

Prospects and challenges for China-Africa agricultural cooperation: the case of Botswana

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Abstract

This paper argues that since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Botswana in January 1975, the two countries have cooperated in trade, education, health, construction, culture, politics and diplomacy, but cooperation in agriculture has been relatively neglected. It is weak compared to other areas of cooperation. However, in the context of China's cooperation with Africa, the paper maintains that there are ample prospects and opportunities for the two sides to expand cooperation in the agriculture sector. The areas that need attention include technology transfer, education, marketing, irrigation and rural infrastructure. There are challenges that may hinder cooperation, such as language and cultural barriers. However, we argue that there are crucial lessons that can be learnt from the Chinese experience, and Chinese technical assistance could lead to positive outcomes for Botswana's agriculture. We conclude that Botswana policy makers should define clear objectives for cooperation with China in the agriculture sector and therefore engage China strategically for optimal benefits.

Key words: Agricultural cooperation, China, Africa, Botswana

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Introduction and Historical Background

The Peoples Republic of China (PRC) was established in 1949 after the Communist Party defeated the National Party in the civil war. The Nationalists fled to Taiwan, which the PRC declared a renegade province. Thereafter, the PRC adopted the “One China” policy which is an important concept in China’s relations with the rest of the world. In 1971, the PRC, with the support of African states, replaced Taiwan at the United Nations (UN), and this led to a new chapter in Sino-African relations. In the anti-colonial nationalist struggle that was gaining momentum in Southern Africa, China provided material and diplomatic support (Taylor, 1998; Bolaane, 2007). From 1970 to 1975, China built the Tanzania-Zambia railway line linking the two countries, the biggest project in Southern Africa at the time. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China has historically supported the African cause (Bolaane, 2007; Mogae, 2012).

After attaining independence from Britain in 1966, Botswana established diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1967. Taiwan provided aid programmes, particularly in the area of agriculture. However, in 1971 Botswana voted for the PRC’s admission to the UN and in 1975 it severed ties with Taiwan and established diplomatic relations with the PRC. As a result, the government of the PRC agreed to support “the just struggle of the government of the Republic of Botswana for safeguarding national independence and state sovereignty and developing the national economy” (Bolaane, 2007, p.143). On its part, Botswana acknowledged that the PRC was the legitimate government representing the entire Chinese people and that the province of Taiwan was an inseparable part of the territory of the PRC (Bolaane, 2007). After establishing diplomatic relations, Botswana and China agreed to develop friendly relations and cooperation on the basis of the principles of “mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression against the other country, non-interference into internal affairs of the other country, equality, mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence” (Bolaane, 2007, pp.152-153). These principles laid the basis for the bilateral cooperation that has developed since 1975.

At independence, Botswana was the second poorest country in the world with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 70 US dollars, but by 2000 Botswana’s economy had changed drastically. It had graduated from low income status to become a middle-income country, having had one of the fastest growing economies in the world with an average annual growth rate of about 9 per cent from 1966 to 1999. This rapid development was prompted by “... diamond mining, prudent fiscal policies, international financial and technical assistance, and a cautious foreign policy” (Mogae, 2012, p. 8). This economic progress played a crucial role in China’s economic interest in Botswana because the latter had plenty of resources and a conducive investment atmosphere. However, despite this positive scenario, in recent years Botswana has faced numerous development challenges, such as unemployment, poverty and inequality (Mogae, 2012). In particular, the contribution of agriculture to the GDP has dropped to about 3 per cent (Republic of Botswana, 2009). This demonstrates a significant developmental need and hence the important potential for cooperation between Botswana and China in the sphere of agriculture.

Perspectives on Chinese Engagement in African Agriculture

China has been engaged in African agriculture for more than four decades. Initially, the engagement was motivated by the need for the “new Chinese nation” to build soft power and recognition on the global stage. During this period, activities were characterised by bilateral agreements with African countries and donation based aid (Casell, 2013). In return, African countries supported the PRC’s “One China” policy. In the period to 1976 the Chinese, under Mao Tse Tung, asserted that China was different from the former Western colonial powers in that it offered friendship and solidarity to the former colonies in their anti-colonial struggles. Today, China maintains that it is part of the developing world and rejects interference in the domestic affairs of other countries. Its engagement and development model allow African countries to forge their own development path. The appeal of the Chinese strategy is derived from the failures and inefficiencies of Western aid and the inequalities of trade imbalances between the West and Africa. China’s new relationship with Africa in the twenty-first century emphasises political equality and mutual trust premised on a win-win economic cooperation (Gabas and Tang, 2014).

Current debates on China’s involvement in African agriculture focus on whether it is a threat or an opportunity for Africa. This issue is widely debated in the media and policy forums and in academic literature. Three divergent perspectives emerge from these debates in which China is seen either as a coloniser (that is, intending to impose economic and political control over African countries), an economic competitor, or a development partner (Alden, 2007). The first two perspectives prevail largely in the Western media. These emphasise China’s involvement as a threat to African development, especially with regard to land and agriculture. In the first perspective, China’s provision of aid and its diplomatic initiatives are seen as part of a protracted attempt to drive out both Western and African control over land and politics in the continent. For instance, in 2008 a British journalist wrote:

In the greatest movement of people the world has ever seen, China is secretly working to turn the entire continent into a new colony. Reminiscent of the West’s imperial push in the 18th and 19th centuries – but on a much more dramatic, determined scale – China’s rulers believe Africa can become a “satellite state” (Malone, 2008, quoted in Buckley, 2013, p.4).

The second perspective portrays China’s engagement as a self-interested, exploitative grab of resources to feed its high growth rate. For instance, in 2009 another British journalist wrote: “A million Chinese farmers have joined the rush to Africa, according to one estimate, underlining concerns that an unchecked “land grab” not seen since the 19th century is underway” (Smith, 2009, quoted in Buckley, 2013, p.5).

The counter perspective to these two, the development partner view, highlights the opportunities presented by China’s cooperation with African countries. This view emphasises the value of China’s development experience for transforming Africa through South-South collaborative initiatives. The development partner perspective is found in multilateral organisations, academic literature and in Chinese and African governments’ narratives (Buckley, 2013). Here, China’s cooperation in agriculture is presented as a success story. For example, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation posits that: “Chinese science and agriculture have much to offer other developing countries, since intensive small scale agriculture has been practised in China for centuries . . . China repeatedly demonstrated its

commitment to helping other developing countries to improve their food security” (Food and Agricultural Organisation, 2012). This perspective debunks the view that China is engaged in large scale farming in Africa for export and holds that the scale of Chinese engagement is still unclear and likely smaller than claimed (Brautigam and Zhang, 2013; Large, 2008). Africans often view Chinese activities positively in contrast with the damaging engagement witnessed during colonialism and experienced later during the Western sponsored Structural Adjustment Programmes. Thus China’s engagement with African agriculture remains a highly contested arena (Buckley, 2013).

The official relationship between China and Africa has been greatly enhanced since the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, and the release of the Chinese Government’s White Paper of 2006, *China’s Africa Policy*. This paper provides the current reference point for Sino-Africa engagement and cooperation. It posits that similar experiences between China and Africa shall shape the discourse between the two. China pledged the continuation of bilateral trade and economic cooperation. Regarding Sino-African trade, China promised African countries easier access to the Chinese markets, duty free access for certain goods from Africa’s Least Developed Countries, support for Chinese firms willing to participate and increase their engagement in African infrastructural development and preferential loans for Chinese investors. One area of cooperation identified was agriculture (*People’s Daily Online*, 2006).

Until fairly recently, China’s agricultural cooperation with African countries focused on technical assistance and capacity building. But, in the interest of sustainability, apart from the development of markets and the potential for expanded trade, China has also encouraged public-private partnerships. For example, it offers incentives for its agribusiness corporations to invest in African agriculture (Tand and Gabas, 2014). However, China’s approach to Africa is still largely based on bilateral aid, giving priority to local food security and market stability in Africa.

The perspective adopted by this paper is that China is a development partner which can play a valuable part in Botswana’s agricultural development. There are some crucial lessons that can be learnt from China’s experience in agriculture, and Chinese technical assistance could be adapted to Botswana’s context with positive outcomes.

Botswana-China Agricultural Cooperation

As stated above, China has been engaged with Africa’s agriculture sector for more than 40 years. Agriculture is one of the areas where the level of cooperation has accelerated in recent years. In Botswana, when the country had links with Taiwan after 1967, the latter had an Agricultural Mission, but this ended when ties were severed in 1975. The cooperation between Botswana and the PRC in agriculture started just after the establishment of diplomatic relations. In the 1970s and 1980s, China helped train a group of Botswana agricultural technical personnel, and it sent experts to Botswana to conduct local land surveys and planning projects. In 1978, during an official visit to China, Botswana’s then Foreign Minister, Mr Mogwe, discussed lessons in agriculture which Botswana could learn from China (Bolaane, 2007). In the mid-1990s, a Chinese company, China State Construction Engineering Corporation, invited two Chinese agricultural specialists to teach Botswana about irrigation using recycled waste

water in its first local projects. But this engagement by a Chinese company in cooperation in agriculture has not been followed up by other companies.

The Chinese government attaches great importance to skills transfer and technical exchange with Botswana in the field of agriculture. In 2009, the Chinese government dispatched three senior experts in the field of agriculture economy, agriculture equipment and irrigation to provide technical assistance to Botswana and enhance bilateral cooperation in the field (Zheng Zhuqiang, 2014; Dzimiri, 2011). In 2010, Botswana's Finance Minister, Mr. Matambo, and the Chinese Ambassador signed an agreement covering economic and technical cooperation entailing a grant of about 20 million Botswana Pula (about 2 million US\$). Mr. Matambo said that it was an umbrella cooperation agreement which covered, among other area, agriculture and food production (Letsebe, 2010). In January 2011, China reiterated that it had committed itself to cooperate with Botswana in the agriculture sector in a bid to improve Botswana's food security. During a donation ceremony at the Chinese embassy, the Chinese Ambassador, Mr Liu Huanxiang, said "food security is a great challenge for Africa and China, and the mutual economic and technological cooperation between China and Botswana, especially in the agricultural sector, has broad prospects" (Dzimiri, 2011). The Ambassador stated that "China is a traditional agricultural country and places great emphasis on agricultural development and the application of new technologies and Botswana can greatly benefit from that" (Dzimiri, 2011).

In 2011 the Ambassador further mentioned the possibility of more experts coming to Botswana to help in the development of the agriculture sector, encouraging more Chinese nationals to come to Botswana and invest in the agriculture sector because of the good climatic conditions, especially in the northern region, and the good agricultural policies. He noted that already two Chinese nationals have invested in vegetable production in Botswana and quite a number have visited to assess the investment situation (Dzimiri, 2011). In concluding his remarks, the Ambassador made an important remark on China's intentions with respect to cooperation in agriculture and future prospects. He said:

We are more than willing to provide further assistance to Botswana to develop agriculture and hope that the profound China-Botswana mutual beneficial relationships will continue to flourish and expand into new dimensions . . . our two countries share similar development goals and, besides, our two economies are complementary (Dzimiri, 2011).

Subsequently, in May 2012, China's Vice Minister of Agriculture visited Botswana at the invitation of the Botswana government. The government wanted to lure China to invest in Botswana's agriculture sector so that the country could improve production and efficiency. It was noted that the Chinese produce tractors that are affordable to small scale farmers. The reporter who covered the visit commented that "If we are successful in luring the Chinese to produce smaller and affordable tractors here we will benefit" (*Mmegi Monitor*, 28 May 2012). This comment is critical because, as shall be seen later, one of the hindrances to increased crop production in Botswana is the shortage of draught power.

In August 2014, when receiving a donation of video conferencing equipment from the Chinese Ambassador to Botswana, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation painted a bright future on the prospects of cooperation between the two countries,

including in the agriculture sector. He said that some of the development assistance projects in the pipeline were the development of an agricultural demonstration farm and the production of animal feed (*Botswana Daily News*, 29 August 2014). There is clearly diplomatic support on both sides for increased agricultural cooperation. However, although there have been some initiatives, they are not as pronounced as cooperation in other spheres, and cooperation in agriculture needs to be carried out on a much larger scale for the benefits to be significant.

An Argument for Increased Botswana-China Cooperation in Agriculture

Botswana-China cooperation in agriculture should be viewed in the context of the general Sino-African cooperation in agriculture. In the 1960s and 1970s, China built more than 80 demonstration farms in Africa, covering a total of 45,000 hectares. The main focus was on technology transfer and training. In 2000 at the FOCAC in Beijing, China announced its plan to invest further in Africa's agriculture. Between 2000 and 2012, China set up 20 agricultural centres in 20 African countries (Gabas and Tang, 2014; Brautigam and Zhang, 2013). From 2003 to 2008, more than 4, 000 Africans travelled to China for short training in agriculture-related courses. China has sent hundreds of technicians and experts to Africa since 2004 to train 4, 200 agriculture management officials and technicians (Xinhua, 2013; Kariuki, 2011).

From 2009 to 2012, China's agricultural exports to Africa grew from US\$1.58 billion dollars to US\$2.49 billion dollars - an increase of 57.6 per cent. In the same period, China's direct investment in African agriculture grew from US\$30 million dollars to US\$82.47 million dollars, an increase of 175 per cent (Xinhua, 2013; Brautigam and Zhang, 2013). This investment is credited for increasing agricultural productivity in the recipient countries. For instance, in Mozambique, 300 hectares of experimental fields supported by Chinese investment yielded nine to ten tonnes per hectare for three successive years. China has pledged US\$800 million dollars through a series of agreements to modernise Mozambique's agriculture infrastructure. It has already funded the building of dams and canals to pump water to arable land (Brautigam and Zhang, 2013; Xinhua, 2013; Kariuki, 2011). Some of the measures undertaken by China to transform agriculture in Africa include: the training of rural farmers, setting up of modern farming demonstration centres, provision of better quality seeds, new technology in farming machinery and soil improvement techniques (Kariuki, 2011).

It is, therefore, evident that China has been intensively and extensively engaged in agriculture in many parts of the continent. However, its engagement with Botswana in this sector has been small. Agriculture is vital to Botswana's rural economy because "about 70 per cent of the rural households derive part of their livelihoods from agriculture" (Moepeng, nd). At independence in 1966, agriculture contributed 40 per cent to the GDP and 27 per cent of formal sector employment. However, by 2009, its contribution to the GDP had significantly declined to 3 per cent. Botswana is currently a net importer of agricultural products. It imports about two thirds of its national food requirements during normal years and 95 per cent during severe drought years, mainly from South Africa (Republic of Botswana, 2009; Asefa, 1989; Moepeng, nd). This scenario shows the need for increased agricultural cooperation between Botswana and China, especially in the crop production sector.

Since 1966, Botswana has introduced a number of agricultural schemes/programmes intended to increase crop production and achieve food security. The first to be implemented

was the Arable Land Development Programme (ALDEP) in 1979. Its major focus was to increase the productivity of smallholders, that is, the households owning less than ten hectares and 40 head of cattle. The largest component provided subsidised farm implements, fencing, water tanks, seasonal credit and draught animals (Mayende, 1990; Shrestra, 1989). ALDEP also aimed at providing productive employment in the rural areas to reduce rural-urban migration. It aimed to enhance development in the rural areas by increasing incomes directly or indirectly from arable production. The second scheme introduced in 1985 was the Accelerated Rain-fed Agricultural Programme (ARAP). Its components involved assistance for de-stumping, input procurement, fencing of fields, water development for crop farming and crop protection services. Both schemes did not achieve their intended objectives. Instead, they benefited the few medium and large-scale farmers who obtained ploughs, cultivators and planters while the poorest farmers received donkeys. These schemes worsened rural inequalities and impoverished poor farmers (Miti and Chipasula, 1989; Shrestra, 1986; Mayende, 1990; Asefa, 1989). In 2008, the Integrated Support Programme for Arable Agricultural Development (ISPAAD) was introduced after the realisation that ALDEP and ARAP had not succeeded. ISPAAD, which is ongoing, is a comprehensive programme with components such as the provision of draught power, portable water, subsidised seeds and fertiliser, access to credit, fencing, and marketing facilities. The objectives of ISPAAD are to increase crop production, promote food security at household and national levels, commercialise agriculture through mechanisation, facilitate access to farm inputs and improve extension outreach (Ministry of Agriculture, 2008).

Already, analysts have expressed scepticism about the viability and sustainability of ISPAAD. Some officials have also admitted that the scheme is encountering problems (interview with Chief Crop Production Officer, Ministry of Agriculture, 8 September, 2014). However, there is potential for cooperation in agriculture between Botswana and China. This cooperation could prove fruitful because China has been successful in crop production. The Botswana crop production sector needs assistance in numerous areas. It needs trained extension experts such as agricultural demonstrators and field assistants. Farmers in different regions of Botswana such as the Southern and Kweneng districts decry the shortage of agricultural extension officers. There are instances where one agricultural demonstrator is assigned 3, 000 farmers (interview with Chief Crop Production Officer, Ministry of Agriculture, 8 September, 2014). In August 2014, there were 221 agricultural demonstrators serving over 80, 000 farmers countrywide (Information supplied by Ministry of Agriculture, Agronomy Division, 2014). The number of demonstrators is woefully inadequate for such a large number of farmers, hence the majority did not benefit from their expertise.

The shortage of trained extension officers hampers crop production in that farmers are unable to receive expert advice on effective crop production methods and practices such as fertiliser application, rotational cultivation and advanced preparation. It has been observed that “Africa lacks training and management skills (in agriculture) and this is an area where China is relatively advanced” (Buckley, 2013). Botswana’s deficiency in this area could be ameliorated through cooperation with China. Cassell (2013) contends that African countries, Botswana included, should partner with China and invest in the skills and abilities of their people in the agriculture sector. Botswana should fully utilise the provisions of the FOCAC Beijing Action Plan which pledged to send experts to revolutionise African agriculture in order

to acquire more agricultural experts to train Botswana farmers and extension workers. The number of Chinese experts sent in the past was too small to make any significant impact on Botswana's agriculture sector.

In Botswana, agricultural machinery such as tractors, planters, harrows and harvesters are insufficient. This negatively affects crop production. Despite ISPAAD's draught power component, shortage of agricultural equipment remains a serious challenge. In an effort to shore up farmers, the government procured tractors for their use in 2009. Still, they were inadequate since the government purchased only 60 tractors. A survey showed that there were 2, 000 tractor owners countrywide in 2009, in which year a total of 75 ploughs, 45 harrows, 60 planters and 45 cultivators were delivered to agricultural service centres (*Mmegi*, 25 February 2009). These were not enough to serve the over 70, 000 farmers in the country. Lack of agricultural equipment, especially tractors and planters, resulted in the low use of improved technology. Farmers failed to utilise the early rains. Since Botswana is characterised by erratic rainfall, this negatively affected crop production (Republic of Botswana, 2009). Although China has in the past sent some agricultural machinery to Botswana, this should be intensified. Alternatively, China's affordable tractors should be produced in Botswana. As shown, Chinese officials have repeatedly said that they were ready to increase cooperation in agriculture. The Botswana government should seek more assistance in agricultural machinery from China, including the establishment of a tractor production factory.

Chinese agricultural cooperation focuses on the "hard" technologies of irrigation and farm equipment (Buckley, 2013). Kariuki (2011) maintains that irrigation has the potential to increase output in Africa. It increases yields of most crops by between 100 and 400 per cent. Yet only 4 per cent of the total land cultivated in Africa is under irrigation compared to 44 per cent in China. In Botswana, irrigation is almost non-existent. Therefore, Botswana could cooperate with China in this area because of the latter's abundant expertise and experience. Botswana could utilise water from the Okavango, Chobe rivers and other big rivers in the north and north eastern parts of the country as well as the recently built dams to undertake intensive irrigation and improve food production.

Access to a critical component of agricultural production. The availability of markets acts as an incentive for farmers to produce more. Botswana farmers have been encountering problems of access to markets for both grains and vegetables produce (Republic of Botswana, 2009). The financial empowerment schemes provided by institutions such as the National Development Bank and the Citizen Entrepreneurship Development Agency are not bearing much fruit because local chain stores produce their own products or get them cheaply from South Africa (interview with a group of young farmers, Gaborone, 19 July 2014). This leaves farmers with no markets for their agricultural produce, hence their ventures collapse. In 2014, Botswana farmers in areas such the North East District and Moshupa West produced surpluses, but the Botswana Agricultural Marketing Board (BAMB) is far away in towns like Francistown and Gaborone (interview with farmers in Masunga and Nlaphwane 19 July, 2014 and Ralekgetho, 4 & 5 July, 2014). Also, the BAMB buys crops at very low prices. Botswana could use Chinese aid and experience to develop export crops for the Chinese market. There is great market potential for Africa's agricultural goods in China (Cassell, 2013) and Botswana needs to exploit this opportunity. Botswana could cooperate with China along the lines of securing markets in China for its agricultural produce. This acts as a disincentive to agricultural

production. However, China is the largest food consumer in the world and it has reached the limits of its food production capacity (Kariuki, 2011, p. 21).

Botswana and China could cooperate on strengthening research in agricultural institutions and capacity building. The Botswana College of Agriculture, through the Ministry of Agriculture, could liaise with the Chinese for the training of farmers and extension officers. Botswana could benefit from the demonstration centres which are part of the China-Africa agricultural cooperation policy. Botswana needs assistance and cooperation to address the shortcomings pervasive in crop production.

Poor infrastructure, such as inadequate roads to connect farmers to markets, is a disincentive for Botswana farmers to increase production. While investment in rural infrastructure is a critical factor in facilitating the achievement of food security, roads and other forms of communications are not well developed in rural Botswana. Many areas are remote and access to markets is a challenge for farmers in these areas. Only 45 per cent of farmers have access to roads, 17 per cent to electricity, 22 per cent to telecommunications and 35 per cent to grain storage (Republic of Botswana, 2009, p. 182; Moepeng, nd). Botswana and China could intensify their cooperation in the construction of roads and telecommunications in rural areas, as well as in solar energy to address the shortage of rural electricity. Chinese assistance here would help small producers to access markets as well as critical information on agricultural production.

The amount of US dollars 800 million pledged to Mozambique's agricultural modernisation referred to earlier illustrates China's serious intentions to develop agriculture in African countries. Botswana should also strive for substantial Chinese engagement, especially that on several occasions Chinese officials have expressed their readiness to increase the level of cooperation. The role of China as Africa's strategic partner in agricultural development is well presented by Cassell:

China's engagement with African agriculture, like China's engagement with the rest of Africa, represents perhaps Africa's biggest opportunity in history. China has done more to alleviate poverty in Africa than anything ever attempted by western colonialism or the initiatives of traditional partners. The Chinese engagement might be more meaningful if Africans are careful to manage it well. African policymakers must clearly define their development objectives and engage China with those objectives in mind. . . . Investing in agriculture is the surest path to reducing poverty and hunger in Africa . . . Africa needs to exploit this opportunity (Cassell, 2013, np).

The above applies well to Botswana because Chinese leaders have expressed their willingness to commit more resources to Botswana's development although Botswana's leaders have not been forthcoming in outlining their needs in the agriculture sector. These needs should be identified by Botswana's policy makers and clearly spelt out to form the core aspects of engagement with China on the issue of agricultural development. Although it seems the relationship between Botswana and China is asymmetrical, with China providing much of the assistance, there is potential for Botswana, with its small population to provide food supply to China if it were to produce surpluses from its crop production schemes. This would be the case if Botswana would receive increased Chinese assistance in agriculture. It has been posited

elsewhere; especially from the western media that China was engaged in the acquisition of land in Africa. However, research and comparisons between China's land holdings in Africa and those of the western countries shows that the latter, through their multinational companies have acquired considerably more land than China. Also, bilateral agreements between China and some African countries such as Libya forbid the transfer of land to a third party (Buckley, 2013). Although in future Chinese companies could invest in agriculture in Botswana, it doesn't look like there can be any land grab detrimental to Botswana's agriculture.

Challenges in Botswana-China Cooperation in Agriculture

Although there is potential for increased Botswana-China cooperation in agriculture, there are also potential challenges to be overcome if the cooperation is to have positive results. Although Botswana is unique, it may experience similar problems witnessed in other African countries where Chinese engagement in agriculture has been extensive. One of the challenges has been the failure by Chinese experts to transfer skills to locals (Acharaz, 2013). In Botswana, there have been complaints in this regard in other areas of cooperation such as the construction industry (Interview with Chinese construction workers, Gaborone, 26 April 2014). This would mean that although China could send more agricultural experts to the country, the lack of capacity building may lead to a failure to utilise the skills when the experts leave. Skill transfers in agriculture should therefore be underlined in cooperation in agriculture between Botswana and China.

Another problem that has been identified with Chinese-led projects elsewhere is that they have unintended social impacts. Chinese agricultural training tends to concentrate on those already powerful in agriculture, that is, government leaders and the elite. This prompted Buckley to comment that "even in instances where China may have valuable models to share with African farmers, it is unclear whether the necessary training reaches the right people" (Buckley, 2013, pp.17-18). Botswana's agricultural schemes such as ALDEP and ARAP have been criticised for being biased towards the elite, and hence failing to achieve their objectives while accentuating social differentiation (Mayende, 1990; Shrestha, 1989). Thus, Botswana and Chinese policy makers and implementers need to ensure that the training reaches the majority of small-scale Botswana farmers. By so doing, and with other complementary measures in place, agricultural production could be improved.

In other areas of cooperation with China that have been undertaken on a significant scale in Botswana, such as the construction industry, problems of misconceptions and misunderstandings have arisen. There have been constant instances where culture, language, work habits, beliefs and myths have affected relations between the two communities. Arguing along these lines, Mogae holds that "... to a certain and fairly significant degree, tensions between the Chinese business community and the local business community stems from a deficit in terms of understanding each other's history, language, culture and traditions" (Mogae, 2012, p.7). Youngman also emphasises these problems in his observations that there have been tensions between Botswana and Chinese nationals in Botswana in the area of community relations, noting that "many Chinese workers in Botswana speak little Setswana or English, whilst few Botswana speak Mandarin" (Youngman, 2013, p.1; see also Zi, this volume). As a solution to these problems, scholars have suggested that both Botswana and the Chinese need

to learn each others' languages to enhance communication and mutual understanding. Learning Setswana or English by Chinese managers, foremen and shop-owners is especially important. They also need to take into account local customs, rules and policies (Youngman, 2013, p.12, quoting Xu Wei, 2013). If cooperation is to succeed, there is need for deeper immersion in each others' cultures, languages, and customs in order to clear the misconceptions that some on either side hold. Some of these beliefs and myths, such as the one that the Chinese use convict labour, are common in Botswana. Botswana farmers and extension workers neither speak nor understand Chinese. Similarly, Chinese agricultural experts neither speak nor understand Setswana or English. Thus the language barrier is a major challenge. In some parts of Botswana, farmers do not work in the fields on certain days (for example, on Fridays in some parts of the north east of the country) or during some cultural and religious ceremonies. These practices must be understood if Chinese agricultural experts are to succeed in training and working with Botswana.

Further, it should be noted that although the Chinese have been criticised from various quarters in Botswana (government officials, politicians, the media and individuals) for the failure of their projects to deliver and of being sub-standard quality, Monageng Mogalakwe posits that these criticisms seem to be unfair. Mogalakwe states that only a few, about four out of the thirty Chinese companies doing business in Botswana have faced criticism in the period May 2010 and March 2013. He notes that the absence of criticism levelled at the others may suggest that these other companies probably finished their projects on time and within the budget. Mogalakwe argues that: 'What I found even more bizarre is the complete lack of mention of the role of the client's project's supervising engineers in the form of (a) project architects (b) quantity surveyors (c) structural engineers (d) civil engineers (e) electrical engineers (f) mechanical engineers' (Mogalakwe, 2015, pp.8-9).

The argument above shows that the Chinese companies should not be blamed for failure to deliver sub-standard work. There is more need to ponder deeper into the issue. After all, why should Chinese companies fail in Botswana whereas in China itself it is known there have some of the most impressive construction projects in the world.

Conclusion

Botswana and China have cooperated in various fields since 1975. This cooperation has largely been beneficiary, with China providing most of the economic assistance. Chinese engagement with Botswana since 2000 has accelerated rapidly with trade and the economy being the main movers. Botswana's economic growth and development, especially major infrastructure such as government buildings, roads and dams, have benefited immensely from Chinese construction companies whose lower bids enabled the Government to undertake these crucial projects. We, however, note that some of these projects have been criticised for being sub-standard. There are ample opportunities in all spheres for the two countries to advance their cooperation for mutual benefit. In particular, cooperation should be accelerated in the critical field of agriculture where China's engagement through aid and investment has been low compared to other African countries. Increased cooperation has the potential to enable Botswana to attain food security and also to supply China with its growing demand for food.

To facilitate increased cooperation in agriculture, there should also be increased cooperation in the cultural sphere in order to resolve the misconceptions and myths on both sides and address problems associated with language and cultural barriers which have created tensions and acted as an impediment to success in other areas of cooperation. It is concluded that Botswana policy makers should define clear objectives for cooperation in agriculture and engage China in ways that are mutually beneficial.

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