



## China, region-centric infrastructure drives and regionalism in Africa

Oscar M Otele

To cite this article: Oscar M Otele (2020): China, region-centric infrastructure drives and regionalism in Africa, South African Journal of International Affairs, DOI: [10.1080/10220461.2020.1856179](https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2020.1856179)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2020.1856179>



Published online: 30 Nov 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



# China, region-centric infrastructure drives and regionalism in Africa

Oscar M Otele

University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya

## ABSTRACT

This article provides a structural reading of the complexities of region-centric infrastructure drives, African regionalism and the role of China. Four structural layers underlying China's engagement in the region are presented: the global infrastructure race; Pan-African continental connectivity; the intra-regional infrastructure race; and bilateral funding of regional infrastructure projects. The article finds that the global infrastructure race catalyses regionalism in Africa, offering agency of choice to East African Community (EAC) member states to select development partners interested in implementing region-centric infrastructure projects. While the ideological coherence between China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Pan-African continental connectivity has advanced the idea of African regionalism, regionalism also appears to have been slowed by a Chinese-induced intra-regional infrastructure race and China's bilateral approach with EAC member states. For regionalism to be successful, member states need to position themselves strategically in engaging China.

## KEYWORDS

Africa; China; East Africa; infrastructure development; regionalism

## Introduction

Cross-border interactions and interdependence feature throughout history, but contemporary regionalism draws its roots from the Western Europe of the late 1940s. This was later diffused to developing regions but was then somewhat lost in the late 1960s and early 1970s. When regionalism later re-emerged in Western Europe in the mid-1980s, it gradually spread to other parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> The most striking feature of the 'new' regionalism is 'its worldwide reach, extending to more regions, with greater external linkages'.<sup>2</sup> Although region formation may be portrayed as a process through which member states are protected from the harmful effects of globalisation, there is also the potential for region formation to be catalysed by globalisation, including the involvement of extra-regional states and non-state actors; it is this latter view that informs the following discussion of African regionalism.

Since the turn of the 21st century, China has had 'a unique relationship' with the African Union's building blocs, referred to as regional economic communities (RECs).<sup>3</sup> These have formed the basis of China's engagement in the various sub-regions on the continent. Throughout the 2000s, for instance, China has engaged with the

Southern African Development Community (SADC) around industrial development;<sup>4</sup> the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) with which it formed the China-ECOWAS Business Forum in 2011 – which has led to a number of agreements between Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs), Chinese provincial governments and ECOWAS;<sup>5</sup> the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) on the Horn of Africa, extending financial support in 2011;<sup>6</sup> and North Africa (extending up into the Middle East), where China initiated the China–Arab States Cooperation Forum with all 22 Arab League members.<sup>7</sup> Most pertinent to this study, in 2011, China signed the East African Community (EAC) Framework Agreement, with infrastructure development as a key component.<sup>8</sup> During the signing ceremony, then EAC Secretary General Richard Sezibera averred that:<sup>9</sup>

[T]he EAC requires approximately US 80 billion dollars in infrastructure investments for the period up to 2018. This investment for sure will not be raised within this region and we are, therefore, extending a hand of friendship to Chinese investors to work with us and take advantage of the huge potential for investment.

On the same occasion, the Chinese Vice Minister for Commerce Jiang Yaoping observed that:<sup>10</sup>

[The framework] will be good for our business community. We need to promote infrastructure and this is of significance to our future cooperation ... we should work together to identify projects as quickly as possible especially for those that need to be financed because China was ready to conduct feasibility studies.

Accordingly it has been observed that to some degree China is interested in engaging with African regionalism. In the view of some, this degree of 'engagement is inconsistent, as China apparently interacts with Africa's [regional organisations] on their own terms and when it is their interests'.<sup>11</sup> The fact that China appears to prefer a bilateral approach in the region, at the same time, raises scholarly interest in terms of understanding the role of China in African regionalism.<sup>12</sup>

This article therefore seeks to consider to what extent China fosters regionalism in East Africa through association with region-centric infrastructure drives. The East Africa region is a compelling case study because it was among the first regions<sup>13</sup> in Africa in which ongoing infrastructure projects were incorporated into China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)<sup>14</sup> upon its inauguration in September 2013. This move also signified the region's geostrategic importance for Chinese foreign policy as it serves as the gateway to East and Central Africa – notwithstanding minor differences between EAC member states (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda). Whereas some observers see the BRI as playing a catalytic role 'in the cooperative efforts between EAC partner states over regional infrastructure developments and the Chinese financing and construction of mega-projects',<sup>15</sup> others see African incorporation into the BRI as more rhetorical and only meaningful in terms of the symbolic politics of BRI summitry. For instance, Africa does not feature anywhere in the six economic corridors<sup>16</sup> – all in Eurasia – which have from its inception form the bulk of BRI.<sup>17</sup> Thus it is arguable that other regions of the world have been brought in as an overarching necessity of global diplomacy.<sup>18</sup> Owing to the debate around this subject, the author would prefer to view China's engagement through the lens of region-centric infrastructure drives, rather than 'straight jacketing' it within the BRI.

Within the EAC case study, this article's focus on transport infrastructure is motivated by the fact that the sector has:<sup>19</sup>

(f) featured in the EAC's development strategies to date, showing their centrality in advancing integration for sustainable regional integration. [It is also a sector in which China] is most active in the bloc, given it boasts the strongest infrastructure construction capabilities in the world.

There is now a burgeoning literature on the region-centric infrastructure projects in relation to East Africa colonial history and what this portends for the region.<sup>20</sup> In particular, Edmond Were contextualises the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) project and projects in the northern and the central corridors from a historical perspective, seeking to understand the role of these corridors in promoting 'Pan-African connectivity, sustainable development and self-reliance'.<sup>21</sup> Building on these works, this article elaborates on the four main structural layers that form the complex context for regional infrastructural projects, regionalism and the role of China in Africa. These are: the global infrastructure race, Pan-African continental connectivity, the intra-regional infrastructure race and regional institutions versus China's bilateral approach in the region. The article finds that the global infrastructure race catalyses regionalism in Africa, offering agency of choice to EAC member states to select development partners interested in implementing region-centric infrastructure projects. While the ideological coherence between BRI and Pan-African continental connectivity has advanced the idea of African regionalism, regionalism also appears to have been slowed by the Chinese-induced intra-regional infrastructure race and China's bilateral approach with EAC member states.

The analysis draws from primary sources, mainly official discourses and media reports, and secondary sources related to Chinese built infrastructure projects in East Africa published between January 2000 and mid 2020. The media reports were triangulated with interview data collected between 2015 and 2017 from more than 50 elite key informants drawn from among policy makers, bureaucrats, diplomats, academics and civil society activists based in Nairobi. Interview questions and data analysis were organised around the four structural layers: the global infrastructure race; Pan-African continental connectivity; the intra-regional infrastructure race; and regional approaches versus China's bilateral approach in the region. There was a focus on how China has contributed to regionalism in East African through region-centric infrastructure drives. To enhance validity of the study more data was collected in 2019 and 2020.

After this introduction, the next section provides a conceptual framework for an analysis of regionalism through the lens of structural layers. The subsequent four sections provide analysis of the role of China in shaping African regionalism, with a focus on the EAC, through each of the four structural layers noted above. The final section suggests implications of the findings for African regionalism before concluding.

## **Regionalism and structural layers**

The concept of region is central in understanding the role of China in African regionalism. The concept has been approached from different disciplines, with most maintaining an emphasis on 'territory' in their discussion of regions. Thus in much academic research a

region is viewed as 'a (subnational) space between the "national" and the "local" (municipality), primarily within a particular "state"'.<sup>22</sup> Since the mid-1980s, however, there has been a re-emergence of regions across borders. In international relations, the concept of region refers to 'larger territorial ... units or subsystems between the "state" and the "global" system level',<sup>23</sup> for example, Africa, Asia and Europe. Perhaps Hettne and Söderbaum's presentation of the following five levels of 'regionness' is the most elaborate account of region: regional space, regional complex, regional society, regional community and institutionalised regional actor.<sup>24</sup> The authors view 'regionness' in terms of:<sup>25</sup>

organised social, political and economic trans-border relations (material foundations of regionalism), supported by a manifested sense of belonging, common goals and values (symbolic foundations), and institutions and regulations that enhance the region's ability to interact autonomously in the international arena.

According to Hettne and Söderbaum, the regional space which is the potential region is viewed as a geographic unit made up of natural physical attributes. This is a 'pre-regional zone' because there is a lack of organised society. At the second level is the regional complex, which invites aspects of social interaction involving cross border relations among individuals which build up a security complex. At this level, the elements of the region are mutually constituted with regard to security issues. The third level entails a regionalised political system with political, economic, military and cultural dimensions characterised by membership in an institutionalised regional organisation and this may be 'supported by infrastructure development'.<sup>26</sup> It is the organisational dimension that qualifies a region as a 'formal' mechanism. Hettne and Söderbaum further observe that it is difficult to fathom the concept of regionalism in the absence of organised cooperation. At the fourth level the region is viewed as civil society characterised by an organisational framework coordinating communications and interaction within the region. At the fifth level is the regional community where the region is conceptualised as an entity with a distinct identity with agencies and structures.<sup>27</sup> It has been argued that 'a region can be a region "more or less" and the level of "regionness" can both increase and decrease'.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the extent of 'regionness' will increase 'in the progress from mere regional space to deeper institutionalised polity with a permanent structure of decision-making and stronger acting capability as a global actor'.<sup>29</sup>

Breaking down the general conception of regionalism into analytical categories, Hveem asserts that regionalism refers to 'the body of ideas, identities and ideologies that are aimed at creating, maintaining or modifying the provision of security, wealth and other goals within a particular region ... usually associated with a formal programme and a regional project'.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, regionalism 'often leads to institution-building ... [it] ties agents to one specific project that is clearly limited spatially or socially'. Thus regionalisation as a concept entails 'cooperation, integration, cohesion and identity creating' with a view to creating a regional space.<sup>31</sup> Region may emerge from regionalism, but it may also be preceded by regionalist ideology or a regionalist project or none of these. Sometimes actors get involved in regionalisation without being aware that they are actually doing so.<sup>32</sup> From a normative position, regionalisation has always been considered a positive thing; however that may not necessarily be the case.<sup>33</sup> Regionalisation and various forms of regional interactions may be conflictual or exploitative, and may reinforce structures of power domination among actors within a defined geographical space.<sup>34</sup>

In order to establish the relationship between China and African regionalism, analysis now turns to structural layers. These are viewed as the contextual factors providing opportunities and risks for China to engage in region-centric infrastructure drives in East Africa. The region comprises state and non-state actors. State actors include Burundi, Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan and Tanzania, as well as extra-regional states ('emerging' and 'traditional' bilateral donor states), while non-state actors include the EAC, international financial institutions (IFIs), civil society organisations and multinational corporations (mainly construction companies). The analysis shows how the material and ideational interests of these actors manifest and how they specifically structure China's association with regional infrastructure projects in East Africa.

The first structural layer is the global infrastructure race, characterised by global political economic structures which grant African states agency of choice between the 'traditional' and 'emerging' donors. The second structural layer is Pan-African continental connectivity, which offers discursive opportunities for African regionalism. The third structural layer is the intra-regional infrastructure race, which exposes competition between Kenya and Tanzania, and the fourth structural layer is China's bilateral approach to funding infrastructure projects in the region, and the tendency to ignore regional institutions.

### **Structural layer I: The global infrastructure race**

China and region-centric infrastructure drives in East Africa are broadly contextualised within the 'global race to build Africa's infrastructure',<sup>35</sup> characterised by the competition between 'traditional' and 'emerging' donors in their quest to financially support infrastructure projects. The 'traditional' donors include bilateral and multilateral lenders like the World Bank, and are estimated to provide about two thirds of development assistance to Africa. These actors peg their assistance on Western standards of good governance and fiscal responsibility during the implementation of infrastructure projects, as seen in the prescriptions attached to structural adjustment programmes aimed at engineering development in recipient countries since the early 1980s. These prescriptions include a neo-liberal agenda of economic reform, removing the strong hand of government in the market place in favour of the benefits of the forces of supply and demand, and emphasising the importance of avoiding excessive inflation, excessive budget deficits and over-valued exchange rates.<sup>36</sup> In the event the recipients fail to agree to meet the IFI's standards, they would not qualify for assistance. If on the other hand they do agree to meet the standards but then backtrack on implementation, the lenders apply pressure by way of threatening to stop funding, reducing the amount of assistance or actually cutting off financial support entirely. The IFIs portray themselves as an 'open-system',<sup>37</sup> claiming to create reciprocal benefits for parties involved and to enhance policy environments.<sup>38</sup>

The 'emerging' donors on the other hand provide about a third of total development assistance to Africa, and they do so outside the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development and its Development Assistance Committee. China is the most dominant emerging donor in the group; one source has indicated that China's assistance in Africa will surpass that from the World Bank in the future,<sup>39</sup> though currently Chinese assistance remains less than overall Western agencies' aid. Between 2000 and 2015, for

example, China's Export and Import (EXIM) Bank disbursed \$613 million in Africa, compared to \$1.7 billion by its US counterpart. Notably, in 2015, the World Bank disbursed \$14.3 billion worth of credit to Africa, an amount similar to the Chinese financial commitment to Africa.<sup>40</sup> Unlike Western agencies, however, Chinese aid comes with limited conditionality, requiring recipients to purchase materials and technology from China. In addition, its aid system operates within the South-South cooperation framework which stresses solidarity, non-interference in another state's internal affairs, mutual benefit and horizontality. This is as opposed to the intrusive vertical engagement associated with 'traditional' donors.<sup>41</sup>

Eager to develop mega infrastructure projects envisioned in their national and regional development strategies, African leaders have found this horizontal engagement resonates well with their agendas. As will be illustrated below, the intensified global infrastructure race – courtesy of predominantly China and other 'emerging' donors – offers agency of choice to the EAC member states to select financiers and builders of regional infrastructure projects they deem favourable, thereby easing the way for regionalism. China has, for instance, emerged as a more favoured financier and builder of infrastructure projects under the LAPSET initiative and projects in the northern and central corridors of the EAC, central to regional connectivity.

The inception of development under LAPSET became a locus of global geopolitical competition, thereby redefining Kenya's interests vis-à-vis the interests of 'traditional' and 'emerging' donors – mainly Japan, China and the Gulf States.

It was widely speculated that the mainland Chinese government would have interest in funding the corridor projects, however this turned out not to be the case.<sup>42</sup> In 2011, the Hong Kong firm JS Neoplant showed interest in the project, however the Kenyan government declined the offer because it involved a sovereign guarantee.<sup>43</sup> China Communications Construction Company won the construction bid for the first three berths at Lamu Port, while China Merchants Ports Group Company Limited won the bid for the construction of the Lamu Special Economic Zone. Having engaged Chinese firms in the transport sector, senior policy makers informed the author that Chinese firms were selected not only because of the low bid, but more importantly owing to the Kenyan government's belief that Chinese firms were more efficient in the delivery of infrastructure projects compared to the bidding Western firms.<sup>44</sup> In a joint venture with a local company, a Japanese firm was to conduct the LAPSET feasibility study, however allegations of inflated costs forced the company to bring down its price.<sup>45</sup> In 2010, Japan's Toyota Tsusho Corporation (TTC) showed strong interest in developing the LAPSET corridor by offering to build the pipeline to South Sudan, so long as it was allowed to manage it in future. It completed a feasibility study of the South Sudan-Kenya route sometime in April 2012, but its interests were stalled by Uganda's concerns over the Kenyan route.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, it successfully gained the contract to undertake the feasibility study and initial works on the Hoima-Lamu pipeline. In the late 2000s, a number of the Gulf States were also interested in the LAPSET corridor; Al-Bader, an international development construction company from Kuwait, put forward a project proposal in Sudan in 2005.<sup>47</sup> In 2006 in South Sudan, Al-Bader showed further interest as the Kenyan government attempted to promote the project abroad.<sup>48</sup> Given that the firm had interests in oil exploration sites in South Sudan, it was expected that it would have interest in developing the project in the country.<sup>49</sup> Al-Bader proposed a public-private partnership model, however

concerns were raised in the manner in which the negotiations were conducted.<sup>50</sup> The Kenyan government also considered the offer from Qatar's government to develop the project in return for land in the Tana River Delta.<sup>51</sup> Some reports later indicated that Qatar's government was interested in developing roads connecting Lamu and Isiolo.<sup>52</sup>

Western actors, particularly the US, followed the early development around the LAPSET corridor partly because of security interests in the Horn of Africa. A report conducted by an affiliate of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, listed four potential effects of the LAPSET initiative on the US-Kenyan security partnership. Namely, the LAPSET initiative had the potential to: force the exit of military units from the Kenyan Naval Base at Manda Bay; harm local communities and exacerbate the latent social tensions; embolden extremists with new targets and disaffected youth to recruit; and expand the Sino-Kenya economic bond.<sup>53</sup> While not denying the perceived challenges, Western actors identified opportunities in the corridor in a bid to counter the increasing Chinese presence. Through the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the US earmarked \$19.4 million for a livestock development programme in areas through which the planned construction in the corridor would pass.<sup>54</sup> In 2014, many Western firms had expressed interest in conducting a feasibility study of the crude oil pipeline contract that was won by Japan's TTC.<sup>55</sup> It was also reported that Bechtel Corporation, the San Francisco-based engineering giant, expressed interest in developing the main components of the project.<sup>56</sup> However, by late 2014, none of the 'traditional' donors had extended financial support for LAPSET corridor projects; instead multilateral lenders like the African Development Bank (AfDB) had supported peripheral roads in Isiolo and Moyale that are now considered part of the project.

Similarly, from the inception of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) project in the northern corridor, competition between Western and Chinese interests intensified. Initially, the Kenya Railway Corporation (KRC) had signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with an Italian firm to conduct a feasibility study of the Mombasa-Nairobi route (Phase One) of the SGR.<sup>57</sup> However, when the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) offered to conduct the feasibility study for free on condition that it develop the project, KRC immediately terminated its engagement with the Italian firm and signed a new MoU with the Chinese firm. Perhaps in a calculated move to deny China the opportunity to implement the SGR, Western governments (through the World Bank) advised the Kenyan government to shelve its ambition of implementing the SGR. A report by the World Bank Africa Transport Unit compared the projected investment costs per kilometre to the anticipated freight volumes and forecasted revenue streams. The report stated that freight traffic within the entire EAC rail network could, by 2030, reach 14.4 million tons annually; however, to be viable, the SGR would necessitate a volume of 55.2 million tons annually.<sup>58</sup> In other words, according to the World Bank report there was no economic sense in building an SGR network in East Africa. The report advised that a rehabilitated metre gauge network would have been financially prudent. However, the Kenyan government ignored the advice of the World Bank and pressed on with the Chinese MoU.

In Tanzania, President John Pombe Magufuli was elected in 2015 largely on the basis of his platform of reviewing China-Tanzania links and projects.<sup>59</sup> The presence of many external financiers in Tanzania has provided fodder to Magufuli to openly challenge China. Following allegations of corruption, Tanzania cancelled a credit facility of \$7.6 billion it had signed with China's EXIM Bank for the construction of the SGR in the



central corridor, expected to link Tanzania with Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda.<sup>60</sup> Magufuli instead funded it from tax payers, and consequently awarded the railway construction contract to a Turkish company.<sup>61</sup> Further, many were surprised when Magufuli quashed the contract of \$10 billion poised to be funded by China and Oman for the Bagamoyo megaport project in the central corridor.<sup>62</sup>

According to conditions set by the Chinese government, Tanzania would not develop any other port until Bagamoyo was completed; in addition, Chinese investors would receive generous tax holidays in the proposed special economic zones, plus a 99-year management lease of the port would be extended to China Merchants Holding International.<sup>63</sup> Magufuli opposed the terms calling them 'exploitative and awkward in exchange for port financing'.<sup>64</sup> However, the Tanzanian government re-opened negotiations leading to a 33-year lease instead of the original 99 years.<sup>65</sup> Chinese investors were to be subjected to a tax regime similar to other foreign investors, and if it so wished Tanzania would develop new ports in competition with Bagamoyo.<sup>66</sup>

The intensified global infrastructure race courtesy of China and other 'emerging' donors has sustained 'Africa's infrastructure renaissance'<sup>67</sup> discourse that is used by African leaders to question the history of colonial infrastructure projects. It is clear that despite the EAC members having long-term engagement with 'traditional' donors and even some 'emerging' donors, the global infrastructure race has given those EAC members a new level of agency of choice. Whereas China appears more attractive because as partners their identities and interests have increasingly been forged through the principles<sup>68</sup> of the South-South Cooperation framework, ironically member states have to some extent played China against its competitors. In so doing, it could be argued, they have engendered a region-centric infrastructure drive on their own terms, consequently laying the foundations for enhanced regionalism.

## Structural layer II: Pan-African continental connectivity

China, in its region-centric infrastructure drives in East Africa, also operates within the context of Pan-African continental connectivity. Unlike bilateral infrastructure projects of the immediate post-independence era, region-centric infrastructure projects are 'driven by hinterland economic demand and realisation of the Pan-African vision of continental integration'.<sup>69</sup> As a concept, Pan-Africanism seeks to unify Africans in their efforts to gain political and economic independence, as well as collective self-reliance and social and political equality, and has proved useful as a rhetorical tool in the creation of African regional organisations.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, the African Union has framed regional infrastructure drives as a vehicle for the attainment of post-modern Pan-Africanism. Indeed, Aspiration 2 of the AU's Agenda 2063 aims at an 'integrat[ed] continent, politically united based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance'.<sup>71</sup> Specifically it calls for 'world class, integrative infrastructure that criss-crosses the continent'.<sup>72</sup> It is the AU's aspiration that 'by 2063, the necessary infrastructure will be in place to support Africa's accelerated integration and growth, technological transformation, trade and development'. This includes:<sup>73</sup>

[h]igh-speed railway network, roads, shipping lines, sea and air transport, as well as well-developed ICT and the digital economy. A Pan-African High Speed Train Network will connect all the major cities/capitals of the continent, with adjacent highways and pipelines for gas, oil, water, as well as ICT Broadband cables and other infrastructure. This will be a

catalyst for manufacturing, skills development, technology, research and development, integration and intra-Africa trade, investments and tourism.

Subsequently, the AU document calls for action that will channel funding towards 'connect[ing] Africa through world-class infrastructure, including interconnectivity between island states and the mainland, and with a concerted push to finance and implement the major infrastructure projects'.<sup>74</sup>

As China's role grows in infrastructure projects on the continent, and increasingly through BRI, China's engagement is in line with the goal of seamless connectivity expressed in Agenda 2063s Aspiration 2. At the sub-regional level, Africa's quest for world-class infrastructure is likewise in harmony with the BRI's Economic Corridor. In 2014, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang made reference to the desire expressed by the AU Chair Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma to connect all African capital cities. Keqiang articulated China's vision for the 'three [level] network' – entailing high-speed rail, a series of roads and highways, and a regional aviation service – and the role of the China–Africa Cooperation Forum (FOCAC) in the development of this network.<sup>75</sup> Accordingly in 2015 and 2016, China and African countries entered into agreement on continental infrastructure development including highways, railways and aviation, as well as development of a high speed train network, viewed as flagship projects of Agenda 2063.<sup>76</sup>

Later, the Johannesburg Action Plan (2016–2018) of the Sixth FOCAC committed China and Africa further to:<sup>77</sup>

[t]ake concrete measures and give priority to encourage Chinese businesses and financial institutions to expand investment through various means, such as Public-Private Partnership (PPP) and Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT), to support African countries and the African flagship projects, in particular the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa and the Presidential Infrastructure Championing Initiative, in their efforts to build railroad, highway, regional aviation, ports ... and facilitate infrastructure connectivity and economic integration in Africa ... According to the plan of building transnational and trans-regional infrastructure in Africa, the two sides will explore and cooperate on planning and construction of projects to achieve sub-regional connectivity and integration.

Most recently, the Beijing Action Plan (2019–2021) unveiled during the Seventh FOCAC went further, calling for a continent wide China–Africa cooperation plan. The plan underscores that:<sup>78</sup>

[China and Africa] will, in view of the cross-border and trans-regional infrastructure development plans of Africa, and by taking into consideration the real needs of African countries and economic and social returns of relevant projects, explore and advance cooperation and projects promoting continental, regional and sub-regional connectivity. China has decided to jointly formulate a China–Africa infrastructure cooperation plan with the African Union. China will support Chinese companies in participating in Africa's infrastructure development by way of investment-construction-operation or through other models.

In line with these and earlier action plans, Kenya has led the development of the LAPSSET corridor aimed at providing transport and logistics between the Eastern African countries of Kenya, Ethiopia and South Sudan. Through the LAPSSET Corridor Development Authority (LCDA), the government in Nairobi has constructed powerful narratives to legitimise the project both at regional and national levels. Regionally, the Chinese-built LAPSSET corridor has been framed as key in promoting regional integration and economic

growth. It is promoted as a pathway linking East and West Africa, coast to coast,<sup>79</sup> which would further propel Kenya as a gateway to East and Central Africa.<sup>80</sup> It is for this reason that the EAC has prioritised the LAPSSSET corridor as one of the key projects in its Vision 2050. The LAPSSSET corridor is also one of the flagship projects in Kenya's national plan, Vision 2030, which seeks to transform Kenya into 'a newly-industrializing, middle-income country' by 2030.<sup>81</sup> Among the local communities in the northern part of Kenya, the government has framed the idea that the project would be essential for 'open[ing] up the pastoral [activities in the area]' to enhance investment and interconnectivity.<sup>82</sup> In June 2015 in South Africa, the LAPSSSET corridor was endorsed as the Presidential Infrastructure Championship Initiative (PICI) project at a gathering of African heads of state and government. This endorsement catapulted the corridor to a highly favoured status consequently inspiring investors' confidence. It also strengthened the prioritisation of the corridor in Kenya's regional and continental infrastructure and investment plans.<sup>83</sup> At the same meeting LAPSSSET was also incorporated as part of the African Union Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa, allowing it to be considered for financial support at the continental level. It was also expected that the institutional transformation would increase its exposure to foreign direct investors in the wake of the oil discovery in the East Africa region.<sup>84</sup>

The original plan of the Chinese-funded SGR was for Kenya and China to 'jointly develop and operate a modern, fast, reliable, efficient and high capacity railway transport system as a seamless single railway operating among the Parties'.<sup>85</sup> The design of the SGR was in sync with the strategic vision of the partner states. For Uganda, the transport route would help to reduce constraints of its geographic location as a landlocked country, while for Kenya it would help to sustain its regional dominance in competition with Tanzania.<sup>86</sup> The 2008 bilateral agreement was upgraded to a Tripartite Agreement in 2013 providing that the rail would be extended from Nairobi to Malaba on the border with Uganda, while the final phase was supposed to run from Malaba to Uganda's capital Kampala, and to Kigali (Rwanda) by 2018, with an extension to South Sudan.<sup>87</sup> Nationally, the newly elected Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta termed the SGR as one of his flagship projects in the Second Medium Term Plan (2013–2017) of Vision 2030. Suffice it to say that Vision 2030 was built upon the policy foundation laid by President Mwai Kibaki in his first economic blue print, referred to as the Economic Recovery Strategy (ERS) paper, which identified infrastructure as one of the pillars of economic growth. Interviews with policymakers revealed that they conceived an effective transport infrastructure as 'one of the most critical factors to lowering the costs of doing business and opening up income-generating opportunities for poor households'.<sup>88</sup> In turn, investment in transport would propel Kenya.<sup>89</sup>

[a]s the most efficient and effective transport hub of the East and Central Africa region and promote national aspirations for socio-economic reconstruction and development. It will also facilitate improvement and expansion of transport infrastructure in a manner that will reduce transport costs and also open new frontiers for economic development.

Therefore the inauguration of Kenya's Nairobi-Mombasa rail line marked on 31 May 2017 'the completion of the first phase of the intraregional railway line that will eventually extend to Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan ... Regional projects such as these demonstrate a shift towards trade enabling infrastructure that aims to spur intra-Africa trade integration'.<sup>90</sup>

Finally, the central corridor, as articulated in Tanzania's Vision 2025, aims at transforming the country 'into a strong and competitive middle-income country by 2025'.<sup>91</sup> As one of the flagship projects, the corridor seeks to drive industrialisation in the region by enhancing 'Tanzania's participation and leadership role in global value chain and production network'.<sup>92</sup> The corridor connects Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the DRC to Tanzania's Port of Dar es Salaam. Pan-Africanist ideals have also pervaded the construction of the central corridor, which is expected to revitalise the spirit of brotherhood embraced by former President Mwalimu Julius Nyerere.<sup>93</sup>

Thus whereas the idea of Pan-African continental connectivity is popularised by African leaders, it is the role China plays both as the builder and financier of the earmarked infrastructure projects in the region that acts as a further catalyst to regionalism. One source estimates that about 12.9% of projects in the region in 2018 were funded by the EAC member states, while China's infrastructure finances in the region was estimated at 25.9%, further underscoring the significant role China plays in region-centric infrastructure drives.<sup>94</sup>

### **Structural layer III: The intra-regional infrastructure race**

The willingness of China to financially support region-centric infrastructure has revitalised regional ambitions, consequently igniting the intra-regional infrastructure race. The competition between Kenya and Tanzania – the nodal states around which regional infrastructure drives unfurl – threatens the ideals of Pan-African continental connectivity. This competition has been interpreted as an attempt by Tanzania to challenge Kenya's hegemony in the region.<sup>95</sup> The implementation of some of the Chinese-funded infrastructure projects paints a picture of 'the rivalry and undercutting that is inherent in the infrastructure development diplomacy in the region'<sup>96</sup> and to a large extent has had an impact on regionalisation. The stiff competition saw Tanzania revive the central corridor by unveiling plans for a continuous transport and communication network linking Tanzania to its neighbouring landlocked states, with a view to developing the Dar es Salaam Seaport to increase commerce in the region.<sup>97</sup> The rejuvenation of this port was interpreted on the Kenyan side as an attempt to erode the economic influence of the Mombasa Port in the northern corridor. Indeed the Tanzanian government states boldly that the central corridor is the 'obvious aorta of [the] East African economic zone and crucial for integration of the region',<sup>98</sup> and is planned to accommodate high speed railway connections to the neighbouring central African countries. Further investment in the central corridor will see the development of Mwanza Port and Kigoma Port to revamp local development and connect to other countries.

The northern corridor on the other hand is designed to ease transport between the Kenyan coast and countries in East and Central Africa. Hosting a number of infrastructure projects under implementation through the coordination of member states of the EAC, the northern corridor was conceptualised as a regional infrastructure development project at a regional conference and adopted by heads of state in Tanzania in 2004. Initially, the intra-regional infrastructure race was manifested in the formation of a coalition of member states deemed to share interests, which saw Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda adopt the principle of asymmetry in which '[states] adopt various measures on integration at varying speeds depending on their domestic, economic and political

status,<sup>99</sup> consequently leading to the formation of the 'Coalition of the Willing (CoW)'. The initial thinking behind the CoW was to ensure faster progress of the Chinese-funded SGR as initially agreed by Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda. The principle of asymmetry was not shared by Tanzania and Burundi, however, who opted for a cautious approach at regionalism,<sup>100</sup> leading to a series of counter-accusations among the EAC member states.<sup>101</sup> Tanzania and Burundi interpreted the CoW as an attempt to isolate and marginalise them, limiting their involvement in the implementation of region-centric infrastructure drives.

The rivalry between Kenya and Tanzania became even more pronounced with Uganda's decision to reroute the Kenya-led Hoima-Lokichar-Lamu oil pipeline, redirecting it to the Tanzania-led Hoima-Tanga route.<sup>102</sup> In 2006, Uganda's government had announced availability of commercially viable oil deposits approximated at 2.5 billion barrels.<sup>103</sup> Coupling this with the fact of its geographical reality as a landlocked country, President Yoweri Museveni construed the oil discovery as an opportunity to reduce Kenya's stranglehold on its economy and take an active role in regional energy politics.<sup>104</sup> Thus under the prevailing context Uganda did not hesitate to redefine its interests with Tanzania when it perceived Kenya's Hoima-Lokichar-Lamu crude pipeline as high risk and not economically viable. Towards the end of 2015, Uganda and Kenya had signed an agreement to establish the crude oil pipeline proposed to pass through Kenya's northern region.<sup>105</sup> The decision was deemed prudent as it would have caused the two countries to cooperate in pooling resources to connect newly discovered oil points, thereby reducing construction costs. A feasibility study estimated that the route would incur a cost of approximately \$5.5 billion for 1400 kilometres of pipeline. However, before the project could begin, Uganda demanded a security guarantee on the Kenyan side, especially in respect of insecurity along the Kenya-Uganda border and the emerging rise in the number of Al-Shabaab militants in some parts of Nairobi and northern Kenya.<sup>106</sup> An alternative route was proposed, but the realities of implementation on the Kenyan side caused Uganda to drift towards Tanzania in search of the alternative route via the central corridor.<sup>107</sup> After President John Magufuli ascended to power in late 2015, Tanzania increasingly forged good relations with Uganda, a move that precipitated Kampala's policy adjustment. The Hoima-Tanga crude oil pipeline, measuring 1443 kilometres and passing through the western part of Lake Victoria, was estimated to cost \$3.9 billion, much lower than the Kenyan option.<sup>108</sup> Due to Tanzania's relative political stability,<sup>109</sup> favourable physical geography, fewer security concerns and a less politicised land acquisition programme, as well as greater availability of railway infrastructure for this project, it was expected to be implemented more quickly than the pipeline with Kenya.<sup>110</sup> Therefore Chinese-funded infrastructure projects paved the way for a heightened regional infrastructure race, potentially threatening regionalism.

#### **Structural layer IV: China's bilateral approach in funding regional infrastructure projects**

Finally, China's bilateral approach in funding regional infrastructure projects is also threatening regionalism. Despite the existence of the EAC-China Framework Agreement, China in its engagement on the continent appears to ignore regional institutions key to setting Africa's regional infrastructure agenda.<sup>111</sup> For instance, while the 5th EAC Development

Strategy envisions a firm foundation for transforming the EAC into a stable, competitive and sustainable lower-middle income region by 2021 through consolidation of the Single Customs Territory,<sup>112</sup> China's bilateral approach in the region works to slow down this process, thereby acting as a regional sub-system wrecker, as elaborated below.<sup>113</sup>

The Northern Corridor Initiative was expected to bring together Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan for the purpose of establishing rules, principles and norms undergirding their engagement on the railway project and making it a truly regional effort. To realise regional objectives of the project, each state was expected to acquire and develop the section of the SGR within its territory. However, the implementation of this requirement saw each state engage China bilaterally. For instance, Kenya was tasked with developing the Mombasa-Malaba route in two phases: Phase One, the Mombasa-Nairobi route and Phase Two, the Nairobi-Malaba route, further divided into three different sub-phases: Phase 2A: Nairobi to Naivasha; Phase 2B: Naivasha to Kisumu (with a new port at Kisumu on Lake Victoria); and Phase 2C, from Kisumu to Malaba. Work began on Phase One in December 2014, and was completed at a cost of \$3.8 billion by 31 May 2017, when it was inaugurated by President Kenyatta.<sup>114</sup> That event was in contrast to the launch of the project, at which four presidents were present – from Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan – on 28 November 2013. Covering about 488 kilometres, Phase One of the railway was constructed by the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC). China's EXIM Bank funded 85% of the costs while the Kenyan government contributed the remaining portion.<sup>115</sup> Whereas the implementation of Phase One and Phase 2A created the impression that the project was on its course to its final destination, financial negotiations of the subsequent phases have influenced policy adjustments among participating states. Uganda's interests in the SGR are structured by Kenya-China relations and how Kenya goes about implementing the remaining phases. During the implementation of Phase One, China placed some demands on Kampala for financing Uganda's side of the SGR. It was held that 'China demand[ed] that Uganda secure [a] guarantee from Kenya, that it [was] still interested and [would] source financing for the Naivasha-Malaba section of the [SGR]'.<sup>116</sup> Kampala might have interpreted the move as an attempt by China to have more influence in the project after its completion.<sup>117</sup> But other reports observed that China was perhaps concerned about Uganda's ability to repay the loan, thus requiring that Kampala 'prove that construction of the [SGR] makes business sense before US\$ 2 billion loan is provided and that once the project is completed it will generate enough money to repay the loan'.<sup>118</sup>

Later in 2017 it was reported that the Ugandan government had already applied for the loan awaiting implementation of the extension to Malaba on the Kenyan side.<sup>119</sup> One year later, authorities in Kenya and Uganda met a Chinese delegation to assess implementation progress and prospects for financing Uganda's costs.<sup>120</sup> In August 2018, CRBC agreed on the construction of the next phase, conditional on the conclusion of financial negotiations during President Kenyatta's visit to Beijing in September.<sup>121</sup> Media reports indicated that nothing tangible came out of the September negotiations, however, as China demanded that a new feasibility study covering the line from Mombasa to Kisumu be conducted to ascertain the viability of the project.<sup>122</sup> Lack of financial commitment from China notwithstanding, Kenya announced that it would proceed to upgrade the existing metre gauge railway from Naivasha to Malaba.<sup>123</sup> In response, Kampala announced that it would spend \$250 million in rehabilitating the old railway

line connecting Kampala to Malaba on the Kenyan border, instead of developing the SGR option.<sup>124</sup> The unfolding events have thus cast doubt on the implementation of Phase 2C of the SGR within Kenya, with reports indicating that 'it is now uncertain whether Uganda's joint plan with Kenya and Rwanda, conceived six years ago, to build a standard gauge railway (SGR) that connects East Africa's land-locked nations to the Kenyan port of Mombasa, will come to fruition'.<sup>125</sup> With financial support not forthcoming from China, it remains to be seen whether the original regionalist idea will be achieved. A similar fate befell the construction of the SGR worth \$7.6 billion in the central corridor when the financial contract between China and Tanzania was cancelled following corruption allegations in 2017, with the result that Tanzania plans to fund the project from tax payers.<sup>126</sup> Through a cost-benefit analysis, Rwanda saw the Tanzania route as more economically viable than the Kenya route, a strategic decision that destabilised the original implementation of the SGR under the Northern Corridor Initiative.

Whereas Chinese loans are attractive to African leaders because of limited conditionality, African economies are now forced to bear with high interest rates on Chinese commercial loans provided by EXIM Bank compared to the rates of various Western financiers.<sup>127</sup> Consequently, to meet loan obligations from China, member states have separately formulated national laws to raise required revenues which have, in some instances, cut across the regionalisation process. For instance, when Kenya introduced the Railway Development Levy (RDL) to repay Chinese credit lines, other EAC member states interpreted the move as a unilateral policy that was in contradiction to the EAC Custom Union Protocol. In particular, Article 10 of that protocol stipulates that, 'the Partner States shall, upon the coming into the force of this protocol, eliminate all internal tariffs and other charges of equivalent effect on trade among them'.<sup>128</sup> Consequently Kenya was compelled to set aside 1.5% of revenues raised via the RDL on exports from the other EAC member states in March 2014, after the East African Business Council petitioned the EAC Council of Ministers.<sup>129</sup> Later in 2014, the EAC introduced a 1.5% Infrastructure Development Levy (IDL) to replace Kenya's RDL. Whereas Uganda and Rwanda adopted the EAC IDL, Kenya went ahead with its RDL. Similarly, Tanzania also enacted a national RDL in 2015 at 1.5%.

## Implications of the findings

In the assessment of China's role in African regionalism via its engagement with regional infrastructure projects, through the lens of four structural layers – the global infrastructure race; Pan-African continental connectivity; the intra-regional infrastructure race; and bilateral funding of regional infrastructure projects – this article finds a mixed effect. In particular, the global infrastructure race and Pan-African continental connectivity offer opportunities for increased regionalism, while the intra-regional infrastructure race and China's bilateral approach in funding regional infrastructure projects threaten regionalism.

Within the realm of opportunity, the global infrastructure race appears to be more promising because it offers African actors agency of choice as far as seeking financial support for region-centric infrastructure projects is concerned. The perception by 'traditional' donors of the infrastructure sector as high risk had left a gap in funding infrastructure development in the region that 'emerging' donors – especially China –

leveraged. Of note is the fact that when China began to assert a strong business presence through construction in Africa – at times even of infrastructure projects funded by ‘traditional’ donors – the ‘traditional’ donors returned to the infrastructure sector. Their move ignited a global competition predisposing African actors to play not only ‘traditional’ against ‘emerging’ donors, but ironically actors within the latter group against each other (ie, China versus Turkey), thereby redefining the sector and exercising new agency in choosing donors deemed unintrusive in the domestic political economy space. Consequently, the offers of financial support encouraged member states to come up with mega infrastructure projects designed to promote regional cooperation and economic growth. The goal of Pan-African continental connectivity fused with ideological coherence of China’s BRI and the AUs Agenda 2063, together forming a rallying call to promote regionalism.

However, those goals have been frustrated by revitalised regional ambitions and consequently the intra-regional infrastructure race. Further attempts at regionalisation have also been limited by the tendency of China to ignore regional institutions in its bilateral engagement, for instance with the EAC member states, thereby acting as a regional sub-system wrecker. While various projects such as the LAPSET corridor development began with great statements about regional integration, in reality the EAC has not fully engaged with region-centric infrastructure drives, rendering the process hostage to a few political leaders and their supporters with financial support – predominantly China. The rhetoric of China’s BRI conveys an intent to promote regional cooperation, but when it comes to financial negotiations, Beijing embraces the bilateral approach, which slows down regionalism. Further, in the case of the EAC, efforts to raise the revenues needed to meet China’s repayment plans have included national laws that are inconsistent with the EAC Custom Union Protocol, further eroding regionalism.

## Conclusion

From the above findings, for regionalism to be successful African regional economic communities such as the EAC need to position themselves strategically when engaging China, with a view to reducing national differences between member states. This would involve developing a unified front when engaging China not only in the development of transport infrastructure projects such as the LAPSET but also in other important sectors. The united approach would foster much needed broader agency on the part of the RECs not only when dealing with China but also with other extra-regional actors, thereby enhancing cooperation further in the region. The EAC and other RECs should also take advantage of the Beijing Action Plan (2019–2021) to enter into partnership with leading Chinese banks funding infrastructure development in Africa to promote a more coordinated financial engagement in the region, so as to better manage debt arising from financing infrastructure projects. The net effect of China’s impact on African regionalism, in the end, should be up to African states.

## Notes

1. F.Söderbaum, *The Political Economy of Regionalism: The Case of Southern Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).





17. V. Tekdal, 'China's Belt and Road Initiative: At the Crossroads of Challenges and Ambitions', *The Pacific Review* 31, no. 3 (2018): 373–90, doi:[10.1080/09512748.2017.1391864](https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2017.1391864); Y. Wang, 'Offensive for Defensive: The Belt and Road Initiative and China's New Grand Strategy', *The Pacific Review* 29, no. 3 (2016): 455–63, doi:[10.1080/09512748.2016.1154690](https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2016.1154690).
18. I thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this point to my attention.
19. S. Ngwenya and A.R. Lema, 'China's Role in Regional Integration of Africa: The Case of East African Community', *Stanford International Policy Review* 5, no. 1: 37.
20. J.T. Aalders, 'Building on the Ruins of Empire: The Uganda Railway and the LAPSSET Corridor in Kenya', *Third World Quarterly* (2020), doi:[10.1080/01436597.2020.1741345](https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2020.1741345); J. Bachmann and B. Kilaka, 'Full But Empty/Empty But Empty? Frontier Narratives on Northern Kenya from Colonial Administrations to the LAPSSET Corridor' (paper presented at the European conference on African studies, Edinburgh, 12–14 June 2019); H. Elliott, 'Planning, Property and Plots at the Gateway to Kenya's "New Frontier"', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10, no. 3 (2016): 511–29, doi:[10.1080/17531055.2016.1266196](https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2016.1266196); C. Enns and B. Bersaglio, 'On the Coloniality of "New" Mega-infrastructure Projects in East Africa', *Antipode* 52, no. 1 (2019): 103–23, doi:[10.1111/anti.12582](https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12582); E. Were, 'East African Infrastructural Development Race: A Sign of Postmodern Pan-Africanism?', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (2019), doi:[10.1080/09557571.2019.1648382](https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1648382); P. Whang, 'Regional Derailment: The Saga of the East African Railways', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 12, no. 4 (2018): 716–34, doi:[10.1080/17531055.2018.1514848](https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2018.1514848).
21. Were, 'East African Infrastructural Development Race', 1.
22. F. Söderbaum, *The Political Economy of Regionalism: The Case of Southern Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 5.
23. Söderbaum, *The Political Economy of Regionalism*, 5.
24. B. Hettne and F. Söderbaum, 'Theorising the Rise of Regionness', *New Political Economy* 5, no. 3 (2000): 457–74, doi:[10.1080/713687778](https://doi.org/10.1080/713687778).
25. B. Hettne and F. Söderbaum Cited in P. Riggirozzi, 'Region, Regionness and Regionalism in Latin America: Towards a New Synthesis', *New Political Economy* 17, no. 4 (2012): 426, doi:[10.1080/13563467.2011.603827](https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2011.603827).
26. Cited in Riggirozzi, 'Region, Regionness and Regionalism in Latin America', 426.
27. For a summary of this, see Riggirozzi, 'Region, Regionness and Regionalism in Latin America', 426.
28. F. Söderbaum, *The Political Economy of Regionalism: The Case of Southern Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 215.
29. Riggirozzi, 'Region, Regionness and Regionalism in Latin America', 425.
30. H. Hveem, 'Explaining the Regional Phenomenon in an Era of Globalization', in *Political Economy and the Changing Global Order*, 2nd ed., ed. R. Stubbs and R.D. Underhill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 72.
31. Hveem, 'Explaining the Regional Phenomenon in an Era of Globalization', 73.
32. B. Hettne, *The New Regionalism: Implications for Global Development and International Security* (Helsinki: United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research, 1994), 1–8. B. Hettne and F. Söderbaum, 'Theorising the Rise of Regionness', *New Political Economy* 5, no. 3 (2000): 462, doi:[10.1080/713687778](https://doi.org/10.1080/713687778).
33. Hettne, *The New Regionalism*, 1–8.
34. Hettne, *The New Regionalism*, 1–8.
35. N. Gil, A. Stafford, and I. Musonda, 'Duality by Design: The Global Race to build Africa's infrastructure', in *Duality by Design: The Global Race to Build Africa's Infrastructure*, ed. N. Gil, et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
36. C. Burnside and D. Dollar, 'Aid, Policies, and Growth', *American Economic Review* 190, no. 4 (2000): 847–68, doi:[10.1257/aer.90.4.847](https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.90.4.847); D. Rodrick, 'Goodbye Washington Consensus, Hello Washington Confusion? A Review of the World Bank's Economic Growth in the 1990s: Learning from a Decade of Reform', *Journal of Economic Literature* 44, no. 4 (December 2006): 973–87.

37. A system that has external interactions taking the form of material transfers into or out of the system boundary.
38. Gil, Stafford, and Musonda, 'Duality by Design'.
39. Personal interview, Prof. Michael Chege, former advisor Ministry of State Planning and National Planning, Kenya, under President Mwai Kibaki (2003–2012); interviewed on 14 July 2015.
40. J. Eom, D. Brautigam, and L. Benabdallah, 'The Path Ahead: The 7th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation', China-Africa Research Initiative, *Briefing Paper* (2018): 1–10.
41. B. Gosovic 'The Resurgence of South-South Cooperation', *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (2016): 733–43, doi:[10.1080/01436597.2015.1127155](https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1127155).
42. Personal interview, Mr. Silvester Kasuku, Director-General, LAPSSET Authority, 14 July 2015.
43. 'Longing for Lamu', *African Confidential*, 5, no. 2, 13 December 2011, [https://www.africa-confidential.com/article-preview/id/10667/Longing\\_for\\_Lamu](https://www.africa-confidential.com/article-preview/id/10667/Longing_for_Lamu).
44. Personal interview, Prof. Wainaina Gituro, Director-General, Vision 2030 Delivery Secretariat 20 July 2015; Prof. Bitange Ndemo, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information and Technology, 27 July 2015.
45. 'Who is Benefiting from the Millions Paid for Lamu Port Corridor Project?', *Daily Nation*, 21, Nation Media Group, 21 May 2011; Alphonse Shiundu, 'Kenya: MPs Threaten to Blacklist Japan Firm Over Lamu Port', *All Africa*, 15 December 2011, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201112151113.html> (accessed 23 July 2020).
46. 'Toyota Tsusho Named Oil Pipeline Lead Consultant', *Expogroup*, 19 November 2014, [https://www.expogr.com/expokenya/detail\\_news.php?newsid=602&pageid=2](https://www.expogr.com/expokenya/detail_news.php?newsid=602&pageid=2) (accessed 24 October 2020).
47. AL-BADER INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CO W.L.L (AIDCO) website, <https://www.al-bader.com/conanddev.html>. See also Dun & Bradstreet company profile, [https://www.dnb.com/business-directory/company-profiles/al\\_bader\\_international\\_development\\_co\\_wll.d5edd178cfb7385a3d76a52d0bf754d3.html](https://www.dnb.com/business-directory/company-profiles/al_bader_international_development_co_wll.d5edd178cfb7385a3d76a52d0bf754d3.html) (accessed 23 July 2020).
48. P. Mayoyo and Z. Sambu, 'Foreign Firm Seeks Rights to Start Grand Project in Lamu', *all Africa*, 4 September 2006.
49. 'Kenya: Kuwaiti Tycoon Set to Clinch Multi-million Dollar Deal for Grandiose Lamu Projects', *all Africa* 14 August 2006.
50. Personal interview, a Senior Officer at LAPSSET Authority (29 July 2015).
51. P. Redfern, 'Lamu Port Deal: Kenya to Sell Tana Delta Land', *farmlandgrab.org*, 20 December 2008, <https://www.farmlandgrab.org/post/view/2641-lamu-port-deal-kenya-to-sell-tana-delta-land> (accessed 20 August 2020).
52. 'Qatar to Hook Up with Total', *Africa Energy Intelligence*, 641, 8 December 2010.
53. Cited in N. Birger, 'Assessing the Impact of the LAPSSET Corridor: Implications for the U.S-Kenya Security Partnership' (MA thesis, Harvard University, Cambridge, 2013).
54. A. Abdi, 'USAid Gives Sh1.7 Billion to Isiolo and Marsabit Counties', *The Standard*, Standard Group, Nairobi, 16 February 2014, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/business/article/2000104758/usaid-gives-sh1-7-billion-to-isiolo-and-marsabit-counties> (accessed 16 December 2019).
55. '17 Firms bid to Design Crude Oil Pipeline from Uganda', *Daily Nation*, Nation Media Group, Nairobi, 11 August 2014.
56. E. Mutai, 'State House Hands Dealmakers Control of Lamu Projects', *Business Daily*, 13 March 2014, <http://bit.ly/1grTxD6>; I. Karambu, 'Ministries Study Sh215bn Plan for Key Lamu Port Projects', *Daily Nation*, Nation Media Group, Nairobi, 29 April 2014; D. Malingha, 'Kenya, U.S. Companies in Talks on Multibillion-Dollar Port Deal', *Bloomberg*, 26 July 2015, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-07-26/kenya-u-s-companies-in-talks-on-multibillion-dollar-port-deal> (accessed 24 July 2020).
57. Personal interview, Mr. Paul Kaliih, Deputy-Director, Asia & Australasia Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, (7 August 2015).

58. P. Wafula, 'Why the World Bank Backed Out of Project', *The Standard*, Standard Media Group: Nairobi, 2 February 2014, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/kenya/article/2000103688/why-the-world-bank-backed-out-of-project> (accessed 24 July 2020).
59. I thank an anonymous reviewer for clarifying this important point.
60. H. Makundi, H. Huyse, and P. Develtere, 'Negotiating the Technological Capacity in Chinese Engagements: Is the Tanzanian Government in the Driving Seat?', *South African Journal of International Affairs* 24, no. 3 (2017): 345, doi:10.1080/10220461.2017.1391116.
61. Interview, Tanzanian diplomat, (July 2020); Were, 'East African Infrastructural Development Race'.
62. *BR News*, 'Will a New Port Make Tanzania 'Africa's Dubai'? (2019), <https://www.beltandroad.news/2019/02/21/will-a-new-port-make-tanzania-africasdubai/> (accessed 24 July 2020).
63. S. Kamndaya, 'Chinese Officials in Tanzania Over Sh23 Trillion Bagamoyo Port Project' (2018), <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/News/1840340-4632182-1ngkidz/index.html> (accessed 24 July 2020).
64. Tanzania-Invest, 'Tanzania Halt Bagamoyo Port Project' (2019), <https://www.tanzaniainvest.com/transport/magufuli-halt-bagamoyo-port-project> (accessed 24 July 2020).
65. S. Zheng, *China, Tanzania in talks to get US\$10 billion Bagamoyo Port project back on track, ambassador says* (2019), <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3018217/china-tanzania-talksget-us10-billion-bagamoyo-port-project> (accessed 24 July 2020).
66. E. Onyango, 'Tanzania Gives Chinese firm Conditions for Bagamoyo Port' (2019), <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/Tanzania-gives-chinese-firm-conditions-for-bagamoyo-port-/2560-5318790-10s5do7/index.html>.
67. C.H. Vhumbunu, 'Enabling African Regional Infrastructure Renaissance through the China-Africa Partnership: A Trans-Continental Appraisal', *International Journal of China Studies* 7, no. 3 (2016): 271–300.
68. Personal interview Prof. Michael Chege, 'these principles and the accompanying discourse have provided agency to leaders in the region to justify China as trustable partner able to deliver infrastructure projects fast and efficient' (14 July 2015).
69. Were, 'East African Infrastructural Development Race', 1.
70. L. Fawcett and H. Gandois, 'Regionalism in Africa and the Middle East: Implications for EU Studies', *European Integration* 32, no. 6 (2010): 630, doi:10.1080/07036337.2010.518719.
71. African Union, Agenda 2063, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, African Union, 2015. P.14. Other aspirations includes: A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development (Aspiration 1); An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law (Aspiration 3); A peaceful and secure Africa (Aspiration 4); An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics (Aspiration 5); An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of Africa people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children (Aspiration 6); Africa as a strong, united and influential global player and partner (Aspiration 7), <https://au.int/agenda2063/aspirations> (accessed 24 July 2020).
72. <https://au.int/agenda2063/aspirations> (accessed 24 July 2020).
73. <https://au.int/agenda2063/aspirations> (accessed 24 July 2020).
74. <https://au.int/agenda2063/aspirations> (accessed 24 July 2020).
75. J. Onjala, 'China's Development Loans and the Threat of Debt Crisis in Kenya', *Development Policy Review* 36 (2018): 711, doi:10.1111/dpr.12328.
76. J. Breuer, *Two Belts, One Road? The role of Africa in China's belt & road initiative* (Berlin, Germany: Stiftung Asienhaus, 2017), 2.
77. [http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx\\_1/zywj/t1327961.htm](http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/t1327961.htm) (accessed 11 October 2020).
78. [http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx\\_1/zywj/t1594297.htm](http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/t1594297.htm) (accessed 11 October 2020).
79. LCDA, Brief on LAPSET Corridor Project, 2016, In *Www.Lapsset.Go.Ke*. <http://www.lapsset.go.ke/%0Ahttp://www.vision2030.go.ke/lib.php?f=lapsset-project-report-july-2016> (accessed 18 December 2019).
80. East African Community, Vision 2050, *Regional Vision for Socio-Economic Transformation and Development* (Arusha, Tanzania, August 2015), 52.

81. Kenya Vision 2030, A Globally competitive and prosperous Kenya, Government of Republic of Kenya, Ministry of Planning and National Development and the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), Office of the President, vii.
82. LCDA, 2016. Brief on LAPSSET Corridor Project. In *Www.Lapsset.Go.Ke*, 16, <http://www.lapsset.go.ke/%0;> <http://www.vision2030.go.ke/lib.php?f=lapsset-project-report-july-2016>.
83. LAPSSET Corridor Development Authority (2016), 1, <https://www.lapsset.go.ke>.
84. LAPSSET Corridor Development Authority (2016), 1, <https://www.lapsset.go.ke>.
85. Republic of Kenya. 14th Summit on the Northern Corridor Integration Projects: 26 June 2018, Safari Park Hotel, Nairobi: Ministry of East African Community and Northern Corridor, Development 2018.
86. Personal interviews, Kenyan policy makers (ministries of transport and foreign affairs) between 2015 and 2017.
87. The Public Investments Committee, *Special Report on the Procurement and Financing of the Construction of Standard Gauge Railway from Mombasa to Nairobi (Phase1)* (Nairobi: Parliament Building, 2014), 59.
88. Personal interviews (September to December 2015).
89. Sessional Paper No.10 of 2012 on Kenya Vision 2030, Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of State for Planning, National Development and Vision 2030pp.12 and 24, [vision2030.go.ke](http://vision2030.go.ke).
90. Hannah Edinger and Jean-Pierre Labuschagne, 'If You Want to Prosper, Consider Building Roads China's Role in African Infrastructure and Capital Projects' (Deloitte, 2018), 20.
91. Republic of Tanzania, 'The Tanzania Development Vision 2025', Planning Commission, Republic of Tanzania, 2011, 2.
92. Republic of Tanzania, 'The Tanzania Development Vision 2025', 2.
93. Enns and Bersaglio, 'On the Coloniality of "New"', 103–23.
94. H. Edinger and J. Labuschagne, 'If You want to Prosper, Consider Building Roads China's Role in African Infrastructure and Capital Projects' (Deloitte, 2018), 21.
95. Kenya is the largest economy among the East Africa Community (EAC) countries with 47 percent of the total regional Gross Domestic Product (World Development Institute, 2019). The GDP shares for other countries is Tanzania- 31%, Uganda-15%, Rwanda-5% and Burundi-1.7%.
96. Were, 'East African Infrastructural Development Race', 13.
97. African Development Bank 'Tanzania's Seaports and Transport Corridors as Development Opportunity for East and Southern Africa' NEPAD, Regional Integration and Trade Department-*Regional Integration Brief No. 3'* (July, 2014): 1–8.
98. Republic of Tanzania, 'The Tanzania Development Vision 2025'.
99. Cited in Were, 'East African Infrastructural Development Race'.
100. A.T. Maina, 'Coalition of the Willing and Tanzanian Isolation: Interests, Cooperation and Competition', 27 November 2013, <https://theforeignpolicyanalyst.wordpress.com/2013/11/27/coalition-of-the-willing-and-tanzanian-isolation-interests-cooperation-and-competition/> (accessed 12 November 2019).
101. Trade Mark, 'Coalition of the Willing 'a Thing of the Past', 2015, <https://www.trademarka.com/news/coalition-of-the-willing-a-thing-of-the-past/> (accessed 19 November 2019).
102. K. Riordan, 'Tanzania-Uganda \$4Billion Oil Pipeline Timetable Slips', *The WallStreet Journal*, 20 June 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/tanzania-uganda-4-billion-oil-pipeline-timetable-slips-1466434537> (accessed 24 July 2020).
103. E. Doro and U. Kufukurinani, 'Resource Curse or Governance Deficit? The Role of Parliament in Uganda's Oil and Zimbabwe's Diamonds', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 44, no. 1 (2018): 46, doi:10.1080/03057070.2018.1403214.
104. D. Anderson and Browne, 'The Politics of Oil in Eastern Africa', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 5, no. 2 (2011): 369–410, 389, doi:10.1080/17531055.2011.573187.
105. E. Biryaberema, 'Uganda Agrees to Plan for Oil Pipeline to New Kenya Port', *Reuters*, 13 June 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uganda-pipeline/uganda-agrees-to-plan-for-oil-pipeline-to-new-kenya-port-idUSL5N0F138D20130625> (accessed 11 November 2019).

106. F. Musisi, 'Cracks Emerge in Uganda-Kenya Oil Pipeline', *The Daily Monitor*, 15 August 2015, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Cracks-emerge-in-Uganda-Kenya-oil-pipeline-deal/688334-2831486-format-xhtml-mdb6nuz/index.html> (accessed 15 November 2019).
107. J.A. Browne, *LAPSSET the History and Politics of an Eastern African Megaproject* (London: Rift Valley Institute 2015), 1–97; A. Mwesigwa, 'Uganda Chooses Tanzania Over Kenya for Oil Pipeline Route', *The Guardian online*, 12 May, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/may/12/uganda-chooses-tanzania-over-kenya-for-oil-pipeline-route> (accessed 28 November 2019).
108. F. Musisi and M.K. Muhuza, 'How Oil Pipeline Deal Slipped Out of Kenya's Hands', *The Daily Monitor Online*, 25 April 2016, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/How-oil-pipeline-deal-slipped-out-of-Kenya-s-hands/688334-3174606-q5qb53z/index.html> (accessed 30 November 2019).
109. Uganda was aware that any political instability in Kenya would certainly affect its economy as it was the case in 2008 following disputed elections where disruption to transport resulted to acute shortage of diesel in the country.
110. 'Perils of the Pipeline', *Africa Confidential*, 57.10. 13 May 2016.
111. U. Wissenbach, 'Kenya's Madaraka Express: Decisive Chinese Impulse for African Mega Infrastructure Projects', in *Duality by Design: The Global Race to Build Africa's Infrastructure*, ed. N. Gil, et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 315–48.
112. EAC, 'Development Strategy 2016/17–2020/21', 11–2.
113. I thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this important point to my attention.
114. The railway line begins from the Port City of Mombasa along the Coastline of the Indian Ocean and stretches along the Northern Corridor through Nairobi, Kisumu to Malaba. The Phase One of the SGR line traverses Kwale, Taita-Taveta, Makueni, Machakos and Kajiado and culminates in Nairobi. The Phase two traverses Naivasha, Narok, Bomet, Nyamira, Yala, Mumias to Malaba. This phase has been divided into three sub-phases as follows: Phase 2A-Nairobi-Naivasha (120km); Phase 2B-Naivasha-Kisumu (262km); Phase 2C-Kisumu-Malaba (107km)- ([krc.c.ke/sg/](http://krc.c.ke/sg/) [accessed on 20 December 2019]).
115. Y. Wang and U. Wissenbach, 'Clientelism at Work? A Case Study of Kenyan Standard Gauge Railway Project', *Economic History of Developing Regions* 34, no. 3 (2019): 286, doi:[10.1080/20780389.2019.1678026](https://doi.org/10.1080/20780389.2019.1678026); M. Otele, *Understanding Kenyan Agency in the Acquisition and Utilization of Chinese Development Finance in the Transport Infrastructure, 2003–2017* (2018), 173, <http://cdm.com.cn/Article/CDMD-10422-1018099104.htm>.
116. A. Dicta, 'China Exim Sets Terms for Financing Uganda's Standard Gauge Railway', *The East African*, 28 May 2016, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/China-Exim-sets-terms-for-financing-Uganda-SGR/2560-3223214-esac0v/index.html>, (accessed 29 November 2019).
117. Personal interview, Officer at the Kenyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (24 October 2019).
118. A. Dicta, 'China Exim Sets Terms for Financing Uganda's Standard Gauge Railway', *The East African*, 28 May 2016, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/China-Exim-sets-terms-for-financing-Uganda-SGR/2560-3223214-esac0v/index.html> (accessed 29 November 2019).
119. T. Ogwang and F. Vanclay, 'Resources for Infrastructures Deals in Africa: Analysis of Chinese Companies Operations in Extractive Industries in Uganda' (paper to be presented at ISA Hong Kong Convention from 15–17 June 2017).
120. A. Olingo, 'Uganda, Kenya to Unlock SGR Funds "soon"', *The East African*, 23 June 2018, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/Uganda-and-Kenya-to-unlock-SGR-funds/2560-4627666-devbpq/index.html> (accessed 30 November 2019).
121. Olingo, 'Uganda, Kenya to Unlock SGR funds "Soon"'.  
122. A. Andeso, 'China Declines to Sign sh380bn Loan for Naivasha-Kisumu Railway', *Construction Kenya*, 9 September 2018, <https://www.constructionkenya.com/6236/naivasha-kisumu-railway> (accessed 19 September 2019).
123. A. Gerald, 'Kenya to Terminate Railway at Kisumu after Rwanda Exit', *The East African*, 18 May 2016, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Kenya-to-terminate-railway-at-Kisumu-after-Rwanda-exit/2558-3208396-view-printVersion-swmngm/index.html> (accessed 29 November 2019).

124. *The East African* 2019, 'Uganda Plans to Restore Old Railways at\$205m', June 9, <https://www.theafrican.co.ke/business/Uganda-plans-to-restore-old-railways/2560-5149582-of2a4z/index-html> (accessed 30 November 2019).
125. *The East African* 2019, 'Uganda Plans to Restore Old Railways at\$205m'.
126. Makundi, Huuse, and Develtere, 'Negotiating the Technological Capacity in Chinese Engagements', 345.
127. D. Brautigam, *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); L. Corkin, *Uncovering Africa Agency: Angola's Management of China's Credit Lines* (Ashgate: Farnham, 2013).
128. Wissenbach, 'Kenya's Madaraka Express', 315–48.
129. Personal interview, Trade officer Kenya Private Sector Alliance (16 July 2016).

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the editor for editorial work and the three anonymous reviewers for their valuable insights and feedback. Any remaining errors are the author's own.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Note on contributor

*Oscar M Otele* is a lecturer at the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, where he also chairs the Biennial International Conference on China–Africa Relations. His research interests include China–Africa relations, Chinese foreign policy and Africa's international relations.