

GLOBAL VIEWS



ZHONG JINYE / FOR CHINA DAILY

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A helping hand to the South

China is sharing its experience and providing practical assistance to help developing countries shake off poverty

Poverty, a chronic affliction of human society, is a challenge for the whole world. Home to nearly one-fifth of the world's population, China completely eradicated extreme poverty — the first target of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — 10 years ahead of schedule.

That is a milestone in the history of the Chinese nation and the history of humankind, making an important contribution to the cause of global poverty alleviation. As a responsible major power, China has also carried out South-South cooperation in various ways to support and assist developing countries, especially the least developed countries, so that they can rely on themselves and strive to build their homelands.

China's achievement is an inseparable part of the global poverty alleviation effort. For instance, the country has built agricultural technology demonstration centers and organized training to cultivate personnel in developing countries in Africa to shake off poverty.

By the end of 2019, China's assistance for Africa's poverty reduction had benefited 500,000 people. It also works on the synergy between the Belt and Road Initiative and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These cooperation projects embody China's experience at the global level.

First, international cooperation on poverty eradication initiated by China combines aid and investment. That form is similar to its domestic model that integrates fiscal transfer and development-driven poverty alleviation through multiple channels. Fiscal transfer means establishing a social welfare and assistance system financed by the government, including the minimum living allowance, support for people living in dire poverty and relief for people affected by disasters. The latter focuses on the capacity building of poor groups, who, discovering and releasing their potential comparative advantages in the market, can shake off poverty through their own efforts. Entering the 21st century, China's aid and investment in developing countries are displaying a simulta-

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neous growth trend.

Second, China's poverty reduction cooperation with other countries includes infrastructure and education projects based on its experience of poverty alleviation. Infrastructure, a priority in poverty alleviation, starts with building roads and projects for water conservancy and supply and power generation and supply, and expands into communications, housing and other fields. It also plays a significant role in China's foreign aid and has achieved remarkable results. Compared with resources, energy, commerce and finance, food and other aid projects related to infrastructure, science, education and humanities show better poverty reduction results. For instance, the roads built in the impoverished delta of Mauritania inject strong impetus into the development of local agriculture and livestock.

Last, when providing foreign assistance, China adheres to the principles of not imposing any additional political strings and not interfering in the internal affairs of the recipient countries. Also, China does not require recipients to reform their domestic political, economic and social systems in exchange for poverty eradication funds.

The Chinese government and State-owned enterprises have played an important role in foreign aid. From 2004 to 2014, SOEs accounted for nearly 70 percent of those providing assistance. Over 30 percent of the projects are led by

the government and SOEs, including those carried out by recipient countries or in cooperation with China.

In January, the State Council Information Office released a white paper, China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era, which states that from 2013 to 2018, China allocated 270.2 billion yuan (\$41.7 billion) in foreign assistance under three categories — grants, interest-free loans and concessional loans.

Grants worth 127.8 billion yuan, accounting for 47.3 percent of the total, mainly went toward helping developing countries build small and medium-sized social welfare projects and to fund projects for cooperation in human resources development, technical cooperation, material assistance and emergency humanitarian assistance, as well as projects under the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund.

The white paper says China has introduced some domestically effective measures in recipient countries, launching demonstration projects and optimizing the local living and business environments to increase residents' incomes.

For instance, during the assistance to Svay Ampear, a village in Cambodia, Chinese experts conducted research to understand the local conditions before establishing a register of poverty-stricken households. The project team then began building toilets, installing stoves and facilities supplying power to improve villagers' lives. The project also included training residents with the skills necessary to start their own businesses. Besides, information on Chinese enterprises is available for local people, who can also get recommendations for employment.

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WANG JINYAN

A quantum leap

The Belt and Road Initiative brings opportunities, wealth and good fortune to Tunisia

Ten years have passed since the "jasmine revolution" in Tunisia. The uprising in the North African country ended the strongman rule of President Ben Ali, and the West attempted to make Tunisia a model for democratic transition in the Middle East. However, under the West's tutelage and patronage, the transition has suffered many setbacks and the democratic institutions have remained on shaky ground.

In the 10 years following the revolution, there have been nine Tunisian governments, some of which had been in power for only a few months. The political whirlwind has slowed the country's economic recovery and development, triggering protests on various scales.

Since 2021, the pandemic situation in Tunisia has gone from bad to worse, and the country has the highest death rate in Africa, perhaps even the world. On July 25, people in many Tunisian cities rallied to protest at the government's failure to curb the pandemic and improve the economy, demanding the dissolution of government and parliament. On the same day, the president of Tunisia announced the decision to suspend parliament and dismiss the prime minister who was also the interior minister. This has failed to resolve the political crisis as the discontent is still simmering.

Political turmoil, deteriorating social stability and the threat of terrorism have destroyed Tunisia's economic recovery and its two pillar industries — tourism and manufacturing. Soaring prices and a high unemployment rate have lowered living standards. From 2011 to 2019, the average economic growth rate was only 1.5 percent. In 2020, due to the epidemic, it plummeted to negative 8.9 percent. The projection for this year's growth is even lower.

China and Tunisia, two geographically distanced countries, have stark differences in their political systems and development paths. However, since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1964, the two countries have never been estranged from each other because of those differences. Instead, they have agreed to disagree and respected the core interests and major concerns of the other.

Upholding the principle of non-interference in other's internal affairs, China has always refrained from commenting on the political situation in Tunisia. It has main-

tained friendly and cooperative relations with the successive Tunisian governments and tried to help them maintain stability and development when needed. After the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in Tunisia, the central and local governments of China, some Chinese NGOs and enterprises have reached out to aid Tunisia, sending batches of medical supplies and protective equipment, such as masks, protective clothing, gloves and testing kits. Chinese health-care experts have also shared their experience in fighting the epidemic with their Tunisian counterparts through video conferences.

Mutual respect has always been a feature and the cornerstone of the political relationship between China and Tunisia. In his speech at headquarters of the League of Arab States in January 2016, President Xi Jinping said, "The key to choosing the right path is to make sure that it suits the national conditions. Given the varied historical conditions, it is only natural that different countries may choose different paths of development. The development path of a country can only be determined by its people in light of its history, cultural traditions and its level of economic and social development." China respects the choice of the Tunisian people and supports Tunisia to proceed from its national conditions to find the right path.

In 2013, China proposed the Belt and Road Initiative, in which Tunisia has been proactively participating. According to Dhia Khaled, Tunisian ambassador to China, the relations between Tunisia and China have taken a quantum leap since the Belt and Road Initiative was launched.

In recent years, the economic cooperation with China has promoted Tunisia's economic recovery and the bilateral relations, delivering benefits to the two peoples. China has undertaken or assisted the construction projects of several landmark buildings in Tunisia, including the Cultural and Sports Center for Youth in Manza of downtown Tunis, a new China-funded hospital in Sfax, the second largest Tunisian city, and the China-assisted Tunisian Diplomatic Training Academy. Such high-quality projects have helped with local employment and development.

Tunisia is a nation of competitive education, science and technology. China has expanded its cooperation with Tunisia, making a splash in some high-tech fields. In April 2018, the China-Arab

States BDS/GNSS Center, the first overseas center for China's indigenous Beidou Navigation Satellite System, was inaugurated in Tunisia. The center has become the first of its kind to conduct international cooperation and an important component in the Beidou service network to serve the Arab countries and the world.

China and Tunisia have been engaged in cultural exchanges too. Several Tunisian universities have established Chinese language programs, and the first Confucius Institute in Tunisia was opened at the University of Carthage in 2019. A number of Chinese universities have also set up Tunisian research centers to conduct joint research with Tunisia. In 2017, Tunisia announced the visa exemption for Chinese citizens, leading to a hike in the number of Chinese tourists and closer people-to-people exchanges between the two countries.

The future cooperation between China and Tunisia under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative will continue to unleash the potential of cooperation and enhance the stability and development of the region. Ambassador Khaled has commended the Belt and Road Initiative for setting an example for bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms. His predecessor, Ambassador Mohamed Sahbi Basly, said that the Belt and Road Initiative brings opportunities, wealth and good fortune to Tunisia and new vitality to the Arabic and African regions and the Mediterranean coast.

At present, the national economy is still in tatters. Most Tunisians are pro-West, as the country is heavily influenced by Europe and adopts a number of European industrial standards. When pursuing cooperation with Tunisia, to produce timely responses and accurate risk assessments, China must keep an eye on any government and policy changes. Meanwhile, it is necessary to maintain friendly relations with both the central and subnational governments, and cement cooperation with the Tunisian Parliament, trade unions and other organizations.

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