

**CHINA'S ENGAGEMENT IN UGANDA: MEDIA,  
CULTURE AND TELECOMMUNICATION**

**PROTEA HOTEL KAMPALA**

**6 FEBRUARY 2014**

**CONFERENCE REPORT**

***THE VOICE OF CHINA IN AFRICA PROJECT***

## INTRODUCTION

On 6th February, 2014, the Department of Journalism and Communication, Makerere University and the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), Bergen, Norway hosted a workshop entitled: *China's engagement in Uganda: Media, culture and telecommunication*. The workshop was part of a collaborative research project: *The Voice of China in Africa*, between the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) in Bergen, Norway; the Department of Media and Communication (IMK) University of Oslo, Norway; the Institute of Journalism and Communication at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS); Instituto de Estudos Sociais e Economicos (IESE), Maputo, Mozambique; the Department of Journalism and Communication and the Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Makerere University, Uganda. The conference was supported by The Royal Norwegian Embassy, Kampala.

The purpose of this workshop was to bring together researchers and interested stakeholders to share perspectives and exchange views on the growing engagement of China in Africa, with special focus on media, culture and telecommunication in Uganda, and the impact on the region and international relations in general. It was attended by 65 participants from different parts of the world including: Uganda, Norway, Netherlands, Sweden, Hong Kong, Nepal, China and South Sudan.

The conference began with an overview, by Prof. Helge Ronning, on the rapid expansion of China's involvement in Africa, which he said was bound to cause considerable political and economic consequences and perhaps shift the balance in international relations. After this, participants listened to a number of presentations that addressed different aspects related to China's interests and investments in Africa, including in the media and communications industry as well as China's booming trade relations with Africa. The presentations were delivered in three sessions: (1) Opening remarks: (2) China in Uganda, and (3) Comparative Perspectives on China in Africa.

## **SESSION 1: OPENING REMARKS**

The opening remarks were delivered by four speakers: (i) the Head of the Department of Journalism and Communication (DJC), Makerere University, Dr. William Tayeebwa, (ii) the Dean School of Literature, Languages and Communication (SLLC), Prof. Aaron Mushengyezi, H.E. Thorbjørn Gaustadsæther, The Norwegian Ambassador to Uganda and H.E. Zhao Yai, The Chinese Ambassador to Uganda.

In his remarks, the Head of the Department of Journalism and Communication, Makerere University, Dr. William Tayeebwa welcomed the various dignitaries and participants to both Uganda and the conference, and thanked the convenors for a timely and significant conference. He noted that both the conference and the **Voice of China in Africa** Project offered incredible opportunity because China's presence in Africa is evident in every sector. He noted that China's presence in the academia in Uganda had been slow but was fast picking momentum. He specifically made note of the proposed China-funded Confucius Institute at Makerere University. In addition, Dr. Tayeebwa noted that the department of Journalism and Communication had been visited by delegates from Chinese Universities and the conference was an opportunity to expand their new found relations.

On his part, the Dean School of Literature, Languages and Communication (SLLC), Prof. Aaron Mushengyezi, noted that it was timely to take interest in China's engagement in Africa because of its significance. He talked of the long history of China's involvement with Africa, which he said dates as far back as the 14th century with African scholars exploring Chinese territories on the one hand, and Chinese explorers visiting the East African coast on the other. He reminded participants that many African anti-colonial movements had support from China and therefore, Africa partly owes its liberation to the Chinese.

Prof. Mushengyezi took note of the recent increase of Chinese engagement in the economy in Africa, especially in construction, transport and more importantly the media. He observed that Chinese trade with Africa may be overtaking the one with other big powers. One interesting issue Dr. Mushengyezi emphasised, is China's utilisation of soft means to gain influence in Africa, an issue that would dominate the rest of the discussion of the day.

He highlighted that China's involvement in Africa and Uganda in particular has been based on principles of mutual benefit, respect, equality, non intervention and assistance without looking like the "big brothers", as many big powers had done in Africa. He stressed the timeliness of both the conference and the research noting the opportunity they both provided for understanding the nature of Chinese engagement in Africa. He noted that SLLC, Makerere University had already agreed to start teaching Chinese because of the belief that it is going to be a competitive language in the future, like English has been for so many years.

In his speech, the Norwegian ambassador to Uganda noted that the cooperation with research institutions such as the ones that organised this conference, was the backbone of Norwegian engagement in Uganda. Support to academia, he noted, has led to development of cordial relations and remains an important component of Norway's relations with Uganda and Africa in general. According to him, Makerere has recently signed the biggest research partnership in Africa with the Norwegian government.

He noted that the Norwegian government continues to collaborate with Uganda on issues of knowledge sharing and transmission at a level that has not been witnessed anywhere else in Africa adding that the conference was an opportunity to understand the perspectives of different stakeholders on China's engagement in Africa. He expressed pleasure at seeing his Chinese counterpart, H.E. Zhao Yai, The Chinese Ambassador to Uganda, at the conference. He expressed optimism that the important research shared at this Norwegian supported conference would strengthen the cooperation between the three countries: Norway, Uganda and China.

H.E. Zhao Yai, The Chinese Ambassador to Uganda began his remarks by welcoming guests to the conference and expressed his pleasure for the people who had come from very far away places to participate in the conference. He reminded participants that China and Uganda established diplomatic relations in 1962, and that China was one of the first countries to recognise the independence of Uganda and soon established an embassy in

the country. Since then, the two countries have continued to cooperate. His speech was dominated by examples of what the Chinese government is doing in the various sectors in Uganda, including transport, education, culture and economic transformation. Some of the aspects he enumerated included:

- Building the proposed Confucius Institute at Makerere University, which is expected to be useful to Ugandans who wish to learn Chinese, but cannot travel to China.
- Bilateral relations and exchange visits: This has happened between the newly elected president of China and the President of Uganda. Other high ranking Ugandan political figures including the Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, the Hon. Prime Minister Amama Mbabazia and the Chairman of NRM Mr. Moses Kigongo have also visited China in the recent past. Likewise, many Chinese political and cultural figures have come to Uganda.
- China has booming investments in Uganda's energy and mining sectors.
- Increased bilateral trade: In 2013 the amount of bilateral trade between the two countries reached 524 million US Dollars. Ugandan exports to China amounted to 72 million US dollars. 95% of Uganda's exports enter China with no duty and tariffs. Up to 365 Chinese business ventures entered Uganda by September, 2013 , amounting to an investment of 1.2 billion US dollars.
- China is expected to construct three hydro power stations including Karuma, Izimba and Ayago power stations. China is supposed to finance these dams on loan.
- The Ugandan government recently signed an agreement with CNOOC (Chinese Oil Exploration company) to become the first licensed oil production company in the country.
- Construction of the Kampala-Entebbe express highway, which is directly funded by the Chinese government. It is the first express highway in Uganda after 50 years of independence and the first Chinese directly financed road project. However, Chinese companies have worked on various road construction projects as contractors.
- Education: 43 scholarships for masters and PhDs. Selected 20 universities in Africa, including Makerere were set to cooperate with 20 Chinese universities under the Forum on China and Africa Cooperation.

- Chinese agricultural experts have come to Uganda, and other 300 Ugandan civil servants have gone to China for short training and capacity building.
- The construction of the China-Uganda Friendship Hospital at Naguru. The hospital was donated by the Chinese government, and the same government continues to provide medicine and equipment as well as a well trained medical team to this hospital.
- People to people and cultural exchange: Thousands of people including women, members of parliament, police officers, have participated in training programmes organised by the Chinese government in China and Chinese troupes have also visited Uganda and performed.
- Two Chinese companies have invested in Uganda's ICT sector, one of them is Huawei. With support from the Chinese government, these companies are working with telecommunication companies in Uganda to strengthen the country's ICT sector.
- In the media Sector, a Chinese company Star Times has got hold of a reasonable share of the Ugandan market. It provides solutions especially in relation to the digital migration project.

In terms of conclusion, the ambassador highlighted China's commitment to equality, mutual friendship and unconditional assistance and cooperation in its relations with Uganda and Africa in general.

## **SESSION 2: CHINA IN UGANDA**

This session included paper presentations on the topic: *China in Uganda*. The presenters in this mid-morning session included: Prof. Helge Rønning (Department of Media & Communication, University of Oslo and CMI), Prof. Goretti Nassanga (Department of Journalism and Communication, Makerere University), Prof. Sabiti Makara (Department of Political Science & Public Administration, Makerere University), Dr. Shubo Li (Chr. Michelsen Institute), Mr. Li Lianxing (China Daily's Chief Reporter in Africa).

The presentations in **China in Uganda** session touched upon: critical reflection on the Chinese conceptualization of soft power; what china does in Uganda with focus on media, communication and telecommunications; the construction of Africa in Chinese media; and creating a better understanding between China and Uganda through media. Issues discussed in each of the presentations in this session are summarised below.

Prof. Helge Rønning (Department of Media & Communication, University of Oslo and CMI):  
***What does China want and how? A critical reflection on the Chinese conceptualization of soft power***

- China's engagement in Uganda and Africa in general is based on the strategy of soft power, which is fronted as an alternative to the more coercive and interventionist strategy espoused by Africa's Western partners.
- There is need for critical reflection and deconstruction of the concept of "soft power" as applied to China's engagement in Africa. This would engender understanding of how the concept is being used at the expense of human rights; and to promote Chinese increased involvement in the economy in Africa as well as its underplayed political consequences.
- Coined by an American writer, Joseph Nye, in the 1990s, the concept of soft power caught on in China when it became apparent that the country needed to improve its image following a series of human rights violations.
- Soft power is about advancing national interests without recourse to coercion. The key term used to define soft power is 'attractiveness'.
- However soft power is not useful as an analytical tool basically because the originator used the term attractiveness in defining it. The main question is: what is attraction, for instance in politics, culture, etc?
- Instead of using soft power, alternative forms of power have been suggested, such as: institutional, reputational, military, representational, political and economic power. These can be useful in understanding what China and all other powers are about in international politics.

- China needs to see the full perspective of what power is and is about than focus on the un illustrated concept of "soft power".

In describing China's foreign policy strategy further, the presenter emphasised that:

- China aims to build good will and portrays itself as a friend to Africa.
- China's strategy is area specific, that is, it focuses on less developed countries.
- China takes a territorial perspective in its power strategy.
- To promote itself as a big power in the world, China engages in both big, and also small scale economic enterprises in the continent.

Another interesting idea that emerged was that China's engagement based on soft power is now (expectedly) a sources of conflicts in the sense that:

- It is undermining local enterprises, which causes conflict and tension. A case in point are Chinese agricultural projects in Zambia which have caused conflicts with local farmers.
- It overlooks labour laws in the various countries in Africa.
- It contradicts self-concept of what china is doing in Africa and its principles of mutual respect and benefit.

But to a great extent, China is so far successful in its soft power initiatives. For example it has created an image of itself as an economic power.

- However, from the cultural perspective its presence is still not felt. A case in point is its failure to compete in the pop culture industry.
- Again, its military power is yet to be understood.

Prof. Goretta Nassanga (*Department of Journalism and Communication, Makerere University*) and Prof. Sabiti Makara (*Department of Political Science & Public Administration, Makerere University*). ***What does China do in Uganda? An overview of the Chinese engagement with a focus on media, communication and telecommunication***



The discussion in this paper focused on how China is using its 'soft power' to influence investments in Uganda. The paper began with a background and a historical context relating to China's foreign policy strategy. The background re-emphasised China's soft power strategy and highlighted, briefly the development of the media in Uganda.

It was noted that the media in Uganda had moved from the state owned/controlled industry of the post independence era to a liberalised and somewhat free industry starting in the early 1990s. The liberalisation and the continued growth of ICT has made it possible for: media houses to sprout, for the creation of transnational media in the East African region and for many local and foreign players, including China, to enter the media market/industry in Uganda. In specific reference to what China's is doing with the media and communications industry in Uganda and Africa in general, the presentation made mention of the following:

- Utilised the interconnectedness and globalised media system that emerged as a result of growth in ICTs to open up. It was noted that prior to this, China had been a closed society. This process is facilitated by ICTs, such as mobile phones, computers and internet.
- Media are carriers of information and images that affect the power balance and this has been a central feature of China's international relations. Like other countries, China cares a lot about how it is portrayed by the media in Uganda and elsewhere. Thus China is taking keen interest in the media in Uganda, especially for this reason.
- Image building through expanding presence in television and other media. A case in point is through StarTimes, a Chinese media company that is also facilitating the digital migration project in Uganda and a host of other African countries, as well as China Daily a weekly Chinese newspaper based in Africa.
- Establishment of CCTV Africa, in 2012 with offices in Nairobi, a news TV channel modelled on CNN. CCTV is dubbed 'the new Voice for Africa'.
- Establishment of Xinhua News agency, which produces global news and covers world events from the Chinese perspective and supplies news to media houses in Uganda.

- Establishment of Weekly Press briefings by the Centre for Chinese Studies at Stellenbosch University, South Africa.
- Sponsorship of Journalists visits to China
- China is a big player in Uganda and indeed Africa's telecommunication industry through Huawei, one of the leading telecommunications equipment providers on the continent.

In addition, it was emphasised that besides the media, China is also doing many other things in engaging with and in Uganda on many other fronts, which include:

- Positioning itself as an influential emerging power in the world. China positions its self in ways so it can be perceived as powerful. One such way is through BRICS, a term used to refer to the major emerging national economies of the world: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- Africa's top business partner, with trade exceeding \$166 billion. It is indicated to be overtaking America as the world's largest net importer of oil
- Under the framework of South-South Cooperation Programme, agricultural experts from China visit Uganda to promote agricultural development .

An important question raised in this presentation was whether China provides an alternative to the conditional bilateral relations between Uganda and countries from the West. In answering this question, it was emphasised that China's relation with other African countries, including Uganda has not been as smooth as perceived. That, it has created several challenges such as:

- Concern about the trade deficit between Uganda standing at a ratio of 1:10 in favour of China
- Local business communities are concerned about the Chinese entering retail trade, and under-selling the latter.

- International concerns have also been raised by the EU over Chinese companies being given local contracts, yet the EU generously contributes to African development as well.
- Concerns over human rights and democracy as well as China's lack of transparency.
- Chinese taking local jobs and retail trade in Uganda
- Local media re-oriented towards Chinese development model
- Failure to create jobs for Ugandans

Nonetheless, China/Africa relations have culminated into:

- Africa's recent high growth rate,
- stimulation of other donors, Japan and the US inclusive, who see China as a threat;
- China's demand for Africa resources has increased global market prices.

The paper was concluded with a big question on whether China is re-colonising Uganda and the rest of Africa.

Dr. Shubo Li (*Chr. Michelsen Institute*): *Imaging Africa: **The perception of Africa in Chinese media***

This presentation highlighted the representation of and reportage about Africa in Chinese media since 2006. It was noted that the reportage has created recognisable and diverse faces of Africa in China. The representation of Africa in Chinese media was summed as below:

- There were some stories of success
- There were stories that described how the Chinese model is suitable for Africa. These illustrated how Africa's engagement with China presented economic benefits for Africa.
- Other stories provided a shield and defense of criticism of Chinese exploitation of Africa and also denied the possibilities of Chinese colonialism in Africa.
- Others were general investigations and these tackled issues that are of concern in Africa, such as disrespect for labour laws and human rights, among others. They provided in-depth exposure to hitherto unknown facts.

- The last form of representation consisted of individual journalists/ writers personal accounts of Chinese in Africa. These were written by especially Chinese journalists who have been to Africa. Some of them make comparisons and personal reflections on their experiences about Africa.

In conclusion, it was noted that all the above categories are similar in the sense that they make Africa relevant to Chinese people. Chinese journalists do exactly the same thing as all other journalists do. The Chinese government is working hard to improve the image of Chinese- Africa relations in china and abroad through the media.

Mr. Li Lianxing (*China Daily's Chief Reporter in Africa*): ***A Better Understanding by A Smoother Media Cooperation***

This presentation contained experiences of a Chinese journalists working in Africa. The aim was to promote a better understanding of the China/Africa relationship through the media.

The presentation stressed the fact that Africa, China and China-Africa relationship was faced with challenges of misrepresentation and under representation through the global media. The paper therefore made an attempt to provide solutions to these challenges and more specifically how the bilateral relationship between China and Africa could be better understood using the media.

It was emphasized that Africa's representation in the media today is twofold: (i) negative portray, which was said to be a creation and an imagination of foreigners and of old knowledge, (ii) An Africa of prosperity and steadfastness. However, it was observed that these two forms of representation are two distinct views that represent two extremes when reporting about Africa. With this understanding, it was emphasised that the media need to act more professional by committing to covering the developing world, especially Africa, adequately, with no motive to reinforce a biased image of the continent.

To achieve the above, it was noted that Africa needs to do the following:

- Strive for indigenisation of media content, which can be achieved if the continent builds media of their own to make her voice heard. China has already moved in this direction and this will be useful for China-African relations in the future.
- Offer more topics and perspectives. This makes it critical for African and Chinese journalists to collaborate so as to provide more understanding.
- Wits University, based in South Africa is already running a China-Africa Report project, which can be utilised by African journalists to improve the image of the bilateral relations between China and Africa.
- More African correspondents should be based in China to tell the African story to interested Chinese readers/audience.

In conclusion, it was noted that media can be fully utilised to improve China-African relationship, especially if journalists from the two regions can dedicate to taking a collaborative reporting approach.

**The discussion of the presentations on China in Uganda touched on four important aspects:**

The first was a reminder that the concept of soft power did not start with China. It was noted that the missionaries had used it in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa to consolidate their rule and that of the British. Journalists and researchers were called upon to deconstruct this and related concepts and to highlight the fact that this has been seen before. Participants agreed that Africans need not close their eyes to what is going on now.

The second issue was an observation that researchers in Uganda enjoyed incredible academic freedom. They were therefore challenged to question and reflect well on the demerits and merits of the models fronted by the big powers, including China's alternative model and the need to question its values vis-a-vis African values.

The third aspect was that researchers must not only take interest in Chinese framing of China, but also Chinese framing of Africa. The discussant noted that the most prevalent framing of china is in Western media. For example the frames of China in the Western

media reflect that Africa has been donated to china and researchers ought to question such frames.

The fourth and last issue was a call to journalists and the media to engage with the Chinese government on issues of press freedom. The need for the Chinese government to appreciate that being critical does not mean being negative. There were concerns about African journalists who are given red cards not to return to China after being critical of the country and its policies.

**SESSION 3: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON CHINA IN AFRICA** Dr. Elling Tjønneland  
(Chr. Michelsen Institute): *Asians in Africa: A comparative study of the Chinese and Indian engagements in Africa*

This presentation started off on the observation that a number of Asian countries have become very important in African development, among them India and China. The two countries were noted to have a long history in Africa, although India is indicated to have engaged with and in Africa for a longer period of time than China. The engagement of the two countries was noted to be characterized by a widely recognisable commercial dimension. The two countries were shown to be engaged in Africa at similar fronts, although in somewhat varying proportions. Such fronts were enumerated as trade, Investment, development finance and education. The following issues were raised in this presentation:

- China is Africa's trade partner in a more profound way than India.
- China's investment in Africa surpasses that of India. China's investments were noted to be expanding in various sectors, including telecommunications and energy. South Africa is their largest investment destination.
- China's economic presence is felt in almost every African country, but more pronounced in some countries such as Angola, Nigeria and South Africa than in others.
- In regard to education and training, it was noted that China has expanded heavily in this area especially by offering short training opportunities for Africans in China.

China has in the recent years become the biggest provider of such educational opportunities to Africans ahead of Germany which used to dominate in the past years.

India was reported to have a similar profile like China, but less volume of trade if compared with its counterpart.

### **What achievements for Africa?**

The following were noted as achievements for Africa from its engagement with India and China:

- Africa is important in China's and India's economic expansion, but not as critical as often believed.
- Both countries have made significant contribution to economic growth and development in Africa.
- They have contributed to Africa's bargaining position both internationally and within countries and among countries in Africa.

### **Dimensions of power and influence of china and India**

It was noted that the two countries had obtained considerable economic power as a result of their engagement in Africa. But the distinction was made as regards the size and speed with which the two countries have entered Africa, noting that China performs better on both fronts.

Good will dimension is common to both. The two countries emphasise win-win situation in their engagement policy and to some extent non interference. India was however, indicated to be less committed to the non interventionist policy compared to China.

The issue of power in regard to the two countries' engagement in Africa takes an ideological dimension as well. They both emphasise South to South Cooperation.

Power for the two nations also comes in form of public diplomacy, in which dialogue, mutual visits and cultural promotion take centre stage. A case in point is the use of the Africa-India forum and the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which have become important platforms for promoting the respective cultural issues of the two countries to Africa.

A note about Chinese soft power: This tends to be focused on getting other countries to appreciate and be attracted to its values.

Elisabet Helander (*Hong Kong Baptist University*): ***The impact of China on African journalism: The case of Kenyan Media***

Kenya's media system was contextualised in this presentation as one that exemplifies relatively free press and professionalisation of journalism. It was noted that China's involvement in the mass media in Kenya comes in various forms, which include:

- Direct aid to African broadcasters,
- Investment in the media industry,
- Journalism education in China,
- China's coverage of Africa.

In specific terms, it was noted that China has engaged in the media in the following ways:

- Setting up Chinese state media bureaus worldwide
- In 2010 CNC world was launched and modeled on global broadcaster CNNC and BBC, English language channel. This brings Chinese perspective on international events to the emerging markets
- Chinese media have set up programme exchanges with Kenya Broadcasting Corporation
- CRI established its own local radio in English, Swahili



It was noted however that China's investment and involvement in Kenya's media industry is just as welcome as in other sectors. The un answered question posed in this presentation was: ***Does such involvement lead to direct influence on the media in Kenya/Africa?***

The concept of soft power has been applied in answering this question. But as earlier noted, it was reechoed in this presentation that this concept should be questioned. As previously indicated, the concept was coined by Joseph Nye. It loosely refers to ability to obtain goals in national interest through cooption and attraction. But there are issues with pinning down what is "attractive" about for example a country's culture, political values, and the like.

### **Framing of Chinese image in Africa**

- China is seen in positive than negative
- Framing of its image is inclined to pragmatic and economic cooperation

Prof Oswald Ndoleriire (Director of the Confucius Institute at Makerere University):  
**Prospects for Opening a Confucius Institute at Makerere University**

This presentation deliberated on the steps that have been undertaken to establish a Chinese funded Confucius Institute at Makerere University. It was noted that this institute is named after Confucius, a Chinese philosopher and politician. Confucius teachings emphasise mutual respect and the search for knowledge.

There are 410 Confucius Institutes in 410 countries, 25 of which are in Africa. Another 74 countries are on the waiting list to establish these institutes. Compared to institutions like Alliance Française (founded in 1883) and the British Council (founded in 1934), the first Confucius Institute was opened in Seoul, South Korea in 2004. The first to be opened in Africa was in 2005 at the University of Nairobi, Kenya.

The Confucius Institute is supported by the Chinese government and its main activity is teaching the Chinese language and culture. CIs may also be used to enhance collaboration and exchange of knowledge between China and the host countries.

CIS are normally hosted by universities and at Makerere, plans are already underway to open up one. Like in other African countries, the CI at Makerere will be supported/ funded by financial assistance from the Chinese government as well as volunteers for language teaching.

The steps taken so far to establish the CI at Makerere University are:

- The College of Humanities and Social Sciences prepared the necessary paper work and carried out discussions with the officials of the Chinese Embassy in Kampala.
- Makerere university has established a knowledge partnership and exchange programme with Xiangtan University in China, under the framework of the Chinese-African Universities 20=20 Project. Under this initiative, the two universities will collaborate on issues involving staff training, academic exchanges and launching of knowledge partnerships
- Delegations from the two Universities and from other concerned government agencies in China have exchanged visits to speed up the process of establishing the centre.
- A communiqué of cooperation between the two universities was signed 7th July 2013.
- The parties also agree to offer both degree and non-degree language programs, and particularly the degree program whereby Makerere will offer a three year bachelors degree in Chinese.

It was highlighted that what is left to be done before the CI can be operation is the signing of a few remaining agreement documents and the approval of the degree course in Chinese by the Senate and Council at Makerere University.

Ms Christine Nagujja (*Head of Communications StarTimes Uganda*) ***StarTimes in Uganda***

Star Times Communication Network Technology Company is a Chinese establishment involved in providing digital television services. With its headquarters in Beijing, China, the company has branches in over 15 African countries including Uganda.

Its operations in Uganda started in 2010, becoming the first pay TV in the country to offer Digital Terrestrial Technology (DTT).

The company is leading Uganda's digital migration project. This is in line with the global process involving the switch from analogue to digital broadcasting signals. All African countries are required to make this move by June 2015, and a number of them including Uganda's neighbors such as Rwanda, have already completed this transition and many more are making the transition. So Start Times is facilitating the process in Uganda and it is using this opportunity to bring combined satellite communication technology (star sat),with terrestrial wireless digital TV technology to construct its digital Pay TV operation platform.

Since its inception in Uganda, the company has managed to achieve the following:

- Ugandan viewers are able to receive clear and colorful programs without installing satellite dishes.
- Extended digital television transmission to various parts of the country including: up to Mbale, Mbarara, Buvuma and Ssesse Islands
- Offered employment to over 295 Ugandans
- Provided decoders to Ugandans at the cheapest prices on the market

At the same time, the company still faces a number of challenges. Some of these are:

- Persistent negative perceptions about China and its products and services
- Constant changes in global technology
- Landscape which affects the signal of DTT
- Inflation

This presentation ended on the note that Start Times plans to roll out its services to all areas in Uganda and to continue to provide the cheapest digital pay TV services on the market.

### **Discussion and reactions**

The plenary discussion on the comparative perspectives on China in Africa touched on the following issues:

It was acknowledged that Star Times has been very useful in Uganda's digital migration process. But the company was called upon to address the quality of technology being used in order to allow Ugandans to obtain value for money.

The other issue raised in regard to Star Times was to do with how and whether ordinary Ugandan people can afford digital migration/television. It was emphasised that the ordinary person, particularly in rural areas, needs to access it at a much cheaper cost than it is right now.

About the Confucius institute, questions were raised on whether Makerere University had conducted research on the possible benefits of the institute to Ugandans, to which it was revealed that no such studies had been done. It was emphasised that a study should be done to evaluate the value added of CIs in areas where they have been established before Makerere can open up one. Participants also expressed pessimism over the amount of local content that will be taught at the CI at Makerere. The main question was whether the CI has to exclusively be about China.

On the impact of China on the media in Africa, participants were mainly concerned about the influence of Chinese state aid to African media on content. Participants also wondered why, despite China's continued support to African media, Western media still dominate African airwaves. The fact that there exists no Pan-Africa media house that is dedicated to African issues was another issue of concern. It was noted that there are quite a significant variation in languages in Africa (Swahili, Arabic, English and a host of other local

languages) and perhaps this could explain why there is no Pan-African media house. However this might change in the future.

The presentation on comparison of India and China's engagement in Africa provoked a number of questions:

- Is china replacing India in Africa and what are the consequences of such a shift?
- Do Chinese and Indians have common or divergent interests in Africa and what is the impact?

Is Africa up for another scramble and if so what are the consequences of this scramble given that India and China are not the only Asian countries engaging in Africa? To this question, some participants observed that the new foreign actors such as the Chinese are opening up new opportunities which can easily be exploited to increase possibilities of a new scramble for the continent especially by the BRICS. There were feelings that such a scramble is the best thing Africa can have at this time. The issues should instead be on how the Africans want to exploit this scramble. What is at play is that Africa needs to be smart and direct the engagement. Participants were also concerned about the extent to which the foreign actors and Asians in particular are to build links with local business people.

- Which of the two countries, India and China has the strongest soft power in Africa.
- What is India's soft power about?
- What are Africa's interests in its engagement with Asian/foreign countries?
- When is Africa's soft power going to evolve so that it can also have some influence in international relations?

It was noted that Africa has rich culture, and if well organised it can easily influence the world from cultural exports. But participants were also concerned that Africa's cultural heritage was being eroded by foreign cultures/ pop culture.

Another interesting comment from the discussion was the observation that while Europe and America have an agenda in Africa, China seems to have agenda for Africa. Yet many

people have not developed an appeal for Chinese products. There were questions on what it would take to make the brand 'China' more attractive.

### **Closing Remarks**

The conference was closed by Prof. Helge Ronning with an emphasis that China's engagement in Africa was a significant development that called for close scrutiny from both scholars and journalists. The need to deconstruct the concept of soft power as it applies to China as well as China's interests in Africa was also reechoed.

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