Opportunities In The Sino-African: A Case Study On Niger

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Abstract
The People's Republic of China has presented toward the start of the 1980s, a strategy of fast modernization and industrialization, bringing about the decrease of neediness and the advancement of an amazing mechanical economy. The blast of the industrialization in China's economy needs new approaches for its sustenance and this became a central goal for the Chinese Government. The African mainland then with a populace of more than 1 billion and a surface of 30,221,532 km² is a noteworthy source of raw materials and has an expansive amount of characteristic assets, including precious stones, sugar, salt, gold, wood, iron, cobalt, uranium, copper, bauxite, silver, and huge stores of oil. Niger covers a land area 1,270,000 km², making it the largest country of West Africa. The country is rich in diverse natural resources, Uranium, Coal, Petrol, Iron ore, Tin, Phosphate, Gold and Gypsum. Niger also represents the world 3rd largest reserve of Uranium.

In fact, the People’s Republic of China and the Niger need each other in this Sino-African cooperation in the sense that the country is the under-developed and the government is looking for investment in multiple fields in order to achieve development and economic growth when China needs natural resources in or order to achieve its economic expansion. The People’s Republic of China seeks to acquire oil, gas, minerals, and other natural resources to boost its economic growth, and the Republic of Niger has abundant resource reserves whose extraction represents its principal economic productivity.

Keywords: Niger, China, cooperation, opportunity, relations.

1. China’s Perspective
The increasingly growing presence of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Niger result first from its need in natural resources and raw materials capable to sustain its economic and other such as security, international legitimacy and the search for a market to export Chinese manufactured goods; these need to be analyzed separately.

Natural resources
Since the new China’s policy toward the African continent has been launched, China’s number one interest in Niger became the access to oil, minerals, and other raw materials in order to boost its industrialization efforts. Such strong interest in African countries can be seen as part of the larger going out strategy that China initiated in the late 1990s¹. This strategy encourages, in fact, state-owned and private companies to invest in countries abroad, particularly in those rich in natural resources such as Niger.

President Hu Jintao made a trip to the African continent in 2004 where he visited four countries; this is with the aim to arrange some agreement with the government in the domain of hydrocarbons. China’s economy is in perpetual growth and the government aim to diversify it sources of supply in natural resources in order to sustain this growth. China occupied the place of 8th world largest petrol importer in 2000, 4th largest importer in 2003 and its petrol importation increased from 27% of the world’s total consumption in 1999 to 37% in 2002. The needs of the country are growing every year and it is necessary to diversify the supplies in order to satisfy these needs in energy.

Again, the People's Republic of China is predicted, to overtake the United States in terms of oil imports worldwide by 2020 and will become the largest global consumer by 2035². The country, in

order to guarantee its future supply, is heavily investing in the oil sectors in several African countries such as Niger.

China is not only interested by hydrocarbon in the Niger but also other natural resources such as Coal, Uranium, Phosphates and Gypsum; China is in fact exploiting petroleum in Niger. The China National Petroleum Corporation is operating in Niger since 2011 and is in charge of the exploitation of the country’s reverse, the corporation has also signed several exploration agreements with the government in order to look for more reserves. China is aiming to extract Uranium in the Republic of Niger; the country has important unexploited reserves and represents 3rd largest uranium reserve in the world.

China is also extracting coal and platinum in South Africa, the country has the largest coal reserves in Africa and represents 10.6% of the world total reserves. Chinese corporations are also exploiting platinum and copper in Zambia and Democratic Republic of Congo and wood in the republic of Guinea.

In sum, the aim of satisfying the needs in energy in order to sustain its industrialization is the main reason of the People’s Republic of China’s engagement with the Republic of Niger since the new China’s African Policy has been adopted.

International Legitimacy

The People’s Republic of China sees in the Niger a key diplomatic, strategic, and geopolitical platform upon which it can operationalize its fundamental principles of equality, non-interference, and South-South solidarity among developing nations. China considers that fortifying its collaboration with Niger will strengthen its authenticity in the global arena. This will without a doubt reinforce the Chinese government in its aim of creating a more reasonable international order that promote harmony, success, and balance in the world.

The People’s Republic of China considers itself as the largest developing country in the world; while on the other hand, Africa is the continent that has the greatest number of developing countries. According to an interview with the Ambassador of Niger in the People's Republic of China, the success of China in Africa has reinforced its status in the world as a superpower. Another heavy reason of China's engagement with Africa is the aim to increase and maintain its influence in the United Nations. In fact, African countries represent more than one-quarter (1/4) of United Nations member states and they occupy three non-permanent member seats in the United Nations Security Council. The support of Niger Republic and the other African countries to the People’s Republic of China when there are votes in the United Nations is an advantage for China because it can easily bloc the western decisions that it disagree with and also win when it is proposing something.

Such case already happened in 1971, when the African countries constituted 26 of the 76 total votes supporting the People's Republic of China taking over the China seat from Taiwan in 1971. President Mao Zedong even declared at the time: “it is our African brothers who have carried us into the United Nations.”

Furthermore, the votes of Niger in the United Nations are helping to defend the Chinese government from criticism in the domain its human rights policies. Gestures by Western nations to censure China over its human rights record at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights Council have failed on several occasions due to support from African countries.

While the People's Republic of China and Taiwan have engaged into a diplomatic competition on the African continent, the Chinese government is actively working to result in the cessation of ties between Taipei and its few remaining diplomatic partners on the continent, these are São Tomé and

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Príncipe, and Swaziland. Burkina Faso just joins the group of African countries having diplomatic ties with China by re-established relations with China on May 2018, after cutting off ties with the island of Taiwan.

In fact, China in obedience of its *One China Policy*, does not establish any diplomatic relation with a country which recognize Taiwan and reward those which have ties with it by rapidly expanding its economic engagement. Malawi for example after recognizing Beijing in January 2008, recorded a boom of Chinese aid and investment, including the building of a new parliament, a national conference center, schools, roads, wells, medical assistance, and scholarship for students to come study in the People’s Republic of China.

Security Interests

Another reason motivating the engagement of the People's Republic of China with the African continent is security. In fact, Beijing considers that the security, prosperity, and stability of the African continent are intimately connected to the general wellbeing of the China-Africa cooperation. A republic of Niger that is economically alive and whose government institutions and security organizations are capable of satisfying the continued trade and investment will not only benefit the Niger citizens but will also benefit Chinese activities in the country.

Consequently, key terms such as common prosperity, peace, security, and human development are clearly highlighted in the People's Republic of China’s various white papers on Africa and meetings between Nigerien and Chinese officials. The Chinese government considers that insecurity and instability in Niger can have a bad impact on its economic interests on the continent. Some internal conflict due to Islamist movements (Boko haram) and civil manifestations have already endangered the safety and the protection of Chinese employees working for Chinese companies operating in Niger. This is why the People’s Republic of China considers security as an important interest in the Republic of Niger.

Nevertheless, we have to note that the People's Republic of China is a major arms supplier to African governments, constituting around 25 percent of conventional arms sales to Africa and argues that sovereign states have the right to purchase military equipment; this even leads to several critics. According to the British academic Ian Taylor, "China's insistence on the rights of sovereign states simply disguises its bottom line of profit and resource gaining, which arms sales to Africa possibly facilitate."

However, the People’s Republic of China remains the largest contributor to the United Nations peacekeeping operations in Niger among the five permanent United Nations Security Council members. China is undoubtedly contributing to the security on the African continent and consequently promoting peace and stability in the region.

Trade Opportunities

The People’s Republic of China does not only perceive Niger as a vast minerals resources pool but also a large market to the export of its manufactured goods. Since the creation of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, trade between China and Niger did not stop growing indeed. China is today the largest trading nation in the world and Niger’s first trade partner. The underdevelopment of the country’s industries is an advantage for China in the sense that it can easily sell the manufactured goods produced in the P.R.C; Markets in Niger are today full of product Made in China.

China has taken over the Nigerien markets in almost every domain; Textiles, Shoes, electronic appliances, domestic and kitchen appliances. This is also one of the reasons behind China's engagement with the Republic of Niger. The products made by China and sold on in the country are usually very appreciated by the consumers because they are often cheaper than those produced locally.

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A lot textile and smartphone companies are today established in the country; the Chinese products in the Republic of Niger have made an impressive success and this one of the People’s Republic of China’s target in the country.

2. Niger’s Perspective

Niger reveals to be one of the less developed countries in the world; the countries is rich in different type of natural resources but there is lack of means to extract and exploit them. Niger also severely lack of infrastructures and need investments in multiples field in order to achieve its economic growth and development. An African official stated "China's development model sets a very good example for African nations, it is a model which shows how a country can develop from a low level of production to a very high level of production and it is the correct model for all developing nations, especially for African nations”\textsuperscript{10}.

He continued saying “Companies in the west are business-oriented, they are to make profits in whatever projects they participate in, they look for what they can get out of it, not what African countries would get out of it; China does not have that attitude, it helps the African nations to build their own capacity to develop and that’s the difference we very much appreciate\textsuperscript{11}. We can understand from this statement that countries in Africa, particularly Niger, prefer cooperating with the People’s Republic of China than any other western country. Serge Mombouli, also argue that “the Chinese bring concrete values to the African continent when the western countries bring intangible values; Africa doesn’t need more electricity, jobs for its population than transparency and democracy”\textsuperscript{11}.

Since the China-Niger relations started expanding, the country also has several interests in the People’s Republic of China. Niger’s major preoccupation today is to achieve economic development and China is helping it in this aim. Niger needs investment, infrastructure development, trade and also political recognition from China. Mr. Jean Ping, ex-chairman of the African Union commission during an interview stated: “for the first time in African history, we are engaged in cooperation where we can benefit something, it has never been the case”\textsuperscript{12}. These shows how positive is the Cooperation between China and Africa viewed by African leaders; the country’s interests in this cooperation are to be analyzed separately indeed.

Natural Resources Extraction

Niger is one of the richest countries on the African continent in term of natural resources, though the government doesn’t dispose efficient human and industrial resources capable to extract and exploit these natural resources. A study by the Oxford Policy Management, British consultancy conducted in December 2011 considered that “the majority of African countries (34 of them) are mineral dependent; this is defined consistent with the International Monetary Fund's definition of export dependence as relying on both fuel and non-fuel minerals for more than 25 percent of their tangible exports. Among the 34 countries, a majority of (19 of them) are relying on minerals for more than half of their exports, and three-quarters (27) became increasingly dependent on mineral exports over the previous 15 years (1995–2010)\textsuperscript{13}, this is case for the Republic of Niger.

This study confirms how natural resources' extraction is important for Niger and knowing that the government lack materials and humans resources capable for the extraction of the multiple natural resources available in the country, it is easy to understand how Niger need China in this cooperation.

Again, the World Bank reported that revenues from natural resource extraction generated an average of 60 percent of governments funding in Niger and 45% of government budgets in countries

\textsuperscript{10}“China’s Development Model Good Example for African Nations: CCM Vice-Chairman of Tanzania,” Xinhua, June 21, 2012.
\textsuperscript{11}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12}Interview with M. Jean Ping, “China is a strategic partner for infrastructure development in the African continent” l’inter, N 3213, January 29\textsuperscript{th} 2009.
\textsuperscript{13} Dan Haglund, Blessing or Curse: The Rise of Mineral Dependence among Low and Middle-Income Countries, Oxford Policy Management, Oxford, United Kingdom December 2011.
rich in other natural resources and this is the case for Niger. This let understand that most of the countries on the African continent are dependent on natural resources exploitation for producing the revenues needed to keep their governments running; this is also the case of Niger, 3rd Uranium reserve in the world and also rich in petrol and other raw. The China National Petroleum Corporation is in charge of the extraction and the exploitation of country’s petrol reserve since 2011.

The People's Republic of China is also heavily investing in natural resources Niger, this is even the first reason of its presence; According to the United States International Trade Commission, as of 2011, approximately 80 percent of the Chinese imports from the Niger consisted of natural resources. Furthermore, from 2003 to 2010, more than half of China's Foreign Direct Investment in Africa was focused to the petroleum industry. Oil and gas production in Africa is expected to grow faster than in other parts of the world. Oil reserves in Africa grew by over 25 percent over the past two decades while natural gas grew by over 100 percent, and oil production is expected to continue to rise at an average rate of 6 percent per year for the probable future.

Natural resources extraction is primordial for the Niger, it constitutes the first source of finance of country’s government and on the other hand the People’s Republic of China is in need of these resources in order to sustain its economic development, an interlaced interest comes from this situation. Natural resources are in fact the center of the China-Niger relations.

**Investments opportunities**

The Republic of Niger is particularly willing to attract investment in a varied range of sectors. China is today the first investor in the Republic of Niger and this constitutes an important opportunity for the government. IssoufouMahamadou, President of Niger Republic stated during the Forum on China-Africa cooperation last August in Beijing “When I accessed to power in 2011, 64% of Nigeriens were living under poverty line, it decreased to 44% in 2016 and my aim is to bring this down to 21% by 2020. The People’s Republic of China should be a model for Niger and I hope Chinese firms will invest more in my country for the government to achieve this goal” he continued saying that “The government of Niger has adopted several codes and agreements in order to attract and protect foreign investments in Niger, I hope China will particularly participate in the transformation of my country by investing in diverse domains as they did in their own country 40 years ago.”

In fact, Niger needs investments from China in order to achieve its economic growth, and its relationship with China constitutes an opportunity the government is seizing. The raise of the People’s Republic of China in Niger is undoubtedly explained by the fact that China is involved in each key sector of the economy; these are the mining and the infrastructure sectors which constitute the first source of revenue for the government. Ali Guimba, economist of the country even stated “This is what Niger needs at the moment”.

The Republic of Niger would without a doubt welcome approaches that make employments for the citizens, especially when jobs promotion from the Western countries is insignificant these days. Western private investments have considerably reduced because of several challenges indeed, and most of their aid has been focused in fields that only promote human development instead of economic development. The reality is that Niger need foreign investment in minerals, manufacturing, and construction in order to create more needed jobs for the population and to promote economic growth. The People's Republic of China is ready to invest in any sector of the economy in Niger and that is what the government is looking for because it promotes economic development in the country.

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14 World Bank, Africa’s Pulse, Vol. 6, October 2012.
17 Interview with IssoufouMahamadou, President of Niger Republic, Beijing, China, August 2018.
18 Ali Guima, Nigerien economist highlighted the importance of the relations between China and Niger, arguing that this partnership is much more fruitful than the one with western countries.
Again, African countries need to create stable jobs for their citizens immediately, particularly the youth. The McKinsey Global Institute, a consulting firm, found that only 28 percent of the African people have stable and salaried jobs. The institute estimates that “while African countries will create approximately 54 million constant jobs over the next decade, as many as 122 million additional people will enter the labor force during that period”\(^\text{19}\). This is in part because of the high birth rate on the continent. In fact, the Republic of Niger has one of the highest fertility rates in the world, which mean the government, should imperatively create jobs for people and the coming generation also. Knowing that the relations between China and Niger are increasingly growing, it is an opportunity for Niger to create more jobs with the Chinese companies’ presence in the country.

**Infrastructures and Trade opportunities**

Since 1999, China’s construction sector has seen an annual growth of 20 percent, making the People’s Republic of China the largest construction market in the global economy. The Republic of Niger is particularly looking for foreign investment in the field of infrastructure. Cherif Chako, a Nigerien economist stated “It is China that is behind oil projects which is currently financing the government in Niger. China is also the first investors of the largest infrastructure projects and these are based on long term repayment and deadlines that are flexible enough for our economy; we cannot have better” he continued saying that “Western countries cannot grant us such opportunity, I think the best approach for Niger today is China”\(^\text{20}\).

In fact, the defective or insufficient water and electricity has a negative impact on the production of industries in Niger. The condition of infrastructures in the country is also making its manufacturers less competitive in world markets and Niger government wants to solve this problem. This is the reason why the presence of China in Niger is a huge opportunity for the country. The multiple investments in the field of industrial infrastructures China is undertaking in the country will undoubtedly make the production of the industries more efficient and that will result in the creation of a bigger market for Nigerien goods.

The China-Niger relations also cover human development; In fact, China is training students from Niger by granting those scholarships and it is also supporting rural development, providing or improving health care in the areas of the country lacking of it. This indeed helps the Nigerien government to demonstrate that its cooperation with the People’s Republic of China is resulting in concrete improvements in the lives of the local citizens. According to a study by Ernst & Young in 2012 “Poor infrastructure,” is presently a major reason of the African continent’s underdevelopment, this is also the case for Niger and the cooperation of the country with China is an opportunity to improve for it to improve its infrastructures.

Trade is also an important aspect of the relations between the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Niger. Consumers in Niger consumers have welcomed the flow of goods from China in the local markets; this is principally because the Chinese goods are much cheaper than those ones made locally. Thousands of Nigeriens have become traders of Chinese goods in locals markets with the expansion of the relations between China and Niger.

Mr Karidjo Hamadou, Minister in charge of commerce in Niger stated “Trade between China and Niger is particularly increasing; this is due to the multiples agreements the countries have signed and also the strengthening of the relations between Chinese and Nigerien traders”. According to the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Niger, trade between the two countries amounted 318 million US dollars in 2014, recording an increase of 59% compare to the previous year.

Niger principally exports natural resources and agricultural goods to China and the latter export manufactured goods (textile, clothes, shoes…), electronic and domestic appliances to Niger. This represents an opportunity for Niger because citizens have now access to several goods that used to be a privilege, only for people with high-income. With the expansion of China-Niger trade relations,

\[\text{19} \text{David Fine, } Africa \text{ at Work: Job Creation and Inclusive Growth, McKinsey Global Institute, August 2012.}\]

\[\text{20} \text{Interview with Cherif Chako, Nigerien economist.}\]
markets in Niger are full of products made in China; these are cheap and affordable for almost everyone.

**Political Recognition of Niger**

Political leaders in Niger have welcomed the People’s Republic of China’s new policy toward the country, emphasizing the Chinese government’s respect of the country’s sovereignty as proof that they have moved from the old period. Niger was in fact, colonized by France for several decades; the country gained its independence in 1960.

In fact, Nigeriens leaders and citizens still remember the old times, the colonization period where they suffered from several injustices and inequalities. The government is now willing its sovereignty to respected and be treated with equality in any interaction they get into with a foreign country; the China-Niger cooperation is based on equality as states the China’s Africa policy paper, the principle of equality between China and Niger is also frequently highlighted during official meetings21.

The Republic of Niger is aiming for a new international order in which its sovereignty can be respected and treated as equal in international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank. Nigerien leaders perceive their relations with the People’s Republic of China as a political opportunity in the sense that the country’s sovereignty is well respected unlike to its relations with some western countries such as France.

The People's Republic of China frequently highlights that its African partners are sovereign states equal to any other country; This is even reaffirmed by ZhongJianhua, China’s special envoy to the African continent in March 2013 when he stated “African countries want to be treated equal states, and this is what many Western countries do not understand, or are at least are wanting to respect; China knows that we have to treat people in Africa as equals”22.

President Jacob Zuma, during the opening ceremony of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in South Africa stated: “The African continent is satisfied with its engagement with the People’s Republic of China because the cooperation is based on equality, this is what make a difference from the relations we had with the western in the past23”.

**Security Assistance**

As interest in the China-Niger cooperation, some African countries are seeking security assistance from the People’s Republic of China. Security assistance in the China-Niger relations has also multiple aspects. It happens trough military training, weapons supply and military equipment donations. The African Union, as suggests its agenda, is intensively working to end all types of conflicts and tensions on the continent by the year 2063 and China is supporting the Republic of Niger in its aim to achieve this goal.

Niger is today facing some interne troubles due to Islamist movements and some tensions related to the Libyan conflicts as the two countries share a border. The training of Nigerien soldiers in China and the supply of military equipment is helping the Nigerien government to maintain peace and stability in the country. Such efforts are well appreciated by leaders and citizens in the country, which they perceive as an opportunity.

The People's Republic of China considers its military sales as just one aspect of its more diversified trade with the African countries, and it has gained African markets as the statistics shows. China has leveled up in the ranks of the African continent's arms suppliers; from number 4 with a 6% of the continent’s total supply in 1996–2000, to number 2 in 2001–2006 with 9% and reached the rank of first supplier in 2006–2010, representing 25% of the continent’s total import of weapons24. China has already established weapons corporations in some countries of the African continent: Soudan,

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Angola and Mali. Another interest of Africa in the field of security assistance in its cooperation with China is the training of soldiers; between 2008 and 2010, 15000 African soldiers were trained in China. This is very significant for the Republic of Niger because the country is suffering from troubles such as terrorism and sometimes internal conflicts; their Cooperation with the People’s Republic of China, can allow the improvement of security and stability in such countries. Furthermore, some African countries are suffering of prohibitions from the United Nations Security Council in acquiring military equipment due to the type of regimes in place in their countries; these rely on their cooperation with China to satisfy their need in weapons and other military equipment. The People’s Republic of China in obedience to its non-intervention in others internal affairs consider that African countries should have the right to deal with their own affairs and accept to supply such countries²⁵.

References