

Africa's Strategic Importance to Norway and other Global Powers

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Abstract

Africa has assumed a central position to emerging and current global powers due to its strategic resources. Its traditional partners draw on their long relationship with the continent to build new partnerships. Norway's need to forge a strong partnership with the continent finds itself in contention with China which has made a strong foray into Africa. The investigation applies a qualitative research design. It employs a descriptive research approach to interrogate the evidence. The study establishes that a partner keen to resolve Africa's key challenges including poverty and conflict may have a better reception in the continent, opening strategic opportunities for it. As different powers contest for influence, the continent has to strategically position itself to draw important concessions to its interests. Actors such as Norway need not be overly focused on checking China's influence in Africa, they should find gaps that are not covered by China and explore this in furtherance of their foreign policy objectives.

Key words: Africa, China, Norway, Relations, Resources.

1. Introduction

Development support strategically positions the donor state to the state receiving support; which increases its influence [3]. This has the effect of enjoining the participating states in an enduring relationship that could either be positive or negative depending on how the support is utilised. The donor state incrementally expands its leverage against the state it is supporting which may open it to economic and diplomatic opportunities. The relationship between the two states could be strengthened if they operate within mutually beneficial parameters and allow for accommodation in the event of changes. The world economy has seen China taking a leading position in energy and trade [14]. This has enabled it to rapidly grow its economy due to its expanded access to raw

materials and access to new markets. Its aggressive entry into the African continent has mediated the way other powers interact with the continent.

Existing and emerging powers that seek to develop strategic partnerships with Africa have to closely examine China's approach to identify gaps and unique entry points that may not necessarily put them in contention with China.

There has been a common notion that the global system is changing on behalf of China; conversely, China's activities continue to preserve the existing state [5]. China has demonstrated that it is not averse to the existing global order as long as this does not threaten its strategic interests. It has therefore not conspicuously indicated its intention to disturb the existing order; rather, its activities appear to favour minimal concerns from other external parties in its engagements with its partners. Africa finds itself at a time when energy resources are beginning to be discovered while its expanding population demands that states increase their economic output to cater to growing needs. China has presented itself as a reliable partner as it has quickly moved to cement its position as an actor with the capacity to meet African interests while at the same time pursuing its objectives. In China steering clear of internal matters of states it engages; it has endeared itself to a significant number of African states that have become more receptive to its overtures [3]. This presents a conundrum to other European partners who may not necessarily wish to adopt China's approach in their partnership with Africa. Norway has to navigate its relationship with Africa in a balanced manner, identifying niche mutual points that it could utilise to forge an enduring partnership. It could support Africa in reducing the governance challenges that continue to prevent it from realising its economic potential which could in turn project Norway's overall intention.

It is observed that development support may be leveraged by donor entities to exert influence on the supported state [3]. The receiving state may find itself at a position of disadvantage in some situations against the donor state especially if it defaults on debt payments. The donor state may threaten to mete out punitive sanctions which may in turn force the receiving state to capitulate to its demands. The uneven relationship developed between the two partners may weaken the receiving state if it does not seek measures to address its precarious position. This scenario may create grounds for exploitation which may lead to poverty and undesired governance practices, especially in developing states. A donor state has to strive to avoid situations where it appears overbearing or exploitative as this may damage the already positive image it may have created while supporting the developing state. Developing states are seen by China as important in checking the West's global dominance; this motivates it to deepen ties with them [14] However, developing states have to avoid being caught in geopolitical conflicts between the West and China. Their interest should be restricted to resolving their existing challenges including poverty alleviation, poor health systems and infrastructure. Norway can assume a middle ground in its interaction with Africa. Although it must be alive to China's rapidly expanding footprint in Africa; its exploits have to be more focused on Africa to increase the potential for improving the achievement of its objectives. It has to offer a better partnership which could subtly check China

through for example, providing impactful technical development support that could help the continent in resolving its serious challenges.

African Geopolitics in the New World

Since international institutions have indirectly propped China's economic growth, it continues to support them [5]. It is not expected that China will change its perception of international institutions if this persists. This should encourage international partners like Norway that prioritise multilateral frameworks in building partnerships with Africa. The long-term predictability ensures stability and minimises exposure to unforeseen risks in their investment in the continent. Norway has to aggressively invest in the largely untapped sectors in Africa and establish long-term plans to develop these in pursuit of mutual interests. International institutions could also give them a veneer of security which potentially shields them against contention with China which could be disruptive to their investment in the continent. Africa could be a strategic partner that could help major powers to plug their deficits in sectors such as energy, raw materials and skilled personnel if robust foundational development is timely initiated. The existing competition in the continent between different powers could become more protracted thereby limiting the ability of emerging powers to make substantial forays in the continent in the future.

Some observers have charged that Africa finds itself in an unfair relationship with China as the latter is motivated by unfettered access to Africa's market and its natural resources [3]. It has to be noted that economic partnerships are largely based on mutual interests which parties bind themselves to in the long term. In Africa having pressing challenges, it is likely to accommodate partners that address these and exercise flexibility in this relationship. China has significantly participated in enhancing the continent's infrastructure at an accelerated pace which has positively impacted the continent's economy. China's competitors have to identify other feasible bases through which they could engage the continent rather than focusing on China's perceived advantage. Africa's economy has experienced structural changes influenced by China where infrastructure development and trade are overshadowing development aid which has raised the competitiveness of its natural resources [3]. This places Africa's traditional partners in a contentious position. China has demonstrated that it has the resolve and resources to compete with them. Although development aid still plays a significant role in advancing Africa's economy, enabling infrastructure is critical in anchoring any meaningful development. The West has to recalibrate its development assistance to Africa and integrate infrastructure development to competitively engage China.

The deepening of relations between China and developing states is attributed to its (China's) rapidly expanding economic base [14]. The rush for partnerships with developing states is bound to be elevated which necessitates potential partners to adapt accordingly. China will look to increase its access to foreign resources, which may find it facing off with its competitors. This may present the developing states with a strategic opportunity to maximise concessions to their advantage. Norway has to independently strengthen its partnership with Africa before competition

increases. It may work with Africa to address current challenges including food security which could have a long-term impact on its perceptibility in the continent. This will help to reduce the number of resources that it could spend on checking China in the continent. [5] asserts that China is motivated to sustain the current power relations structure in the global system because it is in support of its strategic interests. Maintaining the status quo ensures that China utilises the existing systems to advance its strategic interests without investing in additional infrastructure. It also ensures minimal disruption when it embarks on large-scale projects. Norway could look into expanding the range and scope of its diplomatic ties with Africa to enable it to spread its potential risk outlay to forestall any future risks in its investments. Although it may not compete with China based on its resource base, it could focus on the quality of its engagement with Africa which could be supported by better coordination of mutual interests.

China appeals to developing states as it positions itself as a viable option rather than the West in terms of its economic structure and accommodation of local interests [14]. This orientation distinguishes it from the West thereby immediately availing it to Africa's strategic interests. To respond to this, Western governments have to identify and develop their unique approaches to economic development in developing states. They have to assume a two-track approach where on one hand; they could target the governance quality in the leadership while also directly targeting the citizenry with impactful overtures. This will enable them to expedite the achievement of objectives and minimise China's room for manoeuvre in the continent. There has been unanimity between Western governments and organisations in the condemnation of China where they charge that it is contributing to Africa's under-development [5]. This could in part be influenced by China's predominant focus on Africa's resources and its minimal engagement in internal governance processes. China gives basic oversight of the economic assistance it gives developing states which has been construed to imply that it indirectly contributes to poor governance. To understand China's approach, it is important to draw parallels with the internal governance structure in China which does not pursue a Western-style democratic system. Hence, it is not expected that China will support a system that it does not practise. Africa faces significant governance challenges. Norway has to position itself as a reliable partner by supporting the continent to reform its governance processes to support its upward economic mobility. This is predicated on the potential for democracy to enhance inclusivity and public participation in government initiatives.

2. Results and Discussion

China's invigorated engagement with developing states is not expected to upend the West's position in these states [14]. This is based on the West's historical connections with these states through avenues like colonialism which created a basis for their contemporary relationship. Arguably, China does not appear to aggressively confront the West in these states, rather it seeks to increase its influence in furtherance of opportunities for its economy. Therefore, Norway need not overly invest in challenging China's foray into Africa. Instead, it should strengthen its existing

relationships and prepare for potential future changes. This is because the needs of developing states are bound to change with the evolving environment. Soft power is a critical tool in China's foreign policy where it leverages it for goal pursuit and to separate it from the West insofar as Africa is concerned [5]. The de-emphasis on the use of force reduces suspicion and encourages more African governments to cooperate with it. It enables China to gain a foothold in critical African sectors giving it a position of advantage relative to its competitors. Africa has systemic weaknesses that have exposed it to internal challenges which prevent it from realising its economic potential. Challenges such as urbanisation, a rapidly rising population and poor biodiversity conservation warrant policy interventions that require technical support from partners that have the capacity. This could be an opportunity for external partners to support Africa in resolving some of these challenges. Since these challenges remain, Norway could deepen its partnership with Africa to help address these systemic challenges. China does not necessarily cover all the development deficiencies that are meaningful to Africa which avails opportunities for other players.

[7] identifies China's rising trading status; in 2009 it superseded the US in its trade with Africa which was more than 200 billion US dollars; making it Africa's leading trade partner. This exemplifies China's rapid economic rise in the continent which has the potential to affect the economic relationship Africa has with other partners. Attempting to match China may be a herculean task due to the fluidity and large concessions it extends to Africa. Other growth areas like electronic commerce, renewable energy and smart technologies present new opportunities that other partners may explore in their economic relationship with Africa. Norway has already made advancements in these sectors on the domestic front which gives it a basis to seek to disperse this technical knowledge. This could help it to strengthen its economic partnership with Africa which could see it maximise its strategic interests in the continent without necessarily confronting China. China's support for security and stability in developing countries is motivated by its intention to secure its economic interests [14]. This hints at China's intention to undertake long-term engagements in developing states. China sees itself developing long-term relations with developing states and is prepared to support the removal of obstacles that may prevent this. Africa's partners should draw on some of China's approaches and seek to work with it to create a supportive environment for future long-term engagements. Norway could undertake initiatives that speak to the continent's future which will signal its intention to develop an enduring relationship. One way of enhancing this is by mainstreaming stability and governance within its development projects. A stable continent will be mutually beneficial to itself, and its external partners insofar as economic interests are concerned.

China has strategically structured its foreign policy to be ambivalent to accommodate unforeseen developments and to skirt possible obstacles [5]. This is reflective of its anticipation of probable scenarios which may impact its interests. Conversely, an unequivocal foreign policy could be restrictive in situations where it may contradict China's stated intentions. A fluid foreign policy enables China to easily adapt to new dynamics and minimise resource exposure when undertaking

this. This shows that China is more interested in consolidating its interests rather than defending its policy positions. It has to be noted that adopting such a foreign policy orientation could be misconstrued as lacking a stable policy grounding which may create ground for criticism. Norway should maintain a firm foreign policy position when engaging with the developing states if it has to create a unique posture. Its relations with Africa for example, have to be decisive and indicative of its policy directions to better coordinate with the host state.

China's contribution to the political liberation of many developing states has led it to assume a leadership status [14]. It has therefore created deeper ties with states that resisted colonial rule and see it as a reliable ally. This informs its contemporary relations with them where it offers it numerous opportunities in the economic, political and cultural spheres. China's decisive support has helped to cement its position in these states. Africa continues to face acute challenges in food security, political instability, conflict and poor health systems. If Norway is aggressively involved in helping Africa to resolve these challenges, like China; it is probable that this may influence its perceptibility in the continent which may cost-effectively open opportunities for its strategic interests relative to its competitors.

Internal and external stability is perceived by China as critical for development initiatives to be realised [5]. China does not prosecute its initiatives in isolation, it consciously considers the surrounding environment to inform its undertakings. Since China has staked its interests in African resources; it will inadvertently work hard to ensure that its internal and external environment is stabilised to facilitate its economic interests. Other external partners like Norway may not necessarily predicate their partnership with Africa on its stability. Working with both stable and unstable states could have a more profound effect on Africa's overall development especially when efforts are dedicated towards removing conflict motivators.

Norway has undertaken to minimise developing states' debt through debt forgiveness and changing aid to foreign development assistance [10] This demonstrates Norway's commitment to supporting responsible debt management in developing countries. Since China has been accused of trapping developing states into a debt cycle; Norway telegraphs an unequivocal message that it intends to stand with vulnerable states to support their long-term development. This addresses Africa's economy which is plagued by unsustainable debt from external partners. Freeing Africa from economic encumbrances enables it to dedicate its limited resources to critical functions that are important to its economy. Ensuring access to Africa's fossil fuels and its market is imperative for Norway despite it being endowed with significant oil and fish resources [3]. This is on account of the unpredictable nature of energy resources which could face future depletion. Keeping itself in the energy value chains enables Norway to assure itself of sufficient energy supplies regardless of the level of its domestic supply. This could also enable it to easily access its energy products in Africa with minimal investment in support of supply infrastructure. With Norway having an established energy infrastructure and technical capacity, it could support the African continent to expand its production capacity for current and future needs.

Sub-Saharan Africa has seen one of the world's fastest economic growth at the macro level [7] This makes it a viable economic area for foreign partners that seek growth markets and foreign direct investment opportunities. This is contributing to Africa witnessing different partners competing for space in its economy. Thus, Norway has to remain aggressively engaged in Africa's geopolitical and economic ecosystem to position itself to leverage available opportunities. Economic growth in Africa could be indicative that its citizens may increase their purchasing power. This could impact the uptake of new products thereby positively impacting the export and import market. Emerging powers including China, Turkey, India and Brazil are aggressively forging strong partnerships with Africa to expand their footprint in the continent. This could support their geopolitical and economic interests. Norway has to assess the multiplicity of actors in the continent and act accordingly to preserve its position. China's utility of soft power in spheres like cultural diplomacy is enabling it to penetrate Africa's interior, which forms the basis for its infrastructure projects. Norway must consider incorporating Africa-facing cultural diplomacy into its existing diplomatic mix to enhance its relationship with the continent.

Norway prioritises infrastructure development as a basis for expanding integration; it therefore leads efforts in helping other states to develop their infrastructure including bridges and roads [10]. This creates important link points through which regional countries can connect enabling their economies to seamlessly cooperate. African countries should embrace regional economic integration as a basis for enhancing their economic well-being and managing conflict. This is supported by the African Union which gives them a strong legal mandate to operate on behalf of the membership. In being supportive of regional groups, Norway demonstrates its intention to develop robust ties with these organisations. This has the potential to expand Norway's strategic reach within a given region. Africa has made significant progress in the reduction of its poverty levels despite this remaining a complex challenge [7] Closing gaps in infrastructure and production deficits have strengthened Africa's resolve to pull itself out of endemic poverty. An external actor that intends to deepen its ties with Africa has to work towards supporting the continent to confront poverty and accelerate development at different levels. Norway is primed to play this role due to its long-term relations with African states. It has to find ways of strengthening the capacity of African states by making interventions that could positively impact the African quality of life. This could lead to Norway creating a receptive environment for its strategic interests in Africa.

[3] identifies that the UN has been instrumental in amplifying Norway's international footprint especially when it (Norway) supports its programs. This is because Norway has aggressively supported multilateral action in areas like the environment which have resulted in significant positive outcomes in the global climate outlook. Norway has to enhance its work in the UN system to maximise its outward-facing projection, especially in engagements that involve developing states. Critical sectors in Africa like health and the environment warrant closer attention from Norway. Climate change has been identified as a significant factor that is influencing ordinary lives in Africa. This calls for Norway to support the continent in climate adaptation and management processes. This will improve its resilience in managing challenges such as food

security which continue to affect it. African countries have had problems monetising their continental shelves in coastal areas; to help them manage this, Norway works with the UN to facilitate them [10]. Africa's marine environment remains largely unexploited due to the lack of inherent capacity. In helping them to realise their potential, Norway could be inadvertently supporting them to increase their economic base which could positively impact their other challenges. Staking their ownership over their marine environment will also support African states in securing their sovereignty thus protecting their national marine resources. Norway having established robust value chains in the international marine networks which have enabled the commercialisation of its products, can support African states to develop in this area which will enable them to realise competitive prices for their marine products.

Numerous resource-inspired conflicts in Africa prevent it from expanding raw material taxes which could enhance its economy [10]. Undertaking steps that discourage new conflicts and resolve the existing ones could help the continent to meaningfully exploit its raw materials in support of its economy. Enhancing domestic governance systems within African states could help to inspire confidence between different sectors which could create fertile ground for robust institutions to develop. This will serve as a basis for expansion of industry which will increase the demand for raw materials hence raising the potential for more taxes accruing from raw materials. [3] notes that Africa had early interaction with Norway before colonization, when Norway's missionaries visited the continent. This could be utilised by Norway to leverage these early contacts as an important socio-cultural basis for strengthening its contemporary relations with the continent. This will directly counter-balance Africa's traditional partners who are former colonial powers. The early contacts created have facilitated their contemporary strategic relationships with the continent, opening avenues for other critical sectors like trade. Norway has to project the image that it is not a new entrant in Africa; rather, it is merely moving to cement ties that were created earlier.

Development support in Africa continues to be outstripped by private capital which is supporting a significant number of projects [7]. This implies that the private sector is experiencing strong growth in Africa which is increasing the level and quality of competition between itself and the government. Citizens are likely to receive better services while the economy is likely to experience a democratised environment leading to the citizens having a wide array of choices. Norway has traditionally supported the private sector with resources and technologies enabling it to play an important role in national economic development. Emerging sectors like innovation are largely powered by the private sector which reduces state bureaucracy that has been blamed for stifling organic development. Expanding cooperation with Africa in the private sector could help Norway to maximise its strategic reach in the continent as it will open links with Africa's private sector.

[5] avers that the Chinese conceptualisation of development prioritises direct support for the people while it de-emphasises democracy and human rights. This makes the Chinese approach unencumbered with a state's internal politics though it may project China as being far removed from possible ramifications of its engagement in developing states. Emphasising adherence to

democratic principles and protection of civil liberties could send a message that the development partner has the intention to significantly contribute to the enhancement of the quality of life in the respective country. Norway's robust support for effective governance signals its comprehensive approach to its relations with developing states. It also shows its high level of responsibility and commitment to the respect of social justice in the programs it prosecutes in regions like Africa, where development has a close relationship with stability. Foreign aid has been the mainstay of Norway's engagement in Africa and to a lesser extent foreign direct investment (FDI) [3]. Although this has supported its objectives; it would be in the interest of Norway to diversify its partnership with Africa to include foreign direct investment and technical support to widen its impact on the continent. It has to be noted that Norway faces aggressive competition from entrenched partners like China who have developed deep partnerships with African governments through significant infrastructure projects. Norway has to therefore avoid limiting itself to foreign aid if it has to be competitive in Africa.

One of the key definitive features that attract developing countries to Chinese loans is their lack of economic and political caveats which distinguish them from the Bretton Woods institutions' loans [14]. This calls for flexibility and accommodation from other partners that interact with Africa. It would be counter-productive to maintain stringent requirements in their facilities in the face of China's approach. Western partners like Norway may not necessarily adopt China's pathway. In its stead, they have to identify areas not covered by China and focus on these with creative initiatives that integrate African interests. A mixture of state and private capital will help to support Africa's development. The rendered support could be financial and in-kind to obviate the need to impose punitive conditions for their payback. To optimise its aid resources, Norway largely trains its focus on a small number of countries in Southern and Eastern Africa [3]. This ensures that it does not overstretch its resources and limits its focus in a way that facilitates objective attainment without strain. The regional focus is indicative of the degree to which Norway places importance in the areas. Africa has generally experienced stability barring states like Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo (the DRC) while Eastern Africa has both instances of stability and instability. The proximity of the two regions has enabled Norway to develop their connectivity through infrastructure thereby enabling them to expand their respective markets. This dovetails with Norway's intention to support Africa's economic growth by expediting infrastructure development which will facilitate economic integration.

Africa continues to incrementally expand its strategic importance to policymakers in Europe on account of the intensive competition it is attracting from other global powers [1]. This raises its stake in the global agenda as different partners compete for strategic influence. The continent's largely untapped fossil fuels and other strategic minerals are a pull factor for major global actors that seek to power their economies. This could imply that prospective partners have to employ ingenuity in their overtures towards the continent to maximise the odds that they will be seen in a better positive light relative to their competition. States that are geographically smaller than other powers have to therefore deepen their contact with Africa in pursuit of their interests. African

economies started on a strong trajectory after independence but gradually weakened in the 1980s which led them to seek economic support from the Bretton Woods institutions through Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) [4]. They had to structurally re-organise their economic architecture to articulate with the rendered economic support. This, however, did not yield the expected recovery but unleashed a period of rapid economic decline which affected the continent's growth of its production capacity. There is a need to redefine Africa's economic growth without overly relying on foreign debt to address its needs. This could involve fashioning policies that encourage local production and export of surplus to fund its consumption.

Africa's economic growth has a direct relationship with the quality of its institutions in their operation [2]. This is because institutions determine how services are rendered to the public and are the direct implementers of government policy. Weak institutions result in the non-realisation of policy objectives and breed poor governance practices such as corruption. External partners seeking to work with Africa could support the continent in the creation of robust institutions that could offer leadership in its economic growth. This could be through bilateral or multilateral efforts. Norway could leverage its institutional-building experience in unstable societies to support the continent in this drive. Western neo-liberal conceptualisations continue to influence African problem-solving despite the continent's dalliance with African-inspired blueprints [12]. This limits its room for manoeuvring as it requires external support to interpret the foreign mechanisms it applies. The continent need not be held back by ideological dispositions when managing its challenges. It has to embrace actionable practices that are relevant to its economic realities regardless of their origin. Established foreign partners could support Africa to achieve this.

There has been concern about the low intra-African trade in comparison to other global regions; this has often been blamed on tariff and non-tariff barriers (Songwe, n.d). With the expanding regionalism among African states, it is expected that trade barriers will be eased as more cross-border contact will be made thus improving economic prospects. It has to be noted that enhancing regional trade requires an elaborate framework that is anchored on legal and institutional foundations to deal with expected challenges including legal disputes. This presents a strategic opportunity for external actors to support African states to enhance their trade capacity within the regions while at the same time building their global trade capacity. Africa must adopt an informed approach to pricing its commodities in the global marketplace to enhance its growth prospects [2]. High prices may appear attractive in the earnings but may be counter-productive in the long term. Understanding pricing mechanics in global trade is critical in promoting product competitiveness in a market fraught with competition. The profit margins have to be realistic and sustainable to ensure the production cycles are maintained relative to the expected economic objectives. Norway could leverage its advanced entrepreneurship ecosystem to mentor African states on how to craft effective pricing for its products to maintain global competitiveness. This could be mutually beneficial.

Africa has to entrench regional integration and expand its production capacity which has to be supported by new technologies to stay competitive [4]. Regional integration could accelerate the

growth of unique sectors which could take advantage of existing regional value chains. Technology-assisted production could help to automate industrial tasks thereby expanding the volume of production which could translate into more sales. African states have to integrate technology into their education systems to expand its uptake. This offers a strategic entry point for external partners to engage with Africa to increase the latter's technological capacity. Hostilities between Russia and Ukraine have heightened the thinking that Western strategic interests around the world and in Africa face existential threats [1]. It is therefore in the interest of Western states to expand and deepen their partnership with Africa to forestall prospects of the already achieved gains from unravelling. Norway has to undertake practical steps to protect its enduring partnership with Africa by re-orienting its foreign policy to pay close attention to African strategic interests. This will boost its perceptibility in the continent especially when it comes into contention with other global powers like China who are aggressively expanding their footprint. It has to demonstrate it shares a mutual interest in African prosperity by practically contributing to the resolution of its challenges with its tested approaches.

Economic growth in Africa has to be closely aligned with the creation of jobs if it has to be sustainable [2]. This reduces the states' burden of attending to an increasing population especially if revenues gained are directly ploughed into job creation. This is cognizant of the fact that African resources continue to face pressure from unchecked exploitation which may threaten Africa's economic future. An external investment like foreign direct investment (FDI) should therefore be encouraged by formulating policies that are conducive to large-scale economic enterprise. This should be matched with an aggressive human capital technical capacity development in concert with foreign partners with the requisite technical experience. Africa's geopolitical environment places it at variance with advocates of the African Renaissance- an ideological notion that seeks to promote African philosophies [12]. This is informed by the fact that not all solutions that could apply to African challenges could be supportive of African-authored policies. The existing strategic interests determine Africa's geopolitical direction. African policymakers have to be cognizant of the continent's pressing development needs relative to philosophical standpoints which may indirectly inhibit the continent's progress.

An increase in intra-African trade could have positive benefits for the continent including an increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), more employment, a decrease in trade deficits and enhancement of public welfare [13]. It is in the interest of African nations to expedite ratification of regional integration policies and reorient their economies to service wider markets out of their geographical limits. One of the factors that impede efficiency in African governance systems is high levels of bureaucracy at the leadership and institutional levels. This presents a basis through which African governments could exploit their diplomatic partnerships which will enhance efficiency. Norway could draw on its streamlined and efficient governance systems to support African governments in reforming their respective governance structures to create an enabling environment for intra-African trade. Efficient systems could positively influence subsequent sectors that are linked to regional governance. Africa is systematically expanding its assertiveness;

creating opportunities for new partnerships that pit global powers to compete against one another [1]. The continent need therefore not be seen as a target for a new scramble by major powers. Africa could choose the partners it assesses that could accrue mutual benefits. This implies that external partners have to contrive their approaches that not only aim at short-term but long-term interests.

3. Conclusion

The diplomatic environment in Africa is rapidly changing. With intense competition for its resources, the continent must recalibrate its strategic interests to inform how it relates to external partners. Diplomatic relations with its partners have to be mutually beneficial to help it to manage its challenges. It would be more rewarding for the continent if it established a balanced approach in its diplomatic relations to avoid being captive to its external partners. In China applying a unique approach in its relations with Africa, the latter has to build a sustainable partnership that avoids imbalance. Norway's interest in deepening diplomatic relations with Africa has to pay attention to evolving dynamics in the continent's foreign relations where actors such as China are influencing how the continent relates to other external partners.

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