combine hard power, such as financial investment and technology transfer, with soft power, such as personnel training and experience sharing, so as to boot the development of African agricultural economy, increase food production and improve farmers' incomes. In this way, it is hopeful to ensure national, household and individual food security and to prevent social unrest caused by food crises.

### **PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA'S COOPERATION ON FOOD SECURITY IN AFRICA**

Food security is an important part of national security as a whole and is related to social stability and people's well-being. It is thus highly valued by both China and Africa. Since 1982, Chinese government numbered documents related to agriculture the first of the year 25 times in total. They have covered many topics such as food security, agricultural modernization, rural revitalization and structural reform on the supply side of agriculture. At least 40 countries in Africa have issued the implementation plans of Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). 30 countries have signed this document and 23 countries have formulated their own agricultural development strategies under the CAADP framework. While China's agriculture has been developing steadily and food security is effectively ensured, Africa's agricultural development, however, is lagging behind and the issue of food security has not yet been effectively addressed in comparison. In the future, in order to improve the overall performance of China's food security cooperation with Africa and help it achieve self-reliant food security, the following four aspects can be considered to

implement comprehensive measures.

First, we should actively explore the cooperation model of “China + Africa + non-African countries” and bring in third parties to alleviate financial pressure. Europe can be a partner to build “China + Africa + EU” models of food security cooperation. As early as 2008, the EU’s Trilateral Dialogue and Cooperation between the EU, Africa and China identified agriculture and food security as one of its four priorities. In 2016, both trilateral cooperation seminars between China, France and Africa held in Paris and Beijing, identified agriculture as an important area. The China-UK-Malawi Aquaculture Development Project and the China-UK-Uganda Cassava Development Project are both progressing steadily. The cooperation agreements reached between China and Western countries and groups, together with the positive attempts already made provide mechanisms for the realization of the “China+Africa+Europe” model of food security cooperation and early examples. The promotion of this model will help Chinese and foreign agribusinesses to leverage each other’s resources, expand their sources of funding, mitigate project risks and ensure sustainable operations.

Second, consideration could be given to establishing a problem-solving team on food security cooperation in Africa. The team shall include the departments responsible for African affairs in the relevant ministries and commissions, agricultural enterprises in Africa, agricultural research institutions and agro-technical experts. It is advisable to establish a “warranty period” according to the size of the agricultural project and the length of the im-

*Agricultural vocational and technical secondary schools build by Chinese aid to help Cameroon’s agricultural development.*



(Photo/Xinhua)

plementation cycle, so that if African countries face technical problems after the withdrawal of Chinese experts, they can report them to the relevant Chinese institutions in Africa within the time limit, and the problem-solving team can then solve them in a unified manner.

Third, China needs to strengthen its cooperation with Africa on food security in the area of food crisis prevention and control. It would be appropriate for China to consider helping Africa to strengthen its prevention capacity at two levels: food storage and food information sharing. On one hand, China should give full play to its infrastructural advantages to help African countries build grain warehouses, reduce grain losses by improving the quality of the existed ones, and ensure their storage. On the other hand, a food information sharing platform can be established between China and Africa through internet technology. It will facilitate understanding of Africa’s agricultural policies and food production situation and provide a basis for China’s decision making on food security cooperation with Africa. Meanwhile, it also helps ensure information symmetry for collaborative governance in times of crisis.

Fourth, China should strengthen its training for African farmers and support for smallholder projects. China’s cooperation with Africa on food security should adhere to the practical principle of “relying on farmers and benefiting farmers” by reaching smallholders to understand the real situation of agricultural production in Africa. China can use agricultural technology demonstration centers, farms and agricultural parks as a basis to offer training courses specifically for African farmers. A village should be seen as a collectivity, and family a unit, and the courses should try to include every rural household instead of only a handful of farmers as representatives to a village which is the unit in this case. In this way, it can be expected that the capabilities of African farmers will be improved in a general manner. In addition, the development fund jointly set up by China and the International Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) should increase its support for projects for smallholders, such as mechanization and loss reduction of grain storage, etc. It can be considered that five countries in each of the five African regions be enlisted as pilot ones, that is, East, West, North, South and Central, and then apply the experience to smaller and larger regions, so as to create a large-scale effect of linking points to lines and to boot the development of the whole region. 🇨🇳