Black and white, China turns Sudan's oil, cotton into gold

The bird-eye view of Khartoum Refinery, a China-Sudan joint venture hailed as a model of China-African cooperation that showcases China's contribution to African development. (Xinhua photo/Li Ziheng)

by Xinhua writers Zhi Linfei, Li Ziheng

KHARTOUM, Aug. 25 (Xinhua) -- Through fruitful and mutually beneficial cooperation with Sudan, China is turning the African nation's two major resources in black and white, namely oil and cotton, into gold.

The China-Sudan cooperation now shines as a model for developing Sino-African relations, showcasing China's contribution to Africa's development.

Thanks to the funding and technological aid from China, Sudan has largely achieved energy independence by establishing its own oil industry. Similarly, China is helping Sudan transform its economy, through its efforts to create a cotton industry with a complete chain of production.

To illustrate the close economic and trade relationship between the two countries, China is the biggest trade partner for Sudan, which is the third largest African trade partner for China.

"Our relationship with China is historical, deeply-rooted and strategic. This is a model relationship that we hope will continue and shift to wider horizons," Awad Ahmed al-Jaz, a Sudanese presidential aide in charge...
of Sudan's ties with China, told Xinhua in an interview.

Chinese Ambassador to Sudan Li Lianhe met with Awad Ahmed al-Jazi, Sudanese presidential aide in charge of the Sudan-China relations. (Xinhua Photo/Li Ziheng)

KHARTOUM REFINERY: MODEL OF SUDAN-CHINA COOPERATION

When Sudan and China signed a deal on building the Khartoum Refinery Co. in 1997, no one expected it to become such a success story like today.

Located on the east bank of the Nile river 70 km north of Sudan's capital Khartoum, the 50-50 joint venture between Sudan's Ministry of Energy and Mining and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), has successfully turned the oil-rich African country from an importer of petroleum products to an exporter.

With the help of China's funding, technology and personnel training, the refinery was built in less than 20 months, and has expanded to increase its yearly output to 4.5 million tons.

It has not only met Sudan's domestic demand for petroleum and diesel, but also exported high grade petroleum products to neighboring countries to earn the much-needed hard currencies.

A new city was also born around the refinery as it has attracted a number of petrochemical factories, power plants, oil-trading companies, and other service companies.

In the past 20 years, the Sudan oil industry, including the refinery and other oil-related investments, has generated over 100 billion U.S. dollars in direct and indirect revenues for Sudan's economy, according to official estimates.

Jia Yong, general manager of CNPC International (Nile) Co., the Chinese partner of the Khartoum Refinery, said the refinery is a model showing how China helps an African state realize industrialization.

"The project has not only helped Sudan realize energy independence, but also ensured its safety of national energy supply," Jia told Xinhua.

In addition to the economic benefits, China's oil investments have also brought about huge social benefits for local communities. For example, China has trained a contingent of Sudanese oil engineers and technical workers, many of them are even later recruited by oil-rich Gulf nations.

Over the years, CNPC Co. has contributed more than 120 million dollars to varied charity and poverty relief projects in Sudan, by building and donating 104 schools, 50 hospitals and clinics, and 400 water wells, to
fulfill its social responsibilities.

This refinery is so successful that several other African countries have requested China's help to build a similar one in their countries.

"So far, we have made progress in helping Algeria, Chad and Niger build similar refineries, following the Sudan model," Jia said, adding that this model could be applied in China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Jia Yong, general manager of the CNPC International (Nile) Co., the Chinese partner of Khartoum Refinery Co., talked to workers during an inspection tour. (Xinhua photo/Li Ziheng)

CHINA AIMS TO TURN SUDAN'S COTTON INTO WHITE GOLD

In addition to oil, Sudan is also famous for growing quality cotton. But it has failed so far to establish a complete industry with a production chain from cotton farming, processing, to textile and clothing making.

Now, China is making huge efforts to help Sudan build a cotton industry, based on its successful experience in the oil industry.

China has already achieved success in helping Sudan improve its cotton farming. In Al-Faw in Al Qadarif state, 260 km southeast of Khartoum, a China-funded modern cotton research center, China Aid Agricultural Technology Demonstration Center, has successfully introduced a new type of quality cotton seeds from China.

The seeds, named as China 1 by Sudanese government, have notably increased cotton yields per mu (0.04 hectare) by 150 kilos. The seeds are so popular that 94 percent of Sudanese cotton farmers now plant them, earning an average of 8,400 Sudanese pounds (1,259 U.S. dollars) in increased income per household a year.

In August last year, the Sudanese government and Chinese companies signed a Memorandum of Understanding to allow the latter to grow 1 million acres of cotton in Sudan, including 112,000 hectares in Al Jazirah, a major cotton growing state of Sudan.

In addition to cotton growing, Chinese companies plan to help Sudan build textile and ready-made clothing factories to complete the cotton industry's chain of production.
In the Al Rahad irrigation zone, China Shandong International Economic & Technical Cooperation Group joined hands with Shandong Lumian Group in 2012 to invest 50 million dollars in building a 6,667-hectare modern farm of cotton farming and processing.

It envisions building a complete chain of production comprising of cotton growing, processing, textile manufacturing and clothing making factories, as well as animal farming and meat processing facilities. Raw cotton seeds can be processed to make cooking oil, and its left-over can be turned into animal feeds.

With the help from China's ministries of commerce and agriculture, the farm has been training Sudanese in cotton farming and processing. So far, the Al Rahad farm has held 4 sessions of training under a three-year deal with the UN Food Programme.

"We have achieved an inspiring model in the field of oil industry and now we are heading toward turning agriculture into another model for cooperation after oil industry. We are now ready to make Al Rahad Agriculture Project a model for cooperation in the agricultural field," Awad Ahmed al-Jaz said.

Chinese and Sudanese cotton experts held discussions during a field tour of the cotton farm in Al-Faw in Al Qadarif state, Sudan. (Xinhua photo/Li Zheng)

EAGER TO RIDE ON THE WAVE OF BELT & ROAD INITIATIVE

Sudan, benefiting so much from the previous cooperation with China, is now eager to take advantage of the new opportunities offered by China’s Belt and Road Initiative.

The initiative aims to build a trade and infrastructure network connecting Asia with Europe and Africa, by building roads, bridges, ports and other projects to seek common development and prosperity.

Al-Jaz said he was optimistic that the initiative would inject a new impetus to the China-Sudan ties as Sudan can serve as the link between the African continent and the Arab region.

Bushra Al-Sheikh Dafalla, a Sudanese diplomat and political analyst, told Xinhua that the partnership between the two countries have brought about so many benefits, now Sudan needs to get more help from China in the field of infrastructure construction.

"China can establish land transport lines linking the Mediterranean Sea to Cape Town, which can connect the whole African continent across Sudan," he said, noting China boasts world-class railways construction expertise.
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