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**PERSPECTIVES OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES  
ON THE IMPACT OF CHINESE AID:  
A CASE STUDY OF CHINA'S AID PROJECTS  
IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR IN GUINEA**

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*China's re-emergence as an aid donor has attracted the attention and criticism from Western donors, academia, and the media. In contrast to traditional donors, China's aid has been portrayed as anti-poverty aid, mainly due to its combination with other instruments, such as investment, and the absence of any political or economic conditions. This paper examines the impact of Chinese aid projects in Guinea's education sector from the perspective of the beneficiaries.*

*The author collected data from both primary (interviews) and secondary (document analysis) sources. The present study concludes that China's aid projects in the education sector have received both positive and negative feedback, mainly because the recipients' needs have not been appropriately targeted. This study contributes to the literature on China's role in Africa. More specifically, it discusses the conditions for aid effectiveness in the field of education. Moreover, in the context of the globalization of aid practices, the study proposes best practices for China to adopt in order to improve the practices of its aid delivery. The novelty of this study lies in the methodology (qualitative method) used to understand China's aid from the perspective of the beneficiaries of its aid.*

**Keywords:** *China's aid, educational poverty reduction, beneficiaries' perceptions, need based targeting, globalization of aid practices.*

### **Introduction**

In the context of globalization led by the traditional donors within the OECD/DAC, China is expected to play an influential role in this regard (Grinin 2013; Bowles and MacPhail 2014; Cheng and Ping 2012). Today, China is regarded as one of the world's most significant new aid donors to some of the world's poorest countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Kobayashi 2013; Zhang 2021).

The role of traditional donors in alleviating poverty through aid was a hotly debated issue during the early 1990s. Due to criticism of the role of foreign aid in low- and middle-income countries, traditional donors have shifted their focus from solely emphasizing economic growth to directly addressing poverty. Since then, the academia and the recipient countries have been urging aid donors to make their aid more effective in alleviating multidimensional poverty (including educational poverty). Since the adoption of

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the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, the Monterey Conference in 2002, the Paris Declaration in 2005, and more recently the Sustainable Development Goals, it has become increasingly clear that aid plays a role in alleviating poverty (including educational poverty) (see also Aleshkovski *et al.* 2021).

The relationship between foreign aid and multidimensional poverty alleviation has fueled the debate with the emergence of new donors, such as China. Over the past 50 years, the perception of China's involvement in Africa has become increasingly polarized, with one view of China as an investor and partner, and another view as a neo-colonial power (Li and Musiitwa Esq 2020).

Criticisms of China includes accusations that it engages in debt trap diplomacy by increasing the debt burden of low- and middle-income countries in order to gain access to natural resources (Woods 2008; Berthelemy 2011; Pilling and Hornby 2018). The West has accused China of supporting countries unwilling to implement macroeconomic reforms considered as a prerequisite for poverty reduction (Woods 2008; Bräutigam 2011) and of using its aid as a tool of neo-colonialism (Blanchard 2018; Chan 2018; Etzioni 2020).

According to some studies, China has emerged as 'an alternative actor in Sub-Saharan Africa, offering a route to wealth that is grounded in the vitality of its economy and belief in national sovereignty' (Orbán 2015).

Despite the divergent views on China's role, there has been little empirical research on African perceptions of China. At an event organized by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in 2006, David Shinn, a former US Ambassador to Ethiopia and Burkina Faso, questioned 'how much we really know about how the African public views China' (Shinn 2006).

There are some studies that argue that the negative rhetoric emanating from much of the literature may indeed be exaggerated. More importantly, scholars and policymakers need to ask, 'How much do we really know about public perceptions of China in Africa?' (Gadzala and Hanusch 2010).

As a result, the contribution of this study is to examine the impact of Chinese aid on Guinea's education sector from the perspective of the beneficiaries.

## Literature Review

### *Overview of the Sino-African Relationship*

Sino-African relations date back to the 1950s. As far as Africa is concerned, Egypt was the first to receive Chinese aid in 1956, and in 1959, the Republic of Guinea became the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to receive Chinese assistance. Later, China extended its assistance to other socialist countries in Africa, such as Mali and Ghana. China's aid in the 1950s was primarily motivated by a desire to support African countries in their fight against Western imperialism.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Chinese authorities of that period extended their aid to other African countries in order to legitimize themselves as the sole political entity representing the People's Republic of China. In order to ensure its seat in the United Nations as well as to win the support of African countries on the Taiwan issue, China provided enormous assistance to its allies in Africa during the 1970s.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the Taiwan issue, China extended and increased its aid to strengthen its international alliances against the capitalist West and the revisionist communist Soviet Union (Looy 2006). As a result, China increased its diplomatic relations with African countries in the 1970s. In exchange for remaining loyal, countries were offered palaces,

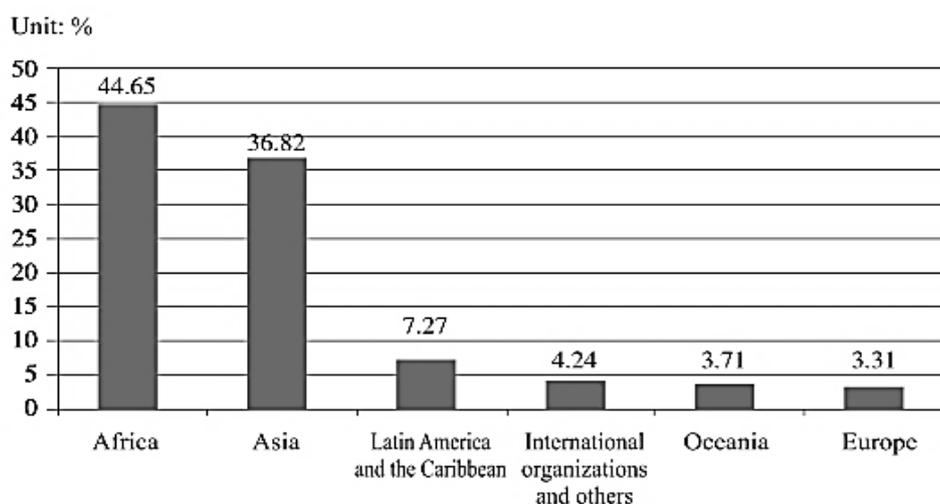
stadiums, factories, infrastructure, medical teams, and student exchange programs (Looy 2006).

The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a decline in Chinese aid to African countries. In part, this decline can be attributed to domestic pressures in China, China's new policy of modernizing its economy and increasing foreign trade and investment, and China's desire to gain recognition from Washington and Moscow in the 1980s.

It was only a few months later that China returned to its African partners. The Tiananmen Square incident served as the catalyst for China's return to its old partners in 1989. As a result of this event, China was condemned by its new partners, including the United States, for violating human rights.

In order to demonstrate the credibility of this renewed partnership, several Chinese officials visited African countries. The establishment of South-South cooperation opened up a new avenue for sharing development experiences. For this purpose, a platform was established to standardize South-South cooperation.<sup>3</sup> One of the most striking examples is the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC).

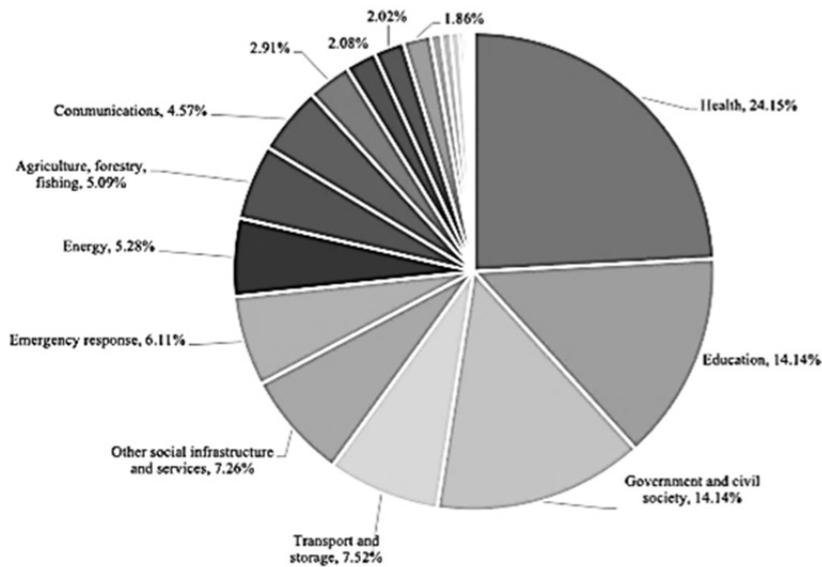
To date, eight FOCACs have been organized between China and its African partners (2000, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015, 2018 and 2021).<sup>4</sup> These platforms are described in FOCAC 2000 as a framework for a collaborative dialogue between China and African countries that is based on equality, mutual benefit, peace, and common development. Chinese aid to Africa accounted for 45 per cent of its foreign aid between 2013 and 2018 (State Council 2021).



**Fig. 1. Allocation of China's Aid to Africa between 2013 and 2018**

Source: China's State Council, 2021.

As far as sectoral distribution is concerned, China has provided aid to a wide range of sectors from 2000 to 2017. The number of aid projects completed in the fields of health and education has been the highest so far.



### China-Financed and Completed Projects in Africa 2000–2017

Source: Aiddata.org, Version 2.0 accessed on October 7, 2021.

#### *Sino-Guinean Relationship*

Located in the western part of Africa, the Republic of Guinea is a French-speaking country. Currently, the country has a population of 13 million and a Human Development Index of 175 out of 189 (UNDP 2018).

According to the International Monetary Fund (2019), the country's GDP was USD 15.68 billion in 2020, and its GDP per capita was USD 1,194.038, indicating a GDP growth rate of about 6.9 per cent (World Bank 2020). In 2019, about 53 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line (8,815 GNF / person / day/ \$1.10) (World Bank 2020). According to the OECD and the World Bank, the country is classified as a Least Developed Country.

The school enrolment rate in 2018 was 90.8 percent, indicating an improvement in access to education over the past few years. Nevertheless, approximately 1.5 million Guinean children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 16 remain out of school. In addition, there are also large gender and urban-rural disparities in access to and completion of education. According to UNICEF, the completion rate for girls is 45.7 per cent, and 62.7 per cent for boys; the primary school completion rate in rural areas is 40 per cent, compared to 75.7 per cent in urban areas, and only 20.1 per cent of children aged 3 to 5 are enrolled in nursery schools (UNICEF N. d.).<sup>5</sup>

As of today, several aid donors are working in Guinea, including the United States, France, Belgium, China, India, Japan, Saudi Arabia, *etc.* In addition to this group of bilateral donors, there are multilateral and regional donors such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Union, the United Nations Development Program, and the African Development Bank.

Guinea has been a partner of China since its independence from France, when Franco-Guinean relations were suspended. China and Guinea have been engaged in economic,

commercial, and cultural relations since 1959. There has also been extensive cooperation in education, health, and international affairs. Since 2003, China has become one of Guinea's principal economic partners after France (Doumbouya *et al.* 2008).

Currently, it is difficult to quantify the amount of Chinese aid to Guinea with certainty. Due to the lack of a central open database documenting Chinese aid to Guinea, we are unable to track the flow of aid. Thus, it is difficult to aggregate the amount of aid provided to Guinea at the beginning of the relationship.

In addition, the difficulty of estimating China's aid can also be attributed to the methods of deliver (in-kind or grants, China's resource for infrastructure assistance, R4I) and the instruments (project aid).

Unlike other donors, such as France, the Chinese Embassy in Guinea's website does not provide any precise figures beyond a list of projects. Information on China's aid to Guinea is only available through online media and a few academic publications.

Several studies provide data from 1959 to 2008. China provided Guinea with an interest-free loan of USD 440 million, technical assistance of USD 374 million, as well as a commercial loan of USD 100 million (Doumbouya *et al.* 2008).

Guinea received very little aid in-kind after independence. In 1959, for example, China donated 5000 tons of rice to Guinea when France left the country (Keita 2019).

These data can be supplemented with those published by the media on the individual projects that China has funded, but which are not considered development aid by the OECD/DAC.

An example is the Resources for Infrastructure Loan (R4I) agreement signed between China and Guinea in October 2016. A sum of USD 20 billion was made available to finance the construction of basic infrastructure. In return, the Guinean government will guarantee Chinese mining companies access to mining licenses (Barma 2017). Thus, mining revenues will be used to repay the loans. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether the loan is commercial or concessional.

Furthermore, other projects have also benefited from China's USD 100 million grant. As examples, one may mention the expansion of the Sino-Guinean hospital, the construction of the Parliament, and the support for the national climate change adaptation program (Barma 2017).

During the 2018 FOCAC, China committed USD 6 million to finance the government's food security program and the water supply project (Diallo 2018).

Since the beginning of Sino-Guinean relations, a number of projects have been financed with Chinese aid. These include, but are not limited to:

- a) The People's Palace (1966–1967), which was constructed at a total cost of RMB 11.5 million,
- b) The Presidential Palace (1996–1997), valued at USD 7 million,
- c) The National Radio and Television (Koloma 2, but the amount is not known),
- d) The transmitting centers of Labé, Kankan, and N'Zérékoré;
- e) The reconstruction of the road between Coyah, Mamou, and Dabola (USD 1.2 billion);
- f) Rehabilitation of roads and sanitation in the capital (Conakry), which is estimated to cost about USD 200 million;
- g) The reconstruction of four universities at a cost of approximately USD 300 million;

- h) The interconnection of the Upper Guinean power grid for USD 250 million;
- i) The construction of the stadium in Nongo at a cost of USD 50 million.

Along with its support for infrastructure (soft and hard), China has also provided support for the health sector,<sup>6</sup> and technical assistance to civil servants in a wide range of areas.

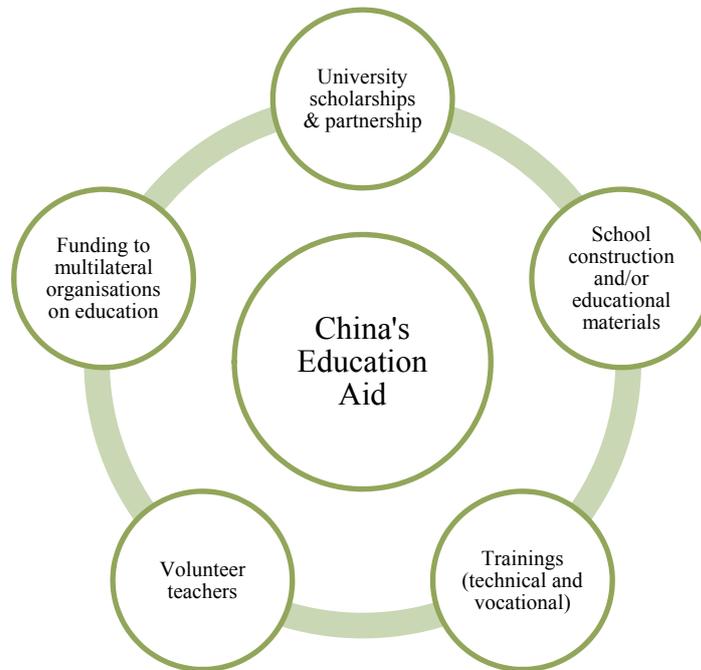
Several technical assistance programs have been implemented in the agricultural, energy, and health sectors.

Since 1968, China has sent 27 medical teams to Guinea with a total of 660 people. Since 1973, approximately 700 Guinean students have received Chinese government scholarships to study in China (Keita 2019).

### China's Aid to Education

#### *Overview of China's Aid to Education:*

China's contribution to education takes a number of forms, including higher education scholarships and university partnerships; technical and vocational training, including teacher training; Chinese language teaching in developing countries through institutional support and volunteer teaching staff; construction of schools and educational materials; and collaboration with multilateral organizations (Reilly 2015).



**Fig. 2. Typology of China's aid to education sector**

*Source:* Author.

Chinese aid for training (including technical and vocational training) targets a wide range of programs, such as policy training for government officials,<sup>7</sup> and technical training for experts in areas such as agriculture, medicine, engineering, energy man-

agement, and environmental protection. As for the aid to higher education, scholarship programs (including four levels: PhD, Masters, Undergraduate and Non-degree (short-term)) and university partnerships are the most prominent.<sup>8</sup>

Volunteer programs and language teaching consist of China's Overseas Volunteer Program (CYVOSP), the Chinese Teacher Volunteer Plan (CTVP), Confucius Institutes (CI), and Confucius Classrooms (CC).<sup>9</sup> In terms of material and infrastructure assistance, a number of primary schools, technical training centers, and university facilities have been built in developing countries (Reilly 2015). Last but not least, China's aid to education takes the form of contributions to multilateral organizations active in the field, such as UNESCO (International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa and the International Center for Girls and Women's Education).

Among the government agencies involved in the design and implementation of China's education assistance include the Ministries of Finance, Foreign Affairs, Commerce, and Education. In addition, the Ministries of Agriculture, Health, Science and Technology, and Environmental Protection are also involved in providing training, with coordination provided by the Foreign Aid Inter-Agency Coordination Mechanism.

### **China Aid to Education in Guinea: An Overview**

In Guinea, China's support for the education sector has taken various forms. Construction of infrastructure to meet the needs of the population, especially in rural areas, is the first type. Second, scholarships and technical assistance, such as training, are provided to students and government departments. It focuses on public officials (around 120 to 250 per year) from various sectors such as foreign affairs, agriculture and animal husbandry (rural development), telecommunications, central administration (presidency), education, health, and security. In addition, these trainings are also designed to develop platforms for Chinese and Guinean experts to share their experiences in poverty reduction (Sanoh, personal communication, July 20, 2013).

In the agriculture sector alone, 50 government officials travelled to China in 2019 to learn about agricultural technologies and planning. Practical training was conducted in the farming fields and specialized laboratories in China (Xinhuanews 2019a).

An official from the Ministry of International Cooperation commented that the series of trainings conducted by China was essential, as about 80 per cent of the Guinean population is engaged in agriculture (Keita 2019: para. 10).

Between 2019 and 2020, 86 students received scholarships from China to study energy, transport, mining, technology, and economics (Xinhuanews 2019b). According to the Chinese ambassador to Guinea, about 700 scholarships have been provided by China since 1973 (Wei 2019: para. 8).<sup>10</sup>

### **Studies on Local Perspectives of China's Aid**

Over the past five decades, the perspectives on Chinese aid have been largely shaped by the views of the Western media and academia. Most Western media portray a negative image of Chinese activities in Africa, often choosing to repeat the narrative that China is a neo-colonial power which challenges democracy and exploits African resources (Li and Musiitwa Esq 2020). Sautman and Hairong (2009) assert that 'African views are neither as negative as Western media portray, nor as positive as official Chinese sources imply.'

Outspoken scholars have expressed skepticism regarding China's presence in Africa. Naim (2007) describes China's aid as 'rogue aid,' unrelated to the needs of the recipient countries and undermining Western donors' efforts to promote good governance in developing countries. Some have even accused China of being a 'neo-colonial power' that seeks to keep recipient countries in a position of dependency (Chan 2018; Etzioni 2020).

Some African government officials do not share these views. They are more positive in their assessment of China's assistance. China is therefore perceived as a saviour and a trustworthy ally of Africa (Maru 2019).

Festus Mogae, then president of Botswana, stated that the 'Chinese treat us as equals. We are treated by the West as former subjects' (Hilsum 2006).

Former Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade stated that 'China's approach to our needs is simply better than the slow and sometimes patronizing post-colonial approach of European investors, donor agencies and non-governmental organizations' (Wade 2008).

Paul Kagame of Rwanda stated that China is a 'more respectful partner' than either Europe or America (Withnall 2018).

Museveni of Uganda states that 'the Western ruling groups are conceited, full of themselves, unaware of our conditions, and they make other people's business their business, while the Chinese simply deal with you as someone who represents your country [...]' (Halper 2010).

The practice of various African leaders expressing praise and admiration for China is commonplace (Walsh and Kinkoh 2020). However, opposition political leaders are sometimes more pessimistic. This was the case with the then Zambian political leader, Michael Sata ('King Cobra').

Recently, many studies have been undertaken to understand the perceptions of the African population of China's presence in Africa. A number of think tanks and scholars have pioneered the study of African perception of China's presence in Africa. The 2007 Pew Global Attitudes Survey (Pew Research Center 2007) polled some 8,471 respondents in ten countries on how they felt China's increasing power (military and economic) was affecting them. According to the study, favourable views of China outnumber critical judgments in several African countries. The second issue examined in the survey was the influence of China and the United States in Africa. In eight of the ten sub-Saharan African countries surveyed, the majority of respondents say that China and the US have a 'great deal' or 'fair amount' of influence on the way things are done in their countries. Thirdly, the study examined whether China's influence was more positive than America's. Eight of the ten sub-Saharan African countries surveyed report that American influence is generally positive. Nevertheless, the perception of China's influence is much more prevalent. In the same year, other studies by Wang and Flam (2007) and the BBC World Service survey (2007) also reported widespread positive attitudes towards China's influence.

The second Pew survey conducted in 2008 found no significant differences in perceptions of China compared with the 2007 survey.

Sautman and Hairong surveyed 2,000 students from nine countries. The authors found that respondents from all countries are generally satisfied with Chinese companies that work on large projects in their respective countries, and that the majority of

respondents also believe that China's policies on the continent are 'somewhat beneficial' overall (Sautman and Hairong 2009). However, the authors point out that African perspectives vary from country to country. The authors argue that the differences in attitudes towards China between countries can be explained by the extent to which national politicians have chosen to raise the 'China issue' and, secondarily, by the degree of Western media influence in African states.

Afrobarometer<sup>11</sup> conducted a survey in 2020 on what Africans think about China's engagement (trade and FDI) in their respective countries and economies. About 26,777 interviews were conducted in 18 African countries in 2019/2020. Based on the results of the survey, it can be concluded that 'while Africans have positive views of China's aid and its political and economic influence on the continent, its perceived influence has nevertheless declined somewhat over the past five years' (Selormey 2020).

As part of their study, Cannon *et al.* (2022) analyzed student attitudes and elite media coverage of China's presence in Kenya. More specifically, the objective of the study was to determine the attitudes of Kenyan university students towards China through the use of surveys. A comparative textual analysis of the main Kenyan newspaper was conducted in conjunction with the survey. According to the survey, about 65 per cent of Kenyan university students had less favorable attitudes towards China in 2020 than they did in 2015. Informant views regarding Chinese trade and Chinese infrastructure and development projects in Kenya were recorded at a lower percentage. Over 30 per cent of respondents expressed somewhat unfavorable opinions, and almost 40 per cent expressed very unfavorable opinions. Over 60 per cent of the informants had an unfavorable or somewhat unfavorable opinion of the BRI-related projects. Finally, and most importantly for this study, almost 90 per cent of respondents believed that Chinese projects and China's relationship with Kenya benefited only Kenya's political elite and their Chinese partners.

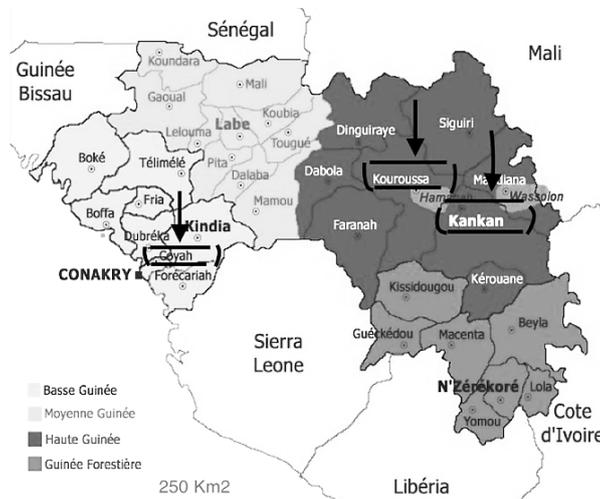
Existing studies focus on citizens' perceptions of China's presence and influence in the countries where they were conducted. There is currently no assessment of the impact of China's education aid programs (Reilly 2015). Unlike other donors in the education sector, China only measures the implementation of projects, such as the number of schools built or teachers employed. China's evaluation therefore does not take into account the impact of education aid on the beneficiaries (Reilly 2015). Nevertheless, there are studies that assess China's aid to education. For example, Kenneth King studied African students in China. The author highlights the lack of formal evaluation of the impact of this major education initiative on individuals, institutions or society (King 2010: 70). As a result, the purpose of this paper is to supplement recent studies on local perceptions of China's aid. Specifically, the study examines the perceptions of the local community regarding the impact of Chinese education aid in Guinea.

### Methodology

In this study, a qualitative research design was chosen in order to investigate the beneficiaries' perception of China's educational assistance. In the context of China's investment, some studies have observed that 'qualitative data is especially important for understanding the special approach of Chinese investment projects. Without a grounded analysis of China projects, the debates remain unproductive generalizations (Lee 2009).

This study uses a standardized (formal or structured) interview and non-standardized (informal or non-directive) interview to collect data from the participants. This analysis

and interview questions did not include China scholarship programs due to the lack of available data. In addition, training programs in the education sector were excluded from the scope of this impact study as they were mainly conducted at the macro level (government level). Therefore, this impact study focuses primarily on the impact of schools on rural beneficiaries. These schools are located in rural areas such as Bordo in Kankan, Baro, Lorombo, and Komola-Koura in Kouroussa. In Coyah, the school was mainly located on the outskirts of Sonfonia (Kassoya). As part of the project identification process, interviews were conducted with the Chinese Embassy, the Guinean Ministry for International Cooperation, the local state representative and the decentralized authorities (in Coyah, Kankan, and Kouroussa). The main objective of the fieldwork was to assess whether the schools had improved access to basic education in rural areas, as well as to examine other socio-economic benefits (unintended benefits) in the regions where the projects were implemented. About 30 households were interviewed in the areas where the schools are located. Therefore, the beneficiaries were selected from the villages and prefectures that had benefited from Chinese aid projects. Thus, proximity to schools was the primary criterion for selecting beneficiaries.



Our study was conducted in three main prefectures: Coyah, Kouroussa, and Kankan.

Two sources were utilized to identify the projects visited: interviews with Guinean government officials and the Chinese embassy. These sources were supplemented by official documents and reports.

**Fig. 3. Location of the projects studied**

*Source:* adapted by the author for the purpose of this research.

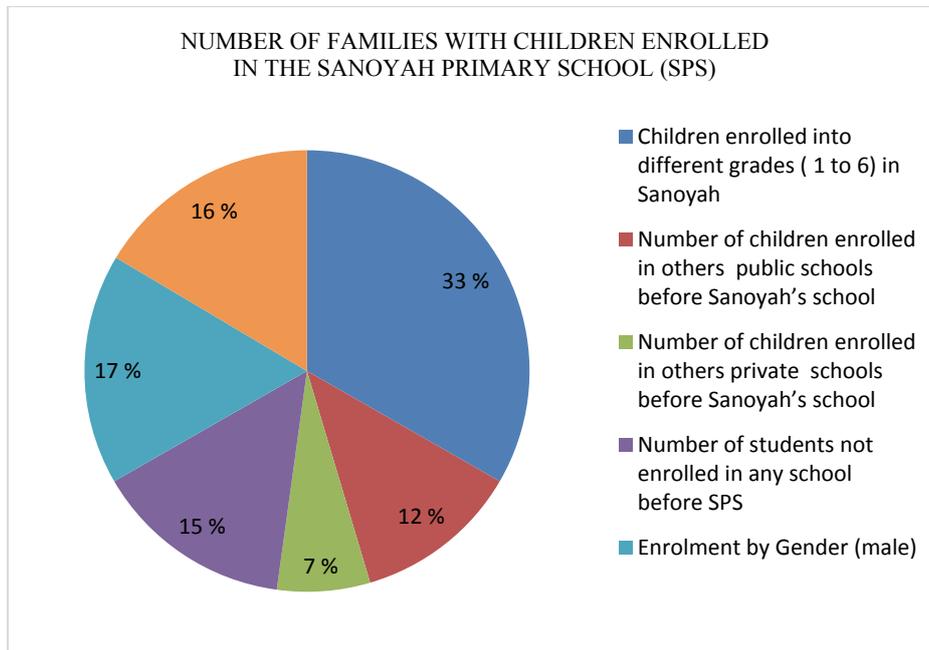
### Findings and Conclusion

As part of this study, we examined some of the infrastructure (schools) built by China in Guinea in order to better understand China's assistance in the education sector. Three Chinese projects in rural areas of Guinea (Sanoya, Baro, and Lorombo) were analysed in this regard.

The purpose of the study is to obtain a better understanding of the beneficiaries' perceptions of the impact of Chinese education aid on access to education in the rural areas where the projects have been implemented: Sanoyah's Primary School (SPS) and Baro-Lorombo and Bordo primary schools.

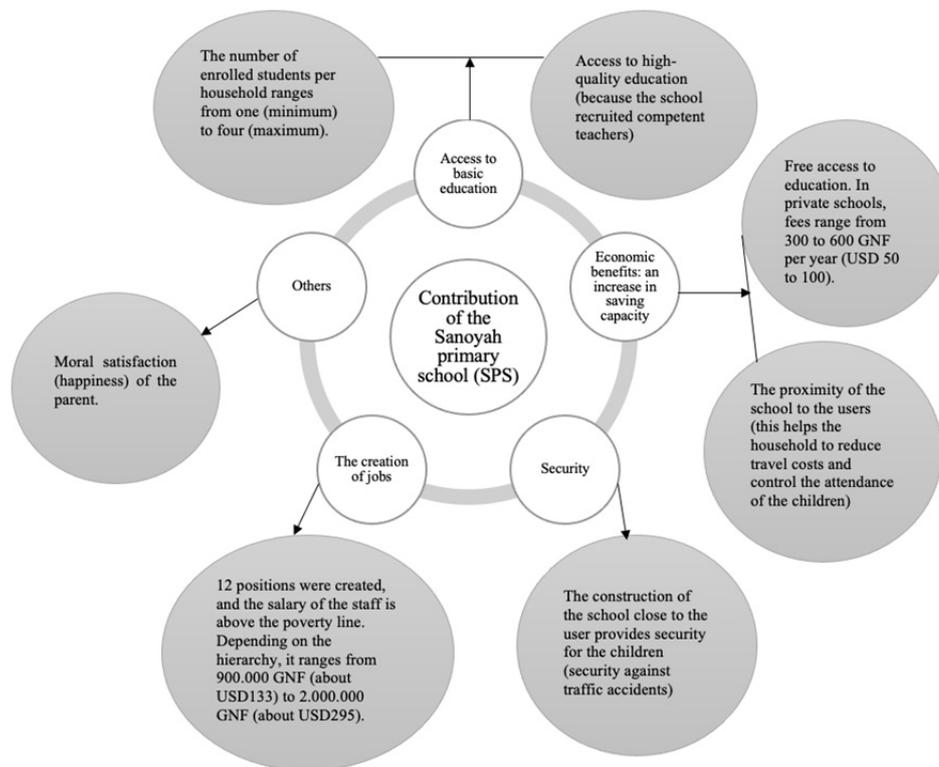
### Sanoyah's Primary School (SPS)

*Perceptions of the beneficiaries about the Benefits of China's aid to education sector*



**Fig. 4. The presentation of the targeted beneficiaries at Sanoyah's Primary School**

In the case of Sanoyah Primary School (SPS), approximately 28 households were interviewed. During the interview, the interviewees mentioned the following benefits of the infrastructure project: an increase in school enrolment, free access to education, proximity of the school to the users, savings on tuition fees previously paid to private schools, reduction in transport costs, the availability of a high-quality education for children (because qualified teachers have been recruited), moral satisfaction (happiness), and the creation of new jobs.



**Fig. 5. Summary of the perception of the beneficiaries of China's aid in Sanoyah**

#### *Discussion of the Beneficiaries' Perceptions*

It would be useful to discuss the perceptions of the beneficiaries. When collecting data during the fieldwork, it was difficult to determine how much the respondents could save on tuition fees and other related school expenses after the construction of the school. The main reason for this is that households do not keep records of their daily expenses. Based on the collected data, the only information on savings was that respondents no longer had to pay tuition fees and transport costs from home to school. It is estimated that those who send their children to private schools could save between \$50 and \$100 per year. However, respondents were unable to provide any information on the number of traffic accidents involving their children prior to the construction of Sanoyah's school. Although participants were unable to provide clear data on the number of traffic accidents involving their children on the way to school, it has been observed that traffic accidents occur frequently between Conakry, the capital, and its outskirts. On the issue of security, no information could be obtained from the respondents on the increase or decrease of juvenile delinquency in their village before and after the construction of Sanoyah's school.

#### **Baro-Lorombo and Bordo**

An informal discussion was held with the local authorities in Baro and Lorombo, including the devolved and decentralized administrations, such as the sub-prefect and

mayor of Baro, as well as the school director, teachers, and representatives of the association of students' parents. As part of the interviews conducted with the beneficiaries, we sought to gain a better understanding of how they perceive the schools built by China in these two sub-prefectures of Kouroussa. Interviews were conducted in Baro (Kouroussa) with the sub-prefect, the mayor, teachers, and the student-parent association. This discussion focused primarily on the perceived relevance of China's new school to the local community.

In terms of the impact of the school, respondents raised the following concerns: the mismatch between the needs of the community and the school that was built. Considering their current needs, the interviewees indicated that the school was not a top priority. Several of their priorities have been incorporated into the local development project (PDL) developed jointly by government representatives and local community leaders. According to the survey results, the priority of the Baro people was not the construction of primary schools, but rather the construction of roads, health care centers, water pumps (51 pumps are available for 16,168 people, including 8,430 households, but only one out of two is functioning), full-time teaching staff, learning materials for students, and capacity building for teachers.

As a result, we are left with the question of how much of China's aid to the education sector in Baro meets the needs of the beneficiaries. First, based on the analysis of interviews, China's aid does not meet the recipients' urgent needs. The reason for this is that they were not consulted about their preferences for a school or other infrastructure necessary to improve their living conditions. This failure is partly due in to the lack of a formal or informal mechanism within China's aid strategy to identify, monitor and ensure the effectiveness of the project for the beneficiaries.

In Baro, for example, where China constructed the new school, there are too many other schools that lack teachers and learning materials. Moreover, there are insufficient roads and a limited number of health care facilities (complex health cases are referred to either Kankan or Kouroussa). According to the interviewees, it would be more beneficial and contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of the Baro people if the aid were allocated to the priority areas.

However, despite these limitations, the project did bring some short-term benefits to the beneficiaries. The project created some jobs in the village. For instance, part-time unskilled workers could earn up to GNF 25,000 (about USD 3.55 per day). An individual with skills could earn between GNF 28,000 and 40 per day (roughly between USD 4 and 6). One interviewee stated that people were able to meet their basic needs with the earnings from the project.

Eleven people were interviewed in Lorombo and Kouroussa. These included the deputy chief of the district (1), teachers (5), the president of the student-parent association (1), and four parents. Similar to the respondents in Baro, the respondents in Lorombo expressed concern that the project does not align with their pressing educational needs. Respondents reported that there is a shortage of teachers able to fill teaching positions and meet children's educational needs. As a result, some children are unable to attend school due to a lack of teaching staff and inadequate learning materials (according to the respondents).

Due to a shortage of teachers, many schools have been forced to overcrowd their classrooms. According to a respondent, it is not uncommon for a general education

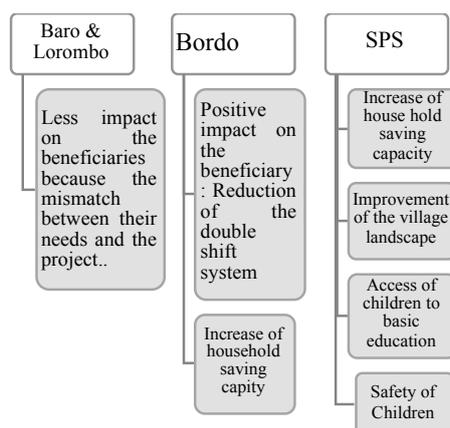
class to have up to 80 students, whereas the standard for education department is between 35 and 45 students. Based on the interviews, it appears that China's building of new schools is not the only way for increasing access to basic education. Thus, by funding the purchase of materials and the recruitment of teachers for existing schools, China's aid could better meet the needs of the beneficiaries and improve access to education rather than building 'empty infrastructure'.

Like the respondents in Baro, the respondents in Lorombo said that, in addition to educational needs (school teachers and learning materials), health care facilities, water and sanitation are of greater importance to them. The Lorombo district authorities explain that the reason for this mismatch is that neither the government nor the donor (China) consulted them about the need for a new school. As a result of these shortcomings in China's aid strategy, this study suggests that donors (China), governments, and recipients should always engage in a trilateral dialogue or consultation before and after the project is carried out. At present, China's strategy does not appear to include this element.

To understand the benefits of the school in Bordo (Kankan), a survey of 30 households was conducted. In addition to the school's proximity to the beneficiaries, the interviewees stated that they would be able to save money on transport. Depending on the distance, the average transport fee from Bordo to the center is around GNF 6,000 (less than \$1 at 2013 rates) per person per day. According to one respondent, families earning less than GNF 8,000 (USD 1.25) have difficulty sending their children to schools outside Bordo if they cannot find a place at the Bordo's primary school. Only those who are able to pay the transport fees can send their children to both private and public schools, resulting in a disparity in educational opportunities. In this regard, the construction of a new school close to the beneficiaries has benefited some of the households. According to the respondents, this would make it easier to monitor children's attendance and ensure that children are protected from traffic accidents. Furthermore, it eliminates the problem of double shifts in the existing primary schools in Bordo, caused by a large number of students in the classrooms. Only 21 out of 30 households are affected by this problem. These households send their children to Bordo Primary School, where double shifts are practiced. In the opinion of one respondent, this results in insufficient learning conditions for the students. In the remaining nine cases, the children attend private or public schools outside Bordo, where there is no problem with double shifts.

According to the interviewees, the new school may also result in an increase in household savings capacity. Nine households claimed this benefit, mainly those who send their children to private schools. The tuition fees for private schools, for example, range from GNF 300,000 to 350,000 (USD 42 to USD 49) per year. Because the school built by China is tuition-free, parents can save on both tuition fees and transportation costs.

The final benefit of the project, in the opinion of the respondent, is the improvement of the landscape of the Bordo district. In this last project, we have learnt that when aid is allocated to meet the urgent needs of beneficiaries, it is welcomed and can have the desired effect. It is worth noting that unlike the Baro and Lorombo cases, the primary school built by China in Bordo was welcomed by all of the beneficiaries, unlike the other schools, which were not built at the request of the beneficiaries. Instead of a new school, Baro and Lorombo needed academic staff, health centers, water, and sanitation.



**Fig. 6. Summary of the beneficiaries' perceptions about projects and their impact**

Source: author.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, it is pertinent to characterize the educational aid given by China before discussing the perceptions of its beneficiaries. First, it is important to note that China's assistance to the education sector is multifaceted. A key component of the program is the training of staff in the strategic government departments and in strategic sectors for poverty reduction, such as agriculture, animal husbandry, and health. Meanwhile, the program has focused on helping the Guinean government in eliminating educational poverty through infrastructure development. As for the latter category, beneficiaries' perceptions of Chinese aid for educational infrastructure in the rural areas remain mixed. The three schools examined in this study provide an excellent insight into how beneficiaries perceive China's aid and how it can be effective.

Taking into account these mixed views, it may be possible to re-evaluate China's aid strategies for the education sector in general and in Guinea in particular.

Based on the issues raised by the interviewees, this study concludes that donors, in this case China, need to incorporate collaboration and information sharing components into their aid strategies in order to effectively address the needs of beneficiaries. In addition to Sanoya's Primary School, the failure of China's aid project in Baro and Lorombo supports this contention. There was a lack of consultation and information sharing between donors and the beneficiaries. Williamson (2009) and Khuhro *et al.* (2012) argue that collaboration and information sharing are essential elements of effective aid. The failure of Chinese aid projects in Baro and Lorombo supports Williamson's and Khuhro's arguments. According to the interviews, there was no consultation between donors and direct recipients about the needs of the recipients. Therefore, this study argues that donors can better target their needs by involving recipients directly in the design and implementation of aid projects.

One of the first recommendations of this study is the adoption of results-based conditions with a particular emphasis on indicators that reflect the beneficiaries' needs. The identification of indicators is a prerequisite for the effectiveness of China's future education aid programs. A well-targeted aid program can improve the lives of beneficiaries, according to Easterly (2003).

A second recommendation emphasizes the importance of extending the dialogue to direct beneficiaries. The benefits of such dialogue are threefold. First, it avoids funding projects that are used by political authorities to reward communities for supporting their elections. Second, it provides donors with information on what projects beneficiaries need and how they can improve living conditions in impoverished areas. Finally, this mechanism enhances the beneficiaries' sense of ownership.

In the light of the above, this paper makes the following observations.

For future projects, the donor, in this case China, should engage in a trilateral discussion with government officials and local community representatives. Upon the agreement on the type of project and the performance indicators, aid can be disbursed for its implementation, taking into account the needs of the direct beneficiaries. This strategy can be referred to as a 'need-based and results-oriented aid'.

These recommendations are also confirmed by of Zinsê and Chunmei (2012) study. The authors concluded that:

It would be valuable if China issues some rigorous regulations on how to grant aid and any kind of investment to African countries, especially clauses and guarantees from African countries on the management of these funds, because sometimes such invested funds do not reach their destined goals.

Therefore, if China intends to globalize its aid practices and principles, including the principle of non-interference, it is imperative that it revisits its approach to delivering aid to its partner countries. Hence, it is essential that China moves beyond rhetoric to integrate practices and create intervention models that focus on the needs of the direct beneficiaries. It is also important that China's extensive globalization project under the Belt and Road Initiative is allocated and funded according to the needs of partner countries.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> China supported Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia in their struggles against imperialism but only indirectly because of its policy of non-interference.

<sup>2</sup> Of the 54 African countries, there are only three have diplomatic relations with Taiwan: Burkina Faso, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, and Swaziland. Moreover, Taiwan has been unable to join the World Health Organization in part due to the opposition from many African states (Brookes 2006).

<sup>3</sup> One should remember that the first forum between China and Africa dates back to the Bandung Conference in the 1955.

<sup>4</sup> 2000 – Beijing, China; 2003 – Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; 2006 – Beijing, China; 2009 – Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt; 2012 – Beijing, China; 2015 – Johannesburg, South Africa; 2018 – Beijing, China.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/guinea/propos-des-enfants-en-guinee>.

<sup>6</sup> In 2014, USD 5 million was provided for the fight against Ebola.

<sup>7</sup> Policy training includes: social security, public health, public administration, poverty alleviation, and cultural promotion.

<sup>8</sup> For example, the partnership between Zhejiang Normal University (ZNU) and Cameroon's Yaoundé I University (YIU) includes: 1. Sending teachers to YIU; 2. Building language laboratory at YIU; 3. Hosting YIU staff for short and long-term training programs at ZNU; 4. hosting YIU scholarship students; 5. Establishing Confucius Institute at YIU. In 2009 the Ethio-China Polytechnic College (ECPC) was opened in Ethiopia, supported by a one-time allocation of \$15 million from China's aid budget (King 2010). Finally, in 1994, the China-Kenya Horticultural Technology Center was established at Egerton University (EU). 6. Fund joint research and exchange programs.

<sup>9</sup> According to Hanban's website (2014), there are 440 CIs and 646 CCs worldwide. Only 117 of the CIs are located in developing countries, with the majority located in the United States and Europe.

<sup>10</sup> Huazhong University of Sciences and Technology, Central China Normal University, China University of Geosciences, or Beijing Institute of Technology.

<sup>11</sup> Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018.

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