

## CONCILIATING AFRICA'S ETHNIC MINORITIES WITH AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN POVERTY REDUCTION: LESSONS FROM CHINA

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### ABSTRACT

Many conflicts in developing countries have been caused by groups on the margins of society agitating against their exclusion from the scheme of things. Africa is a region that has been ravaged by complex and multifaceted conflicts. The continent's state fragility quotient is high; and one of the very first things some African countries (notably Nigeria, Zaire (now DRC) and Angola) did upon gaining independence was either fight a civil war or flirt with situations that brought them on the brink of war. Most of the conflicts have been fought by ethnic groups contesting the control of political and/or economic power and/or natural resources. Ethnic conflict on the continent has been approached with different measures. For example, in Rwanda measures have been taken to eliminate the social relevance of ethnicity (the major cause of the genocide), with the result that Rwandans are no longer ethnically profiled as Hutu or Tutsi or Twa but simply as Rwandan. There are various ethnic policies in the other regions that can be copied and adapted to the peculiar conditions in different countries on the continent. This work holds up China's ethnic policies as models that can be adapted for the continent.

Keywords: ethnic conflict, ethnic policies, Africa, China

### INTRODUCTION

Africa is a continent that has been dogged by poverty and conflict since its independence from colonial rule. Its poverty rate is alarmingly high despite its abundance of natural and human resources. Because of its abundant resources, it has been an arena for big-power rivalries for about 500 years. It was sucked into the international system by the Atlantic slave trade. The so-called Legitimate Trade which replaced that reprehensible trade inexorably led to its experience with European colonialism. Its susceptibility to external influence is largely due to its heavy dependence on foreign aid (Calderisi, 2010); and the heavy dependence on foreign aid has been blamed for its development lethargy. According to Nyatoro (n.d.),

The general attribute of African countries is not poverty, stagnation, or exploitation - rather it is their receipt of foreign aid... Most African countries failed to restructure the postcolonial state; rather they have preserved the legacy of colonialism, which is the concentration of export earnings on one or few primary commodities that are vulnerable to exogenous terms of trade and demand conditions... Aid dependence has reached a point where it is counterproductive and is doing nothing to generate processes that would obviate the need for it. The aid recipient relationship in Africa has developed into one that neither generates mutual respect nor harnesses the capacities of all those involved. Instead, it has generated the dependency syndrome, cynicism, and aid fatigue.

Its exposure to foreign debts began during the colonial rule. Nigeria, for example, walked straight into a public debt of £49.2m which represented 55% of its public revenue and 41% of its GNP when it gained independence from Britain in 1960 (Fieldhouse, 1986). Its poverty rate is on the increase despite its modest economic growth (Beegle et al., 2016). It has only one country, namely South Africa, in the rank of the world's twenty major economies (G20). Similarly, its conflict rate is alarmingly high despite all the efforts to bring it down. A civil war has been fought in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Angola, Mozambique, Algeria, Sudan, Algeria, Uganda, Somali, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Chad, Libya, Central African Republic and South Sudan, while there has been serious political instability in countries such as Kenya, Egypt, Tunisia and Mali as well as a border dispute between Libya and Chad, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Nigeria and Cameroon, Egypt and Sudan and Sudan and South Sudan. Its failure to realize the hopes of greatness which independence from colonial rule held out has made its future "to be spoken of only in pessimistic terms" (Meredith, 2006). Because of its many problems, it has been described in very uncomplimentary terms such as "a scar on the conscience of humanity"

(Blair, 2001) and “the shackled continent” (Guest, 2010). Its high intra-regional and trans-regional migration rate clearly indicates the severity of its current challenges. While intra-regional migration is helping to fuel xenophobia in countries like Libya and South Africa, trans-regional migration is hemorrhaging it of its best brains and brawn. (African migrants are not only swelling existing black diasporas in the Americas and Europe they are also creating new ones in Asia and the Pacific).

There are two leading schools of thought on the causes of the continent’s development lethargy. The first school blames these three anthropogenic factors, namely colonialism, neocolonialism and corruption. This school flourished and captured the imagination of many during the first decade of the continent’s independence, i.e. 1960 to 1970. Among its chief proponents are Rodney (2009) who described colonialism as “a one-armed bandit” and Nkrumah (1966) who argued that neocolonialism has created a façade of independence for the continent. Colonialism, in particular, has been in the dock for decades, accused of building the substructure of the continent’s asymmetric relationship with the outside world. Here is a typical charge of those who have refused to discharge and acquit it:

For the future, the most important consequence of colonialism will be that Africa was economically tied to the wheels of Europe. Before the Europeans came, African farmers were self-sufficient at the extremely low level. By the time the Europeans left, Africa had become what they wanted: an economic appendage of Europe with no rational economy of its own, dependent on Europe for all its manufactured goods, much of its clothing, even some of its food, and selling its crops in European-controlled markets. Less than 10 per cent of the new African nations’ foreign trade is with each other; the rest goes overseas. A stroke of the pen was, in some cases, all that was needed to give Africa political freedom, but far more is needed...to win for Africa the economic independence that would bring about true freedom (Haggood, 1966, 30-1).

Colonialism and neocolonialism are still accused. However, the ogre of corruption which has been running amok on the continent since the late 1960s has made some people to shift a lot of the blame away from those two “isms” to corrupt leadership. Mills (2012), for example, has argued that the continent is poor by choice.

The second school blames nature. Its chief proponent, Dumont (1988, 25), fatalistically argued that the continent is poor because of its location relative to the tropics. This metaphysical argument, however, has long been vitiated by the economic vibrancy of non-African tropical countries such as Brazil, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand. A strong relationship exists between absolute poverty and conflict. Where there is the one, there is also the other. It was stated in the foregoing that Africa has a disturbingly high conflict rate. The conflicts that have taken place on that continent, like any other conflicts, are not accidental: they have their causes. Conflicts could be “embedded in the socio-economic, politico-cultural, historical, identity constructions and experiences of the societies, the societies’ relation with intra-regional and international actors; and local, national and regional configurations” (Bereketeab, 2013). Conflicts on that continent are caused by many different factors. For example, while the Nigerian civil war was caused by the cleavage of ethnicity, the civil war that took place in Central African Republic was caused by the cleavage of religion; but there is no gainsaying that ethnicity is the cause of most of the conflicts.

Ethnicity has been a highly visible phenomenon in African politics since the colonial days. Colonialism did not invent ethnicity. Colonialism, however, has been blamed for instrumentalising ethnicity (see for example, Nnoli, 1978; Davidson, 1992; Chabal, 2009). The role which ethnicity played as a tool for manipulating groups with distinct cultural, linguistic identities during colonialism has not recognizably changed. Ethnicity can breed conflict if it is used as an instrument for mediating intergroup struggle for the control of state resources. According to Nnoli (1978, 8),

[C]onflict is an important aspect of ethnicity. This is inevitable under conditions of interethnic competition for scarce valuable resources, particularly in societies where inequality is accepted as natural, and wealth is greatly esteemed. The fear of being confined to the bottom of the interethnic ladder of inequality generates divisive and destructive socioeconomic competition which has antisocial effects. It becomes possible for the ingroup to accept the expression of hostility toward the outgroup. Aggressive behavior may then be used to limit competition in favour of the ingroup. Demonstrations, rioting and various forms of violent agitations become instruments in interethnic relations.

All heterogeneous societies are vulnerable to political tension because of intergroup struggles for the control of the cockpit of political and economic power. Such struggles are usually fuelled by the minorities’ rational fear of domination by the majorities and the majorities’ natural inclination to safeguard the advantages appertaining to their

numerical superiority in the status quo. Agitation by minorities for distributive justice may abate if some desirable change occurs in the intergroup relationship. For example, agitation by the Niger Delta minorities for the control of oil abated after Goodluck Jonathan was elected Nigeria's Vice-President in 2007. (The agitation could resume following his defeat in 2015). Most movements launched to agitate for distributive justice morph into interest groups or political parties at some point. Examples are Ohaneze Ndigbo, the socio-cultural organization of the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria, which emerged from the group's abortive secession bid and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), which transformed into a political party in Angola after the death of Jonas Savimbi, its founder.

Ethnicity is potent in African politics (Harris, 1987, 259), feeding struggles by Africa's ethnic groups for the control of political and economic power. As a badge of identity, ethnicity is desirable; but it becomes deleterious if it is used to champion group dominance. Most of the conflicts that have occurred on the continent are ethnicity-based; and with its weak institutions, the continent has been unable to effectively regulate struggles for political and economic power among its ethnic groups.

The patterns of Africa's colonial interethnic relations remain largely unaltered in most countries but have been recognizably altered in a few others. For example, in Nigeria none of the three largest ethnic groups, namely Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba have been able to fundamentally alter the patterns of their colonial-era relations. On the contrary, in Rwanda the minority Tutsis who constitute only 14 % of the population have been able to regain the political dominance they lost to the majority Hutus on the eve of their country's independence from Belgium. Although colonial rule created or reinforced ethnic cleavages on the continent (Nnoli, 1978), it cannot, in all honesty, be blamed for most of the continent's post-independence conflicts (see, for example, Ake, 1981,162; Davidson, 1992; Hancock, 2007, 178-9; Achebe, 2012, 243-253).

In Africa, agitation by ethnic minorities for distributive justice is generally viewed as a plot to subvert the majorities, hence the tendency by governments to use force to compel ethnic agitators to the negotiating table. But since force tends to aggravate ethnic agitation even further rather than deter it, African governments should consider a shift of emphasis from force to soft power while responding to any agitation by their ethnic minorities for distributive justice. This chapter discusses how China uses affirmative action in poverty reduction to conciliate its own ethnic minorities with a view to interesting Africa in an approach that has been adjudged effective in conciliating ethnic minorities.

#### **A GLANCE AT CHINA'S ETHNIC POLICY**

China is a cultural mosaic of fifty-six ethnic groups. Han, whose language is the Chinese language, is the largest, accounting for 92% of the national population (National Bureau of Statistics, 2011). They also are in the majority in all the regions except Xinjiang and Tibet. The remaining groups, however, occupy 60% of the country's landmass (China, 2006). Ethnic tension in China mostly involves Han and the two largest minorities, namely the Uighurs and Tibetans. Uighur agitation is for independence; Tibetan agitation oscillates between independence and autonomy. Uighur agitation dates back to the 1800s when the Qing dynasty conquered and incorporated Xinjiang into China (Siddiqui, 2015). It has progressively intensified since 1949 when the region was officially annexed by China. Current bout of agitation is partially fed by Han migration into the region, which involves young highly qualified Hans who corner most of the lucrative jobs in the region (BBC, 2014). Tibetans have been agitating against Beijing since 1950 when the nominal independence which it had enjoyed from the Qing Empire and Britain was abrogated by Beijing. During the pre-reform years, Beijing ensured that Han migration to the western hemisphere where the Uighurs and Tibetans are concentrated was strictly regulated. However, since the reform, regulation has weakened, resulting in thick waves of Han migration to the hemisphere every year. (Han migration to Xinjiang and Tibet autonomous regions may be viewed within the context of the nationwide relaxation of internal migration control). Beijing would want to keep its lid on westward migration. At the same time, it would not want to curtail the supply of Han expertise needed by ongoing investments in the region. (Han migration could also be an effort by Beijing to ensure it has a tangible Han presence among minorities whose loyalty is highly suspect).

China makes every effort to protect its ethnic minorities. Article 4 of the *Constitution of the People's Republic of China* states:

All nationalities in the People's Republic of China are equal. The state protects the lawful rights and interests of the minority nationalities and upholds and develops the relationship of equality, unity and mutual assistance among all of China's nationalities. Discrimination against and oppression of any nationality are

prohibited; any acts that undermine the unity of the nationalities or instigate their secession are prohibited. The state helps the areas inhabited by minority nationalities speed up their economic and cultural development in accordance with the peculiarities and needs of the different minority nationalities. Regional autonomy is practised in areas where people of minority nationalities live in compact communities; in these areas organs of self- government are established for the exercise of the right of autonomy. All the national autonomous areas are inalienable parts of the People's Republic of China. The people of all nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages, and to preserve or reform their own ways and customs.

The country also makes every effort to ensure that Han and the minorities live in peaceful coexistence. Mao Zedong said: "It is imperative to foster good relations between the Han people and the minority nationalities. The key to his question lies in overcoming Han chauvinism. At the same time, efforts should also be made to overcome local nationalism, wherever it exists among the minority nationalities. Both Han chauvinism and local nationalism are harmful to the unity of the nationalities; they represent a specific contradiction among the people which should be overcome" (*Selected Readings* 1971, 459-460). The protection of the minorities has been a priority of State since the founding of China about two thousand years ago.

In dealing with its ethnic minority agitation, China uses both force and soft power. Xinjiang and Tibet, where it is fighting what it calls "the three evil forces"--- separatism, extremism, and terrorism, and where most of the minorities are found, are heavily garrisoned despite their vast landmass and long border. Two geographic realities have been mocking the effort to use force to deter separatist agitation in these two regions. First is the fact that Tibet is bordered by India, which has a long-running border dispute with China, and which has sheltered Dalai Lama since his flight into exile in 1959. Second is the fact that five of the countries that border Tibet and Xinjiang are Muslim--- Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan, which makes it easier for separatist East Turkestan Islamic Movement to operate without much hindrance. International security cooperation arrangements such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) are also being used to garrison these border regions.

The soft-power approach offers incentives such as: (1) the grant of administrative autonomy to those areas where the minorities are in the majority such as Xinjiang or constitute up to 20% of the population such as Tibet and Inner Mongolia. Autonomous regionalism was copied from the USSR; but unlike members of the now defunct Soviet Union, the regions are forbidden secession (Article 4 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China); (2) fair representation in governance. Every minority group is fairly represented at both the national and sub-national levels of governance; (3) economic cooperation with the countries that border the western hemisphere, i.e. the place where most of the minorities are found. The Silk Road Economic Belt is expected to accelerate the hemisphere's economic development (Tiezzi, 2014); (4) preferential treatment in college enrolment; (5) lenient treatment in litigation; (6) three-year tax exemption or reduction for ethnic-minority-owned enterprises in the autonomous regions; (7) exemption from the country's one-child policy (minority couples may have as many children as they like) and affirmative action in poverty reduction.

#### **POVERTY REDUCTION EFFORTS FOR CHINA'S ETHNIC MINORITIES**

The lifting of over 500,000,000 (five hundred million) Chinese out of the dungeon of extreme poverty in a space of thirty years is a testimony to Chinese genius in statecraft; it is also a great contribution to the global effort to reduce poverty (Hu, Hu, & Chang, 2003). A high poverty rate in China can have very grave consequences for the whole world. Apart from straining global food supply, it also can worsen international migrant crisis. So the world should be happy that China which was once derisively called a "land of famine" by Wringley and Mallory (1926) can now comfortably feed its 1.4 billion mouths. The country was the first to attain the UN's millennium development goal of halving the number of citizens living in extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 (UNDP, 2010). This enviable credential in poverty reduction, however, is dented by the fact that the majority of the Chinese still living below the poverty line (daily existence on less than \$1.25) come from the ethnic minorities. According to Gustafsson and Ding (2008), "minority people in China are more vulnerable to poverty than the majority and experience poverty dynamics that are dissimilar to those of the majority." The country's extreme poverty is predominantly a rural phenomenon (IFAD, n.d.). Ethnic minorities constitute the majority of the rural population and, by implication, the majority of the rural poor. Poverty rate remains high even among the Uighurs despite the fact that their region, namely Xinjiang, is stupendously rich in natural resources such as coal and oil.

China considers the high poverty rate among its ethnic minorities as a dent in its success in poverty reduction. Hence, it now focuses most of its best anti-poverty efforts on the vast but mostly mountainous, arid western hemisphere where 75% of its ethnic minorities and 27% of its total population are found. The huge prosperity gap between this hemisphere and the affluent eastern hemisphere has been largely attributed to regional labour supply, industrial composition, labour quality, and geographical location (Candelaria, Daly, & Hale, 2013). The eastern hemisphere where most of the country's richest sub-national economies, namely Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin, Guangzhou, Yiwu, and Shenzhen are located has been the major recipient of the investments that have rewritten the country's economic history. The most important of the efforts that have sought to narrow the prosperity gap and develop the western/central hemisphere are: the 8-7 Plan, the Western Region Development Strategy, the Doctoral Service Group and youth volunteerism.

### **THE 8-7 PLAN**

China's efforts to reduce rural poverty became more aggressive after the Mao era. Because China's economy until the end of that era was predominantly rural and agrarian, Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms essentially were nothing but an effort to increase peasant productivity. Between 1978 and 1985, the number of rural poor fell from 250 million to 125 million (Wang, Li, & Ren, 2004:9). Those efforts, however, were like an orchestra of too many instrumentalists because of their large number. In order to streamline them, the central government established in 1986 the State Council's Leading Group for Poverty Reduction. By 1994 when the Group was scrapped and replaced with the "8-7" Plan, the poverty figure had fallen from 125 million to 80 million (Wang, Li, & Ren, 2004).

The "8-7" Plan which sought to lift the majority of the remaining 80 million poor Chinese out of extreme poverty during the seven years between 1994 and 2000 was "the first program of development and poverty alleviation that had specific objectives, targets, measures, and deadlines" (Dong, & Fan, 2004). It was also an effort to institutionalize shared prosperity, partnership and regionalism in national development. Resembling the Solidarity Pact under which the more prosperous western part of Germany has been subsidizing the less prosperous eastern part since their reunification in 1990, the East-Supports-West Programme (the Plan's major component) mandated the involvement of the eastern hemisphere in the central government's anti-poverty efforts in the western/central hemisphere. Thus, eastern provinces and municipalities would: (1) help fund education, medical care, and infrastructural development in the west; (2) exchange their economic and technical expertise for the west's abundant natural resources and cheap labour; (3) help poor western farmers with funds and agro-materials; and (4) exchange administrative and industrial experts with the west. In the Plan's partnership arrangement, Beijing would assist Inner Mongolia, Tianjin would assist Gansu, Shanghai would assist Yunnan, Guangdong would assist Guangxi, Zhejiang would assist Sichuan, Jiangsu would assist Shaanxi, Shandong would assist Xinjiang, Fujian would assist Ningxia, Liaoning would assist Qinghai, Shenzhen would assist Qingdao, and Dalian and Ningbo would assist Guizhou (Sangui, Zhou, & Yanshun, 2004). In 2000, the Plan was replaced with the Western Region Development Strategy.

### **THE WESTERN REGION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

It was stated in the foregoing that most of the big dots on China's poverty map are found in the western/central hemisphere where the majority of the ethnic minorities are found. The prosperity gap between the hemispheres which was created by eastern hemisphere's advantage of prior contact with international maritime was accentuated by a policy that deliberately enabled the eastern hemisphere to receive the lion's share of the FDI that poured in following the launch of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms in the late 1970s. As a pragmatist, Deng pursued a policy of graduated poverty reduction and regional development (Lai, 2002; see also Zheng, & Xiang 2015, 250). The policy was encapsulated in his statement, "Let a part of the population get rich first." His idea of development varied from Mao's: Mao pursued a policy of simultaneous regional development. Deng's graduated approach, however, created problems such as regional disparity, massive eastward migration and restiveness in the western hemisphere (Abebe, & Masur, 2008). Jiang Zemin who succeeded Deng as President in 1993 launched special development efforts for the hemisphere. The flagship of those efforts was the Western Region Development Strategy (西部大开发).

The Western Region Development Strategy (西部大开发) was the first development master plan for the western/central hemisphere (Huang, Ma, & Sullivan, 2010). It was launched following President Jiang Zemin's pledge to get both the central government and the Communist Party of China (CPC) to "regard development of the West as a major strategic mission and put the issue further ahead of anything else" (*People's Daily*, 1999). The State Council's Leading Group for Western Region Development, its supervisory agency, is headed by the Premier who is assisted by

high-profile officials of the central government. Membership of the Group shows the priority attention the new effort to develop the hemisphere is receiving from Beijing (Sasaki, 2001). The major difference between the Strategy and the Plan is that while the former targets only the western/central hemisphere, the latter targeted the whole country. The central government offers incentives to both private investors (local and international) and governments in the hemisphere. For example, investors enjoy reduced tax rates (15% instead of 25%) and lower land prices, while some sub-national governments both receive heavy budgetary allocations from Beijing and retain central taxes for their own use. Among the landmark projects that have been built by the Strategy are the Qinghai-Tibet railway, the China-Europe railway and the Three Gorges Dam.

The launch of the Strategy coincided with the launch of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000. So it could be said that the Strategy is a loud statement about China's determination to reduce absolute poverty among its ethnic minorities.

### **THE DOCTORAL SERVICE GROUP**

Another effort to give the western/central hemisphere's development priority attention is the establishment of the Doctoral Service Group (DSG). The group, established in 1999, is concerned with mobilizing young scientists and technicians with doctoral degrees to participate in national development. Members of the group volunteer to provide "manpower and intellectual assistance" to less developed parts of the country, particularly those in the western/central hemisphere. Most members of the Group are communist cadets (members of the Communist Youth League) whose participation in nation building resembles that of the Red Guards who went to the rural areas to help farmers during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76).

### **YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM**

China is a country that has honed the art of mobilizing human resources for national development, hence it has been described as a "mobilizing society" (IFPRI 2005:14). (Mass mobilization and propaganda are known to be core tools of political leadership and control in countries that have experienced revolution, invasion or dictatorship). Mass mobilization has been a core tool of nation building in the country since the establishment of communist rule in 1949. It had its finest moments under Mao who had used it to get peasants to queue behind the effort to overthrow capitalism and landed aristocracy. As noted by Perry (2002), "Active mass involvement was a hallmark of Mao's revolution." In his homage to the masses for being the backbone of the communist revolution, Mao said, "The people are the sea that the *revolutionary swims* in."

The pattern of mass mobilization for nation building has significantly changed since the end of the Mao era. During that era, mass labour was levied for agricultural and industrial development purposes. Then, exhortation to patriotism which often strayed into the realm of propaganda was complemented by conscription into public works brigades. Communist dictatorship which attained its apogee of power and glory during that era was compelling mass participation in its efforts to develop the country. For example, the ill-fated Great Leap Forward sought to unleash the peasantry upon the effort to speed up industrialization. Obviously, the elements of compulsion and propaganda which predominated during that era have yielded a lot of space to the element of strident, patriotic appeal to what it means to be Chinese. The State now mostly uses soft power to mobilize citizen participation in nation building. For example, it likes to invoke the revolutionary icon, Lei Feng as an example of selflessness (Yu, 2013). It also makes public (and sometimes private) vehicles and places to bear slogans exhorting selflessness and discipline. Volunteerism is now the largest platform for unremunerated citizen participation in nation building in the country.

Volunteerism is filling the vacuum created by the abandonment of propaganda as a tool of mass mobilization. According to the UN (2011), it is now "a recognised and valued part of Chinese civic life." The process of institutionalizing it in citizen participation in nation building probably began with the establishment in 1994 of the China Volunteers Association by the Communist Youth League (UN, 2011). The youth are the cornerstone of Chinese volunteerism; and the scope of their participation in nation building has greatly expanded since the Cultural Revolution in which they actively participated as "Red Guards". For example, they work in disaster areas, act as guides or interpreters for local and international events such as the Olympics and teach the Chinese language at the Confucius Institutes in different countries.

Volunteers are playing a vitally important role in the efforts to reduce poverty in the western/central hemisphere. According to the UN (2011, 14),

Since 1999, the Go West Campaign, part of the Chinese government national development plans in the western region of China, included the role of volunteering... Since 2003, the 'Great Opening Up the West Campaign' encouraged unemployed college graduates to move for 1-3 years to the western regions, either as teachers or administrators. The CCCYL [Central Committee of the Communist Youth League] launched its own 'Go West' Volunteer Programme, and by 2009, this project has despatched 100,000 graduates as volunteers in education, healthcare, agriculture and cultural development. Volunteers receive a small stipend and preferential considerations in civil service tests and graduate school entrance exams.

The Chinese Young Volunteers Association, established in 1993, runs the Poverty Alleviation Relay Project which focuses on poverty reduction in western and central regions. Volunteers are university graduates who donate six months to two years of their time working in basic education or public health and hygiene in those regions. They receive a stipend from the central government and housing and transportation from benefitting communities. In the first decade of its existence, about 80 million volunteers had donated 4.1 billion hours of service through the association (Buhrer, 2008).

## CONCLUSION

China is pragmatic in its ethnic politics. It does not believe that force is the only weapon to use to 'pacify' its ethnic minorities. Aware of the fact that poverty is one of the major causes of disgruntlement among ethnic minorities the world all over, it is making different efforts to aggressively reduce poverty among its own ethnic minorities. Its efforts receive priority attention from the Communist Party and focuses attention on Xinjiang and Tibet Autonomous Regions, the two most volatile parts of the country. The central government mobilizes the eastern hemisphere, the youth and private investors to contribute to the development of the western/central hemisphere.

African countries should prioritise poverty reduction for their own ethnic minorities. They may consider the following strategies:

1. They should create special development agencies for their ethnic minorities. Nigeria's Ministry of the Niger Delta and Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) are good examples of such agencies. Those agencies have helped to assuage agitation by ethnic minorities in the oil-producing part of Nigeria for a bigger share of the country's oil wealth. They are among the best-funded development agencies in the country; and most of their board members come from the minorities. (Agitation for distributive justice easily degenerates into armed violence if the minorities feel they are not getting enough share of the wealth generated from resources in their areas).
2. They should give scholarships and preference in school enrolment and employment to youth from the ethnic minorities. Promising youths from China's ethnic minorities may school on government scholarships up to university.
3. They should mobilize their youth to participate in development efforts for the ethnic minorities. National youth service programmes such as Nigeria's National Youth Service Programme should be made to function like China's volunteer groups which are helping to develop the western/central parts of their country.
4. They should give incentives such as tax holiday and lower land prices to local and foreign investors in the ethnic minorities' areas.

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