

# > Introduction

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**A**fter decades in the shadow of global affairs, punctuated only by a seemingly endless news stream of debilitating conflict, venal corruption and grinding poverty, Africa is back in the international spotlight. With fast growing economies fed by the commodity boom, a spate of reforms to governance structures and a widening consumer class, the African continent appears poised to enter a new phase of development.<sup>1</sup> At the heart of this revival of African fortunes lies the engagement of emerging powers whose drive for resources and markets, increasingly bolstered by diplomatic activism, is reshaping the continent. Playing out in the oil acreage of the Gulf of Guinea and the chaotic retail markets of African cities, the role of emerging powers is heralding a sea of change in Africa's standing in the international system.

At the forefront of the coterie of emerging powers operating on the continent is the behemoth that is China, a country whose remarkable rise to prominence is the subject of unbridled admiration, clinical study and, in some cases, even profound trepidation.<sup>2</sup> A minor player at the margins of African affairs a mere two decades ago, China has assumed a leading position as Africa's top trading partner, major investor, provider of loans and significant diplomatic partner. Following in China's wake, developing countries as diverse as India, Brazil, Korea and Turkey are investing in resource extraction, building infrastructure, setting up light industries and selling consumer goods. Their appetite for risk and proven development experience is shifting the weight of economic engagement away from traditional North-South configurations towards the South, and is in the process transforming the development prospects of the African continent.

Some scholars point out that 'emergence' is a misnomer – that, for example, China and India's growing portion of the global economy merely reflects a return to historical conditions that prevailed for a millennium until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Arguing from a somewhat different angle, under Russia's previous incarnation as the Soviet Union, Moscow's diplomatic and military cooperation with liberation movements and newly independent states played a formative role in shaping African policies and institutions during the Cold War. Either way, the key feature shared by all these actors operating in Africa is their status as non-Western countries propelled by their growing economic standing onto the global stage in the late twentieth century.

What is distinctly new about this phenomenon is that the continent has never experienced this level of collective emerging power involvement in the modern era, especially when measured in economic terms. Moreover, the nature of this involvement – from large-scale loans without political conditions to deepening diplomatic cooperation – differs in important ways from the approaches adopted by Western governments. Indeed, the story of emerging powers in Africa cannot be told without reference to the declining position of traditional Western partners within the continent's affairs. At the same time, the conscious employment of narratives that draw on history and identity to situate their penetration of

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Economist*, 'Africa Rising', December 2011; *Time Magazine*, 'Africa Rising', 3 December 2012; 'Africa on the Move', Ernest and Young 2012; Donald Kaberuka, President of African Development Bank, presentation, 'Emerging Powers and Africa', University of Cape Town, 9 May 2013.

<sup>2</sup> See Chris Alden, *China in Africa* (London: Zed 2007).

African economies speaks to emerging powers' own discomfort with a relationship that is in danger of replicating features of traditional Western engagement. Finally, as the blizzard of novelty settles into the familiarity of daily engagement, Africans are beginning to ask hard questions of this growing partnership with new actors and its future for the development of the continent.

## THE SUN ALSO RISES

The declining share of Western countries in the world economy, and the concomitant rise of an emerging South, is the most significant development of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For instance, according to the IMF, in 1980 the European Union and the US accounted for 31 percent and 25 percent of world GDP respectively; by 2011 they had slipped to 20 percent and 19 percent.<sup>3</sup> During the same period, Asian economies – led by China and India – jumped from 8 percent of global GDP in 1980 to 25 percent in 2011. Far from being isolated from these trends, African trade and investment is more closely tracking these developments. Since 2010, China has taken the lead in two-way trade with the continent, now estimated to be \$220 billion in 2012, while BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) trade with Africa is expected to surge to \$500 billion by 2015.<sup>4</sup>

Though it can be understood with reference to the shifting economic fortunes of industrialised economies on a global scale, the outmoded attitudes which shape some key Western policy initiatives towards the continent is arguably the most telling difference between the traditional and new actors in Africa. The Western governments' single-minded promotion of major Africa policy initiatives, from the controversial European Partnership Agreements (EPAs) or the seven year search for an African basing site for the Pentagon's Africa Command, is the most vivid example of how the legacies of colonialism and Cold War politics exercise continued influence over European and US policies towards Africa. These contemporary approaches, which reflect paternalism and purpose rooted in the policies of the past, are coupled with a gradual evolution away from policy support for modernisation by the established Western aid industry. Where such assistance was once geared towards enhancing the productive sectors of developing countries such as commercial agriculture and infrastructure development, the last two decades have seen a shift towards aid aimed at ameliorating the social impact of modernisation on developing societies.<sup>5</sup> From tackling the environmental consequences of resource exploitation to targeting the most vulnerable and marginalised population groups, Western aid agencies and NGOs have redefined their role in African development to one increasingly at odds with the requisite needs of modernisation. The result has been wholesale Western neglect of the basic hardware of development – roads, communication networks – and a paucity of investment in the sectors that the continent has in abundance – resources and agriculture – that left Africa economies mired in the poverty trap.

The arrival of emerging powers flush with cash and confident of their development achievements marked a revolutionary change in African fortunes. China's critical role in shattering the donor consensus on development and a demonstrated willingness to invest in high risk areas, symbolised by its large investment into war-torn Sudan's oil sector after 1995, paved the way for others to follow.<sup>6</sup> For most of these new actors, the pillorying of OECD-DAC modalities of aid – particularly the notion of 'political conditionality' – and the celebration of interest-based forms of South-South cooperation became a hallmark of their approach to Africa. Backed by export credits and astute diplomacy, Chinese, Brazilian and Indian multinationals have been able to secure access to African resources as well as open up new markets for the sale of commercial goods. Private firms and individual migrants, especially but not exclusively from China, are making inroads into retail sectors and even begun setting up manufacturing and assembly plants in countries like Egypt, Kenya and Botswana.

3 Jeffrey Sachs, 'A World Adrift', 24 December 2012, [project-syndicate.org](http://project-syndicate.org).

4 Standard Bank analysts, cited in 'Africa becoming an increasingly important trading partner for BRICS countries', 15 February 2013, [howwemadeitinafrica.com](http://howwemadeitinafrica.com).

5 See Emma Mawsley, *From Recipients to Donors – emerging powers and the changing development landscape* (London: Zed 2012).

6 Dan Large and Luke Patey, eds., *Sudan Looks East – China, India and the politics of Asian alternatives* (Oxford: James Currey 2012)

At the same time, the cold truth of the resource trade between emerging powers and Africa, which echoes the unequal patterns of North-South economic relations, has necessitated a new rhetoric of engagement. The fact is that the bulk of emerging power trade and investment remains tied to Africa's resource sector – whether directly into energy, minerals, timber and increasingly agriculture or indirectly in infrastructure that supports economies of extraction. For some Africans, the nagging fear that they are merely trading one set of exploitive relationships for another, however attractively packaged, remains a significant source of concern. For instance, the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Malama Sanushi Lamido Sanushi, declared in March 2013 that trade relations with China carried with them 'the whiff of colonialism'.<sup>7</sup> Others have found in Indian, Brazilian and Korea actions disturbing elements of exploitation that have drawn similar protests from governments and local civil society.<sup>8</sup>

This has produced the need amongst emerging powers for a new story of proximity and modernisation with Africa. Therefore, in constructing relations with Africa a notable feature is the active employment of historical, identity and solidarity narratives to frame contemporary ties. In particular, there is an overt effort to retrieve 'lost' history with Africa and claim, on that basis, an identity that purports to lend an exceptional character to the bilateral relations and daily commercial interactions.

For the Chinese, this has concentrated on a rediscovery of the Ming dynasty admiral, Zheng Ho, and his visit to the East African coast in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. The fact that his voyage did not precipitate Chinese colonial expansion, unlike that of Vasco de Gama a few decades later, is held to be proof of China's benign intentions for the continent. For the Turkish government, an assertion of its Islamic identity in conjunction with a 'neo-Ottomanist foreign policy' is shaping the target of its interests in northeast Africa. The Brazilians take the legacy of the slave trade, a substantial Afro-Brazilian population, to posit a commonality of culture and concurrent obligation to the continent. It goes without saying that these archival daguerreotype memories are selective – forgotten, for instance, is Brazil's diplomatic support for Portuguese colonialism; Chinese support for regimes and liberation movements which ended up 'on the wrong side of history'; the Ottoman Empire complicity in the slave trade; and Soviet promotion of economic policies that damaged development prospects. For Russia in particular, grappling with the Soviet legacy and its enduring and sometimes personal imprint on Africans' experiences is more complex and even divisive, perhaps in part because of the proximity of this near-contemporary history.

The search for an understanding of this new South-South axis of trade and development and its transformative role in shaping Africa that goes beyond the fanfare is crucial to any assessment of Africa's future rise. The aim of this report is to provide a balanced, comparative analysis of these new actors that sheds light on the motives, impact and meaning for the continent. ■

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7 'Nigeria: Central Bank Governor's Protest Against Trade Imbalance Ruffles China', *This Day*, 7 April 2013, [allafrica.com/stories/201304070073.html](http://allafrica.com/stories/201304070073.html)

8 See Sergio Chichava et al, 'Chinese and Brazilian Cooperation in African Agriculture – the case of Mozambique', Working Paper 49, [www.future-agricultures.org](http://www.future-agricultures.org), p. 15; 'Zambia criticises Vedanta for not generating enough jobs', *LiveMint-Wall Street Journal*, 3 April 2013, [www.livemint.com](http://www.livemint.com); 'Madagascar's new leader says Daewoo land deal off', *Reuters*, 18 March 2009, [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com).