Common but Differentiated Commitments

China's Engagement with the 2030 Agenda Global Partnership

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Abstract: Since the basic framework of the United Nations 2030 agenda for sustainable development goals (SDGs) was created, the focal point of relevant discussions has been shifted to global partnership and implementation. As a key component of this development initiative, global partnership has the potential to determine the means of implementation and follow-up implementation of the 2030 agenda, to which China is expected to make greater contributions. China's participation in global partnership will definitely generate benefits and incur costs. On one hand, the continuing rise of China could lead to future shrinkage of physical gains, leaving enormous potential for augmenting non-physical gains. On the other hand, the rest of the world expects China to contribute more global public goods in physical terms but not necessarily intellectual ones. With regard to cost-benefit balance, the costs of China's involvement in global partnership will be greater than the benefits it generates, while its

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non-physical gains will be hard to assess due to many uncertainties. For China, as a developing country, to contribute further to global partnership for the 2030 agenda, it should make clear strategic commitments on multilateral platforms, promise concrete material assistance at bilateral (collective) forums, and deepen its comprehensive domestic reforms.

Keywords: United Nations; 2030 agenda for sustainable development; global partnership; China's role.

China and the UN 2030 Agenda: An Overview

The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were initiated in 2000, will reach their deadline at the end of 2015. Meanwhile, after four years of global consultation and open discussions,¹ the MDGs' successor — the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (hereafter "2030 Agenda"),² with sustainable development goals (SDGs) as its core, has been formally approved at the UN Development Summit in September 2015. Though relevant debates are still underway, focus on the 2030 Agenda has been gradually moving from establishing the framework of goals and targets toward their means of implementations (MOIs), follow-up measures, and global development partnership (hereafter "global partnership").³ Given the fact that the MDGs had not been seriously implemented until 2005, five years behind schedule, the international community hopes to put

¹Regarding the progress of the Post-2015 Agenda negotiation, see Zhang Chun, "Erlingyiwunian Hou Guoji Fazhan Yichen de Jinchen Yashuo yu Zhongguo de Keneng Gongxian [Process Summary of the Post-2015 Agenda and China's Potential Contribution]," *United Nations Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2014), pp. 71–75.

²The title of this agenda has changed several times, including "Post-MDGs Agenda" and "Post-2015 Development Agenda," and the outcome document that has been passed in September 2015 renamed it as 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. See *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, UN, August 11, 2015, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/7891Transforming%20Our%20World.pdf>. Because the title of "2030 Agenda" is quite new and people are more familiar with the name of "Post-2015 Agenda," this paper will use these two terms interchangeably.

³Global partnership of the Post-2015 Agenda was referred to as the "new global partnership" before the SDGs were created. "SDGs global partnership" is now more widely used though some also adopt terms like "global development partnership." Here the author uses "global partnership."

the 2030 Agenda into action as early as possible. Since global partnership is the basis for effective MOIs and further implementation of SDGs, worldwide attention on building such partnerships is mounting continuously.

As an emerging power, China's potential role in the 2030 Agenda global partnership will undoubtedly be placed in the limelight. "Global development partnership" was notably stressed in the position paper—the second of this kind—issued by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on May 13, 2015, but its potential contributions were largely ignored.⁴ For China, the significance of establishing global partnership is not confined to the global development cooperation itself, but falls within a much broader framework of China's rise due to dual pressure from domestic economic structural transformation, as well as international power shift from the West to the Rest. Thus, instead of viewing the benefits and costs only from the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, China locates global partnership within its grand strategy of achieving its global status and sustainable development.

China welcomes the SDGs agenda as a whole for several domestic reasons. First, thirty years of rapid economic growth have generated significant side effects on the environment; second, the structural transformation of the economy is now at a crucial juncture; and third, the overall carbon emission is estimated to peak around 2030. Therefore, China has been taking an active role in the formulation of the 2030 Agenda, and published its first official position paper in September 2013, the earliest in the world. To push forward the discussion of the 2030 Agenda, China has communicated and coordinated closely with developing countries (especially members of the Group of 77), and at the same time promoted domestic policy coordination among various government bodies including the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Commerce, and the Ministry of Finance.

It is noteworthy that if China maintains its current momentum of economic growth, its marginal benefits of global partnership in physical terms will be less comparable to its potential (physical) contributions; meanwhile the net gains in non-physical terms will be highly uncertain due to international concerns about China's rise. In this light, China might adopt a very cautious attitude. It will need to emphasize North-South cooperation as the main

⁴China's Position Paper on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, Chinese Foreign Ministry website, May 13, 2015, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t1263455.shtml.

channel while strengthening South-South cooperation through various platforms; support ambitious SDGs while avoiding formal concrete commitments including official development assistance (ODA); and improve domestic policy coherence and transparency while resisting external interference.

In other words, China will possibly pursue a conservative and sub-optimal negotiation strategy, which might be referred to as “common but differentiated commitments,” to support the SDGs by proposing (new) big ideas while refraining from making substantial commitments justified by the common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR) principle. At the same time, given that the SDGs are beneficial to the growth and structural transformation of China’s economy, China will likely integrate the SDGs with its domestic development strategy and promote domestic policy coherence by internalizing the SDGs and MOIs, a process favorable to domestic development, but with obscure implications for global governance.

Based on the brief review of China’s interactions with the UN 2030 Agenda, this article will further elaborate on China’s engagement with the major SDGs in the 2030 Agenda in the next section. Subsequent sections analyze China’s costs and benefits in global partnership, followed by an outlook of the changing cost-benefit curve in the next 15 years. A static and dynamic analysis of the cost-benefit structure is presented before the last section defines an optimal Chinese strategy of engaging in the 2030 Agenda global partnership.

China: An Active Actor in SDG Agenda Building

Though remarkable achievements have been made, it is indisputable that the bulk of MDGs will remain unfulfilled at the end of 2015. One reason is the ineffectiveness of global partnership (Goal 8). Therefore, the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP) appointed by UN Secretary-General (S-G) Ban Ki-Moon called for a “new global partnership” in May 2013.⁵ In the synthesis report released by S-G Ban on December 4, 2014, partnership is listed as one of the six essential

⁵ *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development: The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda* (New York: United Nations, 2013).

elements for building the Post-2015 Agenda.⁶ Beyond these appeals, the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) proposed the framework of post-2015 goals and targets, with some discussion on global partnership in detail. In the OWG's report submitted to the S-G on August 12, 2014, the proposed Goal 17 aims to "strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development." Besides the 19 targets of Goal 17, another 31 targets, dispersed across the 43 MOIs affiliated to the other 16 goals, are closely linked with the building of global partnership.⁷ In other words, 50 targets among the 62 related to MOIs and follow-up implementation are concerned with global partnership building. Successful establishment of global partnership will exert tremendous influence on the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda.

As an emerging power, China's role in promoting the 2030 Agenda global partnership has been widely acknowledged. For example, in the S-G's Synthesis Report, South-South cooperation and the significant efforts of solidarity by emerging economies are encouraged. More countries need to commit to augmenting their contribution to international public financing and setting targets and timelines to do so.⁸ Moreover, in the *Common African Position (CAP) on the Post-2015 Development Agenda* and the *First Ten Years Implementation Plan (2013–2023)* of Agenda 2063, Africa has stressed that its sustainable development efforts need financial support from the international community, including emerging economies like China.⁹ In contrast with some Western countries that are still struggling under the shadow of the 2008

⁶*The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming all Lives and protecting the Planet, Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Agenda* (New York: United Nations, December 2014), p. 24.

⁷See *Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals*, UNGA, A/68/970, August 12, 2014.

⁸*The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming all Lives and Protecting the Planet, Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Agenda*, p. 32.

⁹African Union, *Agenda 2063: The Africa we Want, Popular Version*, 3rd Edition (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: African Union, January 2015), pp. 16–17; "Background Note," Workshop on Agenda 2063 First 10-Year Implementation Plan, Lusaka, Zambia, March 2–6, 2015, <http://agenda2063.au.int/en/events/workshop-agenda-2063-first-10-year-implementation-plan-lusaka-zambia>, Annex 3 "Agenda 2063 Financing, Domestic Resource Mobilization and Partnerships."

financial crisis, the economic advantage of emerging countries is conspicuous. It is logical for the international community to place high hopes on China and other emerging countries contributing more in shaping the 2030 Agenda global partnership. Although there is no single goal related under the SDGs framework, targets like Goal 17.1 (mobilizing domestic resources), Goal 17.3 (mobilizing additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources), Goal 17.4 (assisting developing countries in attaining long-term debt sustainability) are all relevant. Those targets on South-South cooperation, triangular, regional and international cooperation, technology sharing, all require robust investments from rising powers.¹⁰

China does hold great potential in making contributions to the formation of the 2030 Agenda global partnership. First and foremost, the achievements in domestic implementation of MDGs and contributions to MDG-8 (MDGs global partnership) have set good examples. China has been dedicated to the global poverty reduction effort and is the first to fulfill the poverty reduction goal (MDG-1), reducing 76.09 percent of the world's total poverty population over the period 1990–2005. Meanwhile, China also provided support for more than 120 countries in their fulfillment of the MDGs under the framework of South-South cooperation.¹¹

China contributed to over three quarters of poverty reduction in the world from 1990 to 2005, and it is the first country to have fulfilled the poverty reduction goal (MDG-1).

Second, China was among the first to propose establishing the new global development partnership. Back in November 2012, China called for building “a new global development partnership with greater equality and balance” at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), half a year earlier before the “new global partnership” was initiated by the UN on the 2030 Agenda. In September 2013, China issued its first position paper, the earliest not only among major powers but also around the world. In May 2015, China released its second position paper, in which “establishing a more balanced global development partnership” was stressed.

¹⁰See *Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals*.

¹¹See *China's Position Paper on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*.

Third, China has been seeking cooperation with other countries especially the developing ones in pushing forward the 2030 Agenda global partnership. Through a number of multilateral platforms, China called for consensus building actions on the 2030 Agenda, for example, at the 5th Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) held in July 2012 in Beijing¹² and the 5th BRICS Summit in March 2013, Durban, South Africa.¹³ In the process of intergovernmental negotiations on the 2030 Agenda, western countries have been trying to scale down the OWG's SDGs in order to minimize their responsibility in global partnership, which triggered fierce backlashes from developing countries. Through the G77+China channel, these countries clearly voiced that starting from scratch would be unacceptable.¹⁴

¹²"We call on the international community to, under the leading role of the UN, take seriously the inefficient implementation in the field of sustainable development, show the political will and commitment to build consensus, and reach agreement on the implementation plan of the post-MDG framework of sustainable development. We also urge the developed countries to honor their assistance commitments to developing countries, African countries in particular." See *Beijing Declaration of the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, FOCAC website, July 23, 2012, <http://www.focac.org/eng/ltada/dwjbzjjhys/hywj/t954245.htm>.

¹³President Xi Jinping said that "We should jointly participate in the setting of international development agenda, fully harness the productivity and material resources accumulated in the past, fulfill the UN Millennium Development Goals, narrow the North-South gap in development, and make global development more balanced." See Xi Jinping, "Work Hand in Hand for Common Development," Chinese Foreign Ministry website, March 27, 2013, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpcfl_665694/t1027968.shtml.

¹⁴Such struggle started from the 69th UNGA in September 2014 when OWG's SDGs report was approved by the UNGA. The *Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Agenda*, is another attempt to replace the SDGs with six elements. The climax was in the 3rd round of intergovernmental negotiation in New York in March 2015. For example, in a speech on March 23, G77+China stated "the G77 and China remains averse to the re-arrangement or repackaging of the SDGs"; while on March 25, the language was much stronger, G77+China argues that "since the Report of the OWG-SDGs was adopted through a GA resolution in its entirety," thus "the Group firmly rejects any attempts to re-open the agreed Report of the SDGs..." See *Statement on Behalf of the Group of 77 and China*, by Ambassador Kingsley Mamabolo, Permanent Representative of the Republic of South Africa to the United Nations and Chair of the Group of 77, on the occasion of the 3rd session of the Intergovernmental process on the post-2015 development agenda, New York, March 23, 2015; *Statement on Behalf of the Group of 77 and China*, by Thembele Ngculu (Mr), Counselor of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of South Africa to the United Nations, on the occasion of the 3rd session of the Intergovernmental process on the post-2015 development agenda, New York, March 25, 2015.

A balanced and reasonable global partnership for delivering the 2030 Agenda could then be expected under such efforts.

Nevertheless, policy incoherence still exists in China's participation in the SDG formulation process, and importance attached to the SDGs differs at the operational level. Less effective coordination is still conducted among various agencies, although the mechanism for inter-ministerial cooperation had been founded by 2012. Apart from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), and Ministry of Finance (MOF), other ministries or agencies seem to pay little attention to these issues except when they are consulted by superior ministries.¹⁵ The lack of coordination along with the divergence of attentiveness can be easily discerned in China's engagement in discussion during the OWG working process. According to this author's analysis of the working document of the OWG's 11th session in May 2014, the latest one with country-specific list of target proposals, China's attitude toward SDGs is quite positive on the whole, proposing 30 targets within the 140 of the 16 focused areas (renamed as "goals" since the OWG's 12th session in June 2014). As for other BRICS countries, Brazil proposed 33 targets, India proposed six, South Africa and Russia proposed one respectively. However, a more detailed analysis of the targets' advocacy structure shows that China has almost no voice in many specific areas, for example, No. 4 (education and lifelong learning), No. 12 (climate change) and No. 13 (protection of marine resources and sustainable use), due to its policy incoherence.

The Group of 77 and China "firmly reject any attempts to re-open the agreed Report of the SDGs."

Seeking Non-Physical Returns from Global Partnership

Based on the judgment of its own development, China welcomes the SDGs agenda and is ready to provide more global public goods as a responsible stakeholder. China's delivery of development assistance with the diffusion of experience on capacity building and development is in the real interests of other developing countries. China's growing economic strength will

¹⁵ Author's interview with an official from China's National Health and Family Planning Commission, January 28, 2015, Shanghai.

make physical or economic profit less available than non-physical gains generated from the SDGs agenda.

China's potential gains from global partnership are mainly intangibles such as a better image and louder voice in international arenas.

In general, political and environmental gains will be most predictable, followed by economic, financial, and social benefits. In concrete terms, the improvement of China's national image might be the most intangible gain. Through providing official development assistance, assisting developing countries to maintain their long-term debt sustainability (Goal 17.2), promoting North-South, South-South, and trilateral cooperation in scientific and technological innovation (Goal 17.6), delivering aid for developing

countries on capacity building (Goal 17.9), strengthening sustainable global partnership (Goal 17.16), and fostering public-private partnerships (PPPs) (Goal 17.17), China's willingness and capability to provide more international public goods could be better demonstrated. As a result, a good national image will be presented.

The second benefit that China could enjoy is a louder voice in global governance and international norm/rule making. After 35 years of reform and opening up, China's economic power has reached an unprecedented level. However, the impact of economic development on the environment also looms large. One of the many examples is the lingering haze over many cities which has raised concerns among all Chinese people. Therefore, in the *U.S.-China Joint Announcement on Climate Change* last December, China proposed to reach the peak of its greenhouse gas emission by 2030, with a downturn after that.¹⁶ In line with the "Four Comprehensives" principle set out by Chinese top leaders, it will be very critical to implement the 2030 Agenda in the next 15 years for the sake of environmental sustainability and economic transformation. Against this background, China takes a positive

¹⁶"Zhongmei Qihou Bianhua Lianhe Shengming [China-U.S. Joint Statement on Climate Change]," Chinese Foreign Ministry website, November 12, 2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_chn/ziliao_611306/zt_611380/dnzt_611382/fzshyixghd_669568/zxxx_669570/t1210034.shtml.

attitude toward most of the goals and targets listed in the Agenda. As illustrated in the second policy paper,

China's economy has entered a phase of 'new normal,' with a growing downward pressure and the trend of unbalanced, un-coordinated, and unsustainable development remaining a prominent issue. The agricultural foundation is still weak, while the constraints on resources and the environment have been intensified. The capacity for innovation is weak, and transforming the mode of economic development and readjusting economic structure remain a tough challenge. . .¹⁷

Thus, the Chinese government will,

based on China's national conditions, endeavor to align its own development strategy with the Post-2015 Development Agenda (a prototype of the 2030 Agenda), work hand in hand with other countries and make ceaseless efforts to build a community of common destiny for mankind, helping to realize the dreams of people across the world.¹⁸

On this basis, China put forward the idea of building a comprehensive, balanced framework for international development cooperation. In addition, China has suggested verifying the fulfillment of ODA delivery, technological transfer, and capacity building (Goal 17.2). To promote the 2030 Agenda, China also supports the "data revolution" (Goal 17.18, 17.19). Though still cautious and reluctant to employ such terms as "enhance statistics," China has decided to adopt the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in November 2014, demonstrating its willingness to promote data transparency and data revolution under global partnership.

Compared with the two kinds of non-physical gains mentioned above, the environmental, economic, and financial gains—in other words, the physical benefits—are relatively small. After more than 30 years of rapid

¹⁷See *China's Position Paper on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*.

¹⁸See *China's Position Paper on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*.

growth, China has accumulated abundant funds for its own development, and now it is the time to give returns.¹⁹ As a donor country of increasing importance, China still has access to some social aid or assistance from developed countries. Also, China can continue to benefit from the international aid architecture, though the net gains might fall. With the progress of the WTO Doha Round negotiations, a multilateral trading system that is more open, fair, universal, systematic, and non-discriminatory will be established. Then the overall environment for China's foreign trade might move forward in an advantageous direction, which could help promote China's international trade. International transfers of technology, especially those of environmentally friendly technologies (Goal 13.a, 15.a), will boost the structural reform of China's economy and its sustainable development. International effort at technology transfer to developing countries (Goal 17.8), especially the application of information and communication technologies, will also further expand China's overseas market with regard to information and communication equipment.

Offering more foreign aid does not deprive China of the eligibility for aid from developed countries.

In addition, there would be some uncertain gains. For example, given that China is a leading agrarian country, Goal 2.a—"increase investment...to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries"—has implied China's potential to provide its own agricultural products and technologies to the international market.

While Goal 2.c, to "limit extreme food price volatility," also indicates China's role in the stabilization of food prices within its domestic market. What's more, Goal 3.b provides opportunities to promote China's domestic medical and pharmaceutical research, which could pave the way for the export of Chinese medicines. Goal 6.a and Goal 15.b could also bring positive implications on water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, waste-water treatment, recycling and reuse technologies, forestation promotion, etc. However, it would be unreasonable to

¹⁹Author's interview with an official from the Department of International Financial Cooperation, Ministry of Finance, China, January 28, 2015, Shanghai.

assume that China will reap all these potential benefits, since they remain highly uncertain.

Making Greater Contributions to Global Partnership

As the world's biggest developing country, China has been facilitating other developing countries in promoting common development through the implementation of the MDGs. Drawing on the existing achievements, China is prepared to make greater contributions to MOIs and SDGs global partnership. China is aimed to pursue unity and common development.

Enhancing the global development partnership. A new global development partnership should be established for common prosperity and development. North-South cooperation remains as the core of this partnership and South-South cooperation is a useful supplement to North-South cooperation.

Development financing should be enhanced with North-South cooperation serving as the main channel. Developed countries should honor their Official Development Assistance commitments, provide development assistance, and scale up their support for developing countries, especially African and Least Developed Countries. Developing countries should further enhance South-South cooperation, help each other in the spirit of solidarity, and pursue common development.²⁰

China's potential contributions to MOIs and SDGs global partnership will lie in the following aspects:

First, to increase the physical contribution to the SDGs global partnership, especially in financing, debt relief, tariff reduction, trade promotion, and technology transfer. Although official comment has not yet been made, chances still exist to increase the physical contribution and ODA to the SDGs global partnership given different positions among departments. For example, the Foreign Ministry insists that CBDR be the core principle

²⁰China's Position Paper on the Development Agenda Beyond 2015, Chinese Foreign Ministry website, September 22, 2013, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t1078984.shtml.

and “an important consensus on development of the international community, which lays the foundation for international development cooperation,”²¹ thus becoming an obvious part in the debate of the second round of intergovernmental negotiation in February 2015 in New York.²² By contrast, the Ministry of Commerce, which is responsible for foreign aid, is increasingly open-minded. The *Administrative Measures of Foreign Aid* released by the Ministry of Commerce on December 15, 2014, reflects some differences. In April 2014, when the draft version of the *Administrative Measures of Foreign Aid* was finished for public discussion, some traditional Chinese words could be found. For example, the Foreign Ministry now still adheres to the words “act according to one’s ability” (*liang li er xing, jin li er wei*). Yet interestingly, in its final version published in November 2014, such words have been removed. This might be seen as a sign of China’s potential contribution to international development financing.²³ Similarly, responsible for the allocation of funds, the Ministry of Commerce also takes a positive attitude. With capital advantage, especially a large reserve of foreign exchange, China could better promote global development cooperation.

Second, to provide a new platform for the SDGs global partnership. The 2030 Agenda focuses not only on global development, but also on topics like security, human rights, and governance. For sure, there will be some overlapping areas between platforms of the 2030 Agenda global partnership and other existing platforms. Hence, when implementing the 2030 Agenda and global partnership, effective platforms that avoid duplicated efforts must be established. Platforms of global partnership can be divided into four types in terms of their relevance to the SDGs (see Table 1).

- (1) The SDGs platform, which deals with issues related to SDGs financing arrangement. Though the 3rd UN Conference on Finance for Development (FfD) in July 2015 aroused high expectations, it eventually

²¹Ibid.

²²“Development: Post-2015 Declaration – One Step Forward, Two Steps Back?” Part I and II, *Social Watch*, March 6 and 9, 2015, <http://www.socialwatch.org>.

²³*Measures for the Administration of Foreign Assistance*, No. 5, 2014, Chinese Ministry of Commerce website, November 15, 2014, <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/b/c/201411/20141100799438.shtml>; *Measures for the Administration of Foreign Assistance (Draft)*, Chinese Ministry of Commerce website, November 15, 2014, <http://tfs.mofcom.gov.cn/article/as/201404/20140400556051.shtml>.

Table 1. China's Cost-Benefit Structure in Global Partnership

Issue	Gains	Costs	Negotiating Mechanism
Global finance	Small amount of social infrastructure assistance, such as rule of law, social governance, etc.	More funds for international development cooperation	SDGs Platform ICESDF
Trade	Improvement of foreign trade environment, growing foreign trade volume	More aid for trade development	SDGs + Platform WTO UNCTAD
Technology transfer	Technology sharing in clean energy, water resource, basic medicine, etc.	Transfer abundant productivity, promoting industrialization in developing countries, especially for improving transportation infrastructure	SDGs + Platform WIPO SS-GATE
Global governance reform	Increase the weight of China's voice	Support the global south	SDGs-Platform IMF World Bank
A stable international macroeconomic system	Increase the weight of China's voice	Support the global south	SDGs-Platform G20
Climate change	Speed up domestic transformation on economic structure; push forward domestic environmental protection	More aid on climate mitigation and adaptation; greater responsibility of cutting emission	SDGs-Platform UNFCCC
Sustainable consumption and production	Stimulate domestic consumption and adjust the pattern of economic growth	Mobilize domestic savings to invest abroad	Non-SDGs Platform

Table 1. (Continued)

Issue	Gains	Costs	Negotiating Mechanism
Data	Improve domestic statistical capacity; increase data transparency, timeliness, and accuracy	Provide growing public goods on data capacity building for other developing countries	Non-SDGs Platform United Nations Statistics Division (DESA) S-G's Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development (IEAG)
Private sector commitments	Help mobilize private capital and improve its competitiveness	Provide more international development financing, legal and policy aid, helping target countries in creating better environment for investment	Non-SDGs Platform Various investment protection and negotiation platforms

Source: Compiled by the author.

proved to be quite generic and did not specifically concentrate on the 2030 Agenda. As for global partnership of the 2030 Agenda, the main negotiating platform is supposed to be *The Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing* (ICESDF).²⁴

- (2) The SDGs plus (SDGs+) platform, namely combination of the existing platform and SDGs framework, to deal with issues closely related to the SDGs agenda while having some mature mechanisms already. For example, trade promotion measures under the SDGs framework should combine with the Doha Round of WTO negotiations; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) can also be regarded as an auxiliary platform. Furthermore, issues on technology transfer may involve the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and South-South Global Assets and Technology Exchange (SS-Gate). The private sector, with a profit-oriented instinct, is usually reluctant to invest in social affairs like education and health promotion. Therefore, the mobilization of the private sector needs the support of public funds. Government should pave the way for private investment, especially in the creation and protection of favorable environment for investment. It is important to combine the SDGs framework with negotiations on the agreement of bilateral and multilateral investment protection.
- (3) The SDGs minus (SDGs-) platform, to deal with issues loosely related to the SDGs agenda. It is better to discuss them on the previous platform. The SDGs framework could play a catalytic role rather than a dominant one. The key problem here is how to make improvements on global governance that is more dependent on the specific areas of the reform. It is unrealistic to fully count on the SDGs negotiations. The complete change of the global governance structure or reform through the construction of the SDGs global partnership is also unfeasible. The reform of the IMF and the World Bank cannot be achieved under the SDGs framework, and the stability of global macro-economy can hardly be maintained by the SDGs negotiation, while issues are more likely to

²⁴Chinese Ministry of Commerce official attaches great importance to the Third International Conference on Financing for Development held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, July 2015. Interview with the deputy director of division of the Department of International Financial Cooperation, Ministry of Finance, January 28, 2015, Shanghai.

be addressed within mechanisms on global economic governance like the G20. Likewise, the existing mechanism of UNFCCC should be better exploited for combating climate change.

- (4) The new independent (Non-SDGs) platform, to deal with some new topics beyond the SDGs framework and with no mature mechanisms attached. It is necessary to think about how to create a new mechanism to deal with new issues more comprehensively when pushing forward negotiations under the SDGs framework, so as to maintain the results achieved within the SDGs negotiations. Sustainable production and consumption always require a drastic change of people's preferences. Taking China as an example, the habit of saving money has been embedded in the Chinese culture for thousands of years, which will take time to change with the transformation of economic growth model, namely, from being export-driven to consumption-driven. Since solutions provided by the SDGs arrangements are short-term in nature, a macroscopic and long-term negotiation mechanism needs to be established. The data revolution might be considered as another example. The current consensus on the necessity of data revolution to fulfill the SDGs agenda is more about the technology and pathway of implementation, rather than a broader change of mentality. The ongoing progress of the data revolution is very likely to create its political implications by exerting influence on national statistical capacity, data sovereignty, and data independence, among others. Although the agreement achieved under the SDGs framework might have no political imperatives, it is significant to build a new mechanism to discuss issues from both political and technological angles simultaneously.²⁵

China is seeking to help construct a new platform for SDGs global partnership.

Third, to provide new methods for the SDGs global partnership. Two aspects should be emphasized. One is the Chinese approach of dealing with the development-security nexus based on its domestic experience since its

²⁵Zhang Chun and Gao Wei, "Lianheguo Erlingyiwu Nian Hou Fazhan Yichen yu Quanqiu Shuju Huoban Guanxi [UN Post-2015 Development Agenda and Global Data Partnership]," *World Economy and Politics*, No. 8 (August 2015).

reform and opening up, and the other is China, as a fast developing country, could make significant intellectual contributions to the development of South-South cooperation, especially in poverty reduction, technology transfer, capital accumulation, etc.

Uncertainties of China's Cost-Benefit Structure

Many factors lie behind the formulation of China's strategy of engaging with the SDGs agenda and global partnership. First of all, China now prefers non-physical gains based on affluent financial resources that support its domestic development. Second, with its growing economic power, China's physical gains or incentives from global partnership will keep decreasing in the long term, while the non-physical gains are full of uncertainties. And third, considering that China is still a developing country for the time being and that it is likely to undergo a great change in 15 years (till the deadline of the SDGs agenda), it is necessary for China to remain flexible in its engagement with the SDGs agenda and global partnership. In this regard, we can find some dilemmas.

First, China's marginal benefits, especially the physical ones, from global partnership will keep declining in the next 15 years, while its costs or contributions on providing global public goods are expected to grow, thus a "scissors difference" between the costs and benefits will emerge. If China continues to maintain stable growth (even at a slower pace) till 2030, the incoming foreign aid will shrink inevitably, which means China has less access to international financing. Furthermore, China then needs to shoulder greater responsibility of international financing and might be requested or take the initiative to join the OECD — DAC, and thus subjected to the 0.7 percent benchmark commitment for foreign aid. On one hand, the improved openness of the international trading system will make the environment of international trade more agreeable for China; on the other hand, China's stable economic growth will stimulate further expansion of its domestic market as well as aid scale for developing countries. Therefore, the gap between benefits and contributions might also be widened.

Second, China expects a reform of the global governance system through the implementation of the SDGs agenda and global partnership. However, the SDGs agenda is more relevant to development, with no

authority on global governance, especially in specific areas. Although the SDGs agenda could be a contributor/catalyst to the global governance reform, it cannot determine the pace and scope of this reform. The 2008 financial crisis largely failed to trigger an overhaul of the global governance structure, especially the reform of the IMF and the World Bank. It is thus unrealistic to believe that the SDGs agenda will promote substantive reform on the global governance system when we take into account the non-binding nature of the SDGs agenda and MOIs. In this regard, China's efforts at seeking a louder international voice might turn out to be very difficult or even unsuccessful, according to the understandings of many Chinese officials and scholars.

Third, although China always looks forward to improving its national image through providing more public goods for the international community, the current international discourse is more inclined to interpreting China's global activities as a kind of "compensation" for its wrongdoings rather than positive contributions. For example, with the ever-changing landscape of its economic growth, China is frequently blamed for the ups and downs in international oil prices and the imbalance of global oil supply and demand. For another example, after the outbreak of the global financial crisis originated from the malfunction of the U.S. financial system, some American politicians put the blame on China and demanded that China take the responsibility of rebalancing the world economy. Another way of explaining China's contribution is by trying to dig out its "hidden agenda." The creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) might be a good example here. The U.S. gave open criticism on the U.K.'s decision to join the AIIB, asserting that

China intended to change international investment norms and rules. In this light, the rewards for China's support of the SDGs agenda and global partnership are highly uncertain; China might have to spend more time explaining its "ambitions" rather than be able to improve its national image.

To sum up, in the 2030 Agenda global partnership, China's strategy may still remain material-interest-orientated, taking CBDR as its core part, emphasizing North-South

While China is certain to commit more physical resources into the 2030 Agenda, the intangible returns for it are far from assured.

cooperation as the main channel and South-South cooperation as complementary. In other words, China may refrain from being excessively active in South-South cooperation, in order to pursue a sub-optimal result, and be hesitant to challenge the leading role of South-North cooperation (which the traditional donors try to deny). China will also oppose it if the developed world pushes South-South cooperation to the front to shift their “responsibility” to the developing countries. At the same time, China welcomes further engagement of the private sector, while maintaining an open attitude toward the potential role of the private sector.

Thus, the dynamics of China’s gains and costs/contributions under global partnership may present the following picture: putting more emphasis on physical benefits and potential cost-benefit imbalance, while playing down the importance of non-physical benefits and contributions; giving more emphasis to the key role of North-South cooperation, while underscoring the significance of South-South cooperation to some extent, keeping an indifferent but open attitude toward the role of the private sector; placing more attention on the limits of China’s current capacity, and avoiding making clear commitment so as to leave itself maximum flexibility.

Sub-Optional Strategy of “Common but Differentiated Commitments”

Based on the current situation and its future development, China’s sub-optimal strategy on the 2030 Agenda global partnership should focus more on physical costs and benefits and deliberately maintain ambiguity on the MOIs and SDGs commitments. However, China’s national image and international voice could be at risk under such a strategy. To address the dilemma, China should make full use of the flexibilities that the SDGs agenda implies and develop a strategy of “common but differentiated commitments” that includes three levels of actions. At the global level, China should initiate “big ideas” for global development cooperation so as to retain the moral high ground; at the regional and bilateral levels, China should make concrete aid promises, to show that it is not “all talk and no action” at the global level; and most importantly, China should use the

opportunities created by the 2030 Agenda to promote long-term sustainable development goals domestically.

China's proposal of
"common but
differentiated
commitments" in
global partnership
carries significant
global, bilateral as
well as domestic
implications.

At the global level, China should commit itself to building international consensus on development cooperation. First, China may propose some new concepts for development to enhance its national image. The concept of sustainable development behind the SDGs agenda has been put forward for a long time, and will finally become a domestic topic after the adaptation of the SDGs agenda by the end of 2015. What comes next? From its own experience and vision for the future, China will possibly offer the international community a new concept of development, following the proposal of such

notions as the Asian Security Concept.

Second, to promote the implementation of the SDGs agenda and the building of global partnership, China may put up a new international development cooperation framework that continues to emphasize the role of the United Nations as the core in global development and point out the need to adjust or reform the global governance system. Thus, China could further promote the implementation of the SDGs agenda while better monitoring it, keeping a balance between technical rationality and political sensitivity in areas such as data revolution.

Third, China may also conceive of some new concepts for South-South cooperation. There are two key underlying factors: on one hand, China's development projection indicates its greater role in South-South cooperation; on the other hand, the emphasis on universality of the SDGs agenda and the emphasis on domestic/private resources mobilization impose greater pressure on South-South cooperation, because the Southern countries have fewer domestic/private resources compared with the North, which leads to their weaker mobilization capabilities. By proposing new concepts for South-South cooperation, China can include sustainable development and inclusive development into the economic pillar of traditional South-South cooperation and emphasize the solidarity of the global

south in terms of the independent choices of development pathway and North-South cooperation, etc.

At the regional and/or bilateral levels, China has to make more concrete aid promises to the developing world. To avoid “empty promises,” China needs to strengthen its development efforts on other developing countries. First of all, China should make best use of the 6th FOCAC Summit to be held in December 2015, to facilitate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Africa, and provide various supports including development assistance that African countries need. Secondly, China should link its “Belt and Road” initiative with the 2030 Agenda, and give more support for Asian developing countries mainly through the AIIB, the Silk Road Fund, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), etc. And thirdly, China should take advantage of its G20 Chairmanship in 2016 to speed up the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Finally, China needs to strengthen cooperation with the BRICS and G77 to support developing countries through multilateral channels.

At the domestic level, China may actively and independently incorporate the SDGs agenda into its national development planning and send timely feedbacks to carry through the initiative. China is currently at a critical juncture of economic reform and transformation. There are many positive elements within the SDGs agenda and especially the MOIs which are in line with China’s own development needs. China will take the initiative to internalize the principles and measures embodied in these targets and indicators, while remaining sensitive to external impacts in relevant areas. China will also endeavor to promote the coherence of its domestic policies in an independent way, after which more international cooperation in these fields will be advanced.

Conclusion

China does not think of the 2030 Agenda and its global partnership in an isolated way (limited to the development perspective). China’s economic transformation is underway, and the relationship between China’s rise and international power shift is quite sensitive. Given China’s rapid growth, and the high uncertainty of international circumstances in the next 15 years, it is easy to conclude that China’s participation in the 2030 Agenda global partnership is more of a net-pay.

Thus, the real significance of China's participation in this process does not lie in international cooperation, but in domestic development instead. Facing the transformation of its own economic structure, and the sensitivity between its rise and international power shift, China has entered into a special period of development. Therefore, China will have to consider the 2030 Agenda from the perspective of domestic economic transformation, and calculate the participation in global partnership based on its own rise. In this sense, China needs to take the initiative to internalize goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda at the domestic level, and promote domestic reform and economic transformation by participating in global partnership; in the international arena, China needs to temper its contributing zeal and make a sub-optimal choice by maintaining some ambiguity on international commitments for policy flexibility.