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China-Britain-Uganda: Trilateral Development Cooperation in Agriculture

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ABSTRACT

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Against the broader context of donor pluralism, trilateral development cooperation (TDC) has received renewed interest within development policy circles, with supporters arguing that TDC reflects the changing geographies of aid and helps to forge new, more equitable global development partnerships. China has demonstrated a growing openness to TDC and engaged with a number of traditional donors in trilateral projects ranging from agriculture to healthcare. However, there has been scant fieldwork-based TDC research and even less concentrating on China’s engagement, in particular. This paper seeks to fill this gap by focusing on one of China’s first trilateral projects with traditional donors in Africa – its engagement with the United Kingdom (UK) on a cassava project in Uganda. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in 2016, this paper details key coordination challenges during the project implementation phase, and more importantly, critically examines two oft-claimed TDC “advantages”: its contribution to a more horizontal and equilateral development partnership and its role in providing recipient countries with more suitable technical assistance. The paper illustrates how the inclusion of a Southern donor like China, which mainly serves as a provider of technical assistance in this trilateral arrangement, does not necessarily lead to a more horizontal development partnership between the traditional donor (UK) and the recipient (Uganda). The similarities between the Southern donor and the recipient in terms of development capacities, challenges, and experiences do not naturally guarantee technology transfer success, which instead hinges on a deep and contextualized understanding of development differences, in this case, in the cassava sector between China and Uganda. This paper cautions against the tendency to assimilate shared identity and development experiences between the South-South TDC components.

INTRODUCTION

IN NOVEMBER 2012, DURING THE SECOND AFRICA-BRITAIN-CHINA Conference on Agriculture and Fisheries in Beijing, China the United Kingdom (UK) announced the establishment of a trilateral development cooperation (TDC) program called “Agricultural Technology Transfer to Low-Income Countries (AgriTT).” AgriTT planned two pilot development projects (PDPs) to be established in Uganda and Malawi, in the cassava and fishery sectors, respectively.¹ As one of the first TDC projects China initiated with Western donors in Africa, it indicated China’s growing willingness to foster cooperation with traditional donors in international development. China’s 2014 white paper on foreign aid also confirmed this position, stating that China “conducted trilateral cooperation featuring complementary advantage with multilateral and bilateral assistance providers by leveraging each party’s strengths on the premise of fully respecting the will of recipient countries.”²

However, despite Beijing’s growing openness to TDC and the exponential growth of academic literature on China’s foreign aid, there has been limited fieldwork-based research on China’s engagement in TDC, particularly published in Chinese.³ Most available research concentrates on deciphering the rationales behind China and Western donors’ decisions to engage in TDC.⁴ Case studies on China’s involvement in specific TDC projects are limited to a few Australian fact-finding studies on China’s TDC engagement with New Zealand and the United States in the Asia-Pacific region.⁵ Discussion about China’s TDC participation in Africa is also scant; for example, in one study of Sino-African agricultural engagement, French and Belgian researchers make only a brief mention of Chinese TDC projects, without in-depth analysis.⁶

This report aims to narrow the gap by focusing on a pilot project initiated by China and the UK in Uganda’s cassava sector. First, this report details the project structure, including the management and implementing partners, and the progress made while fieldwork was conducted.^a Secondly, the report identifies and analyzes the main obstacles encountered during the implementation phase of the project. Finally, the report reflects on some of the oft-claimed “advantages” of TDC advanced by the development policy community, focusing primarily on the claim that TDC’s contribute to more horizontal and equal North-South relations, as well as its role in bringing in more suitable technical assistance for recipient countries.

This report is based on more than a month of fieldwork in Uganda, during which 25 interviews were conducted. Two additional interviews took place in Beijing. The interviewees fall into two categories. The first includes those directly affiliated with the project, while the second includes interviewees who have different degrees of knowledge about the project or who have general knowledge about China’s development cooperation in Uganda. Fieldwork took place in Kampala and the four local districts where the pilot project was implemented. The author also observed land clearing in Masindi and training sessions for local farmers on mechanized agriculture and the use of imported Chinese machines in Masindi and Biiso. Official project

^a This report accounts for the project progress as of May 2016, when fieldwork was conducted. Final project results can be accessed through the AgriTT learning report. See e.g. Lila Buckley, “Trilateral cooperation in agriculture: Achievements and lessons from AgriTT,” International Institute for Environment and Development, April, 2017: 15, <http://pubs.iied.org/G04145/>

documents, materials collected on site, media sources, and online research (in English and Chinese) were also gathered and analyzed.

While efforts were made to collect data reflecting the different implementing partners' perspectives, the author was unable to conduct interviews with the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) or the Foreign Economic Cooperation Center (FECC), under the MOA. Therefore, the analysis of Chinese perspectives on this project is primarily based on interviews with two Chinese technical assistants sent by the FECC, in charge of negotiating and implementing this trilateral project on behalf of the Chinese government, to support the implementation of AgriTT. It should be noted, however, that the opinions of these two Chinese experts might not reflect those of officials in the MOA and the FECC. As a result, this paper focuses more on the implementation of this trilateral project.

The background outlines the current aid landscape in Uganda with an emphasis on China's growing role, from the Ugandan perspective and provides concise information about the AgriTT program. The case study section details the pilots objectives, management structure, and implementing partners. The results discuss project coordination during the first year of the project, which was marked by financial management disagreements as well as whether TDC helps contribute to a more horizontal and equal North-South development partnership and whether Chinese technologies are more likely to be suitable in Uganda. The paper concludes by offering four policy recommendations.

BACKGROUND

AID LANDSCAPE IN UGANDA

ACCORDING TO THE UGANDAN MINISTRY OF FINANCE, 31 donors provide aid to Uganda. The World Bank (WB), African Development Bank (ADB), European Union (EU), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Department for International Development (DFID), and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) represent the main aid providers during the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 fiscal years. In total, these six actors contribute about 71% of development aid, the other 25 development partners provide the remaining 29%.⁷

Uganda identifies Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Korea, and South Africa as its non-traditional development partners. Among these, China (and to a lesser degree South Korea) have a significant aid presence in Uganda.⁸ Chinese aid has grown considerably, from US\$31 million in 2008-2009 to US\$104 million in 2011-2012, marking an increase from 2% to 7% of Uganda's total aid.⁹ Aid provided by non-traditional donors is considered to be particularly attractive because it comes without human rights or governance conditions, and often targets the infrastructure sector.¹⁰ Chinese engagement has also been viewed by the Ugandan government as being aligned with national priorities established under the 2010 and 2015 National Development Plans (NDPs), particularly when it comes to infrastructure development. For instance, the

Chinese have supported construction of the Kampala-Entebbe Expressway, the Karuma and Isimba hydropower plants, and the national information technology backbone.¹¹ The Ugandan government believes that non-traditional donors' aid will continue to grow, that much of it will come from China, and that concessional loans from non-traditional donors come with fewer concessions compared to loans from traditional donors like the WB and the ADB.¹²

In the context of donor pluralism, the Second National Development Plan 2015/16 - 2019/20 (NDPII) takes into account this global geopolitical and geo-economic change and highlights the need to establish an active engagement strategy with these new partners, especially China.¹³ While the Ugandan government barely mentioned China in its first NDP published in 2010, NDPII refers to China a number of times. The Ugandan government views China as an important source of funding for infrastructure development. To a lesser degree, China's experience in economic transformation is

also discussed in NDPII, particularly in regards to the establishment of industrial zones and land reforms.

However, China has yet to participate in any aid coordination mechanisms established by the Ugandan government or by traditional OECD Development Assistance Committee donors in Uganda. The

Ugandan Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries (MAAIF) has established an agricultural working group, which holds meetings every three months. The MAAIF uses this occasion to brief donors on its activities and to solicit their support. Additionally, traditional donors, including international organizations, have established the Local Development Partners Group (LDPG), which gathers all their heads of mission to discuss activities, policies, and recent developments in Uganda. Ouyang Daobing, the head of China's Economic and Commercial Counselor's Office in Uganda – MOFCOM's antenna abroad in charge of foreign aid- was invited in June 2015 to a meeting in the Belgian Embassy, during which he shared information about the "history, policy, main modalities and key projects of Chinese aid in Uganda".¹⁵ However, this meeting does not appear to have led to any deeper communication between China and the LDPG. A possible reason for the lack of further communication was the timing of the meeting, which took place just before a period of heavy staff rotations among Western embassies and before summer holidays.

Traditional donors with a significant presence in Uganda's agricultural sector (e.g. USAID, Japan International Cooperation Agency - JICA, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations - FAO) also bring officers in charge of agricultural cooperation together on the last Tuesday of every month. This informal meeting aims to facilitate information exchanges on agricultural projects supported by each donor in order to prevent duplicated efforts. Neither staff from the Chinese embassy in Kampala nor Chinese agricultural experts have attended these meetings. During the author's

Table 1: Chinese aid in Uganda (Million USD)¹⁴

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
China	31.45	14.61	41.48	103.8

fieldwork, the FAO chaired the presidency of this group and JICA held the vice-presidency. Given that the tripartite agricultural cooperation between FAO and China in Uganda started in 2012 and entered into its second phase in 2016, one interviewee from USAID suggested, “why not ask FAO to send an invitation to the Chinese? It is very easy to do and it is only a meeting where people share some information.”¹⁶

AGRITT

AGRITT’s AIM IS TO FACILITATE THE TRANSFER OF CHINESE agricultural technologies to developing countries in Asia and Africa. It includes two main components. The first is to establish PDPs in low-income countries to disseminate Chinese agricultural technologies and practices. The second component aims to support Chinese, British, and researchers from other low-income Asian and African countries’ to undertake collaborative research projects in order to generate innovative solutions to improve agricultural productivity in developing countries.

Progress was made towards the first component during the second Africa-Britain-China Conference on Agriculture and Fisheries in November 2012. There, the Vice Minister of the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture and the British Ambassador to China signed two MOUs with the MAAIF and the Malawian Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and, Water Development to establish two PDPs in the cassava and fishery sectors. Initially, AgriTT was expected to identify a third pilot country, ideally in Asia; however, a number of countries, including Myanmar, Nepal, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Tanzania were approached without success due to either a lack of interest or disagreements between DFID country offices and China.¹⁷ Accordingly, AgriTT decided to limit itself to the two pilot programs in Malawi and Uganda.

The Research Challenge Fund, which invited researchers from China, the UK, and other developing countries to submit collaborative proposals, was launched in support of AgriTT’s second aim. The Fund specifically encouraged proposals supporting the implementation of PDPs in Uganda and Malawi. Selected proposals received between £150,000 and £300,000 in funding from AgriTT. Recommended proposal themes included important agricultural technologies, effective value chain development, and the innovative sharing of agricultural knowledge. Over 135 concept notes were submitted, and authors of those deemed eligible were invited to submit full proposals.¹⁸ The Fund’s Steering Committee gathered in November 2013 and selected 12 trilateral research projects.¹⁹ One of the selected projects, in particular, focused on analyzing the development of the cassava value chain in China and looking into how Chinese technologies could be adapted to the local Ugandan context.

CASE STUDY: UGANDA’S PILOT DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

THE DFID OFFICE IN CHINA, VIA THE DFID OFFICE IN UGANDA, informed MAAIF of its plan to engage China in TDC; MAAIF wasted little time in responding positively to this invitation. Before their trip to Beijing for the second Africa-Britain-China

Although China did not make any direct financial contributions to this pilot project and therefore assumed a minimal role in financial management, one can reasonably conclude that TDC can contribute to a better understanding among Chinese partners of traditional donors' logic and project management practices.

Conference on Agriculture and Fisheries in November 2012, the Ugandan delegation gathered interesting project proposals within MAAIF. During the conference, a project proposal on cassava production garnered Chinese interest. After the signing of AgriTT's MOU at the end of the conference, MAAIF commenced designing a formal proposal based on that particular cassava project.

Meanwhile, a tender went out to recruit an intermediary to take charge of daily management of the entire AgriTT program, including the pilot in Uganda. Landel Mills, a London-based development consultancy company, was chosen. Their first step was to create the Program Management Office (PMO) in March, 2013 and on March 13th, the PMO director went on his first trip to Beijing. He visited the European Affairs Bureau, within MOA's Department of International Cooperation, and the FECC in order to clarify responsibilities, establish work plans, and facilitate an exploratory mission for Chinese experts to Uganda.²⁰ From late April to early May of 2013, the MAAIF took Chinese experts to visit different potential implementing partners in order to convince the Chinese delegation of the pilot project's feasibility. After this trip, the project proposal, budget, and work plans were revised several times until they were finally approved by the Steering Committee in late 2013. According to the 2013 AgriTT annual review the development and approval of these work plans, which required frequent multi-site consultations, in all took about one year to complete. The 2013 annual review also raised the risk level of the Ugandan pilot from "medium" to "high" in terms of project coordination and management obstacles.²¹

The Ugandan pilot was funded almost exclusively by DFID, with a promised contribution of £1.25 million, instead of a joint China-Britain funding pool. However, according to an interview with an employee from the PMO's Uganda office, the pilot project suffered budget cuts due to implementations delays.²² The Chinese financial contribution was relatively marginal, only covering smaller components like the second Africa-Britain-China Conference on Agriculture and Fisheries.²³ As for MAAIF, they were only responsible for paying the taxes imposed on imported Chinese machinery.²⁴

OBJECTIVES

THE PILOT WAS IMPLEMENTED ACROSS FOUR DISTRICTS in Western Uganda: Hoima, Masindi, Buliisa, and Kiryandongo. Based on information gathered from interviewees, these four Western districts were selected because other development partners in Eastern and Northern Uganda, which are the country's main cassava growing regions, had already undertaken similar projects.²⁵ MAAIF, therefore, wanted to expand cassava into Western Uganda. Of the four districts, cassava is only the main crop in Kiryandongo, with maize as the dominant crop in the other three districts. This may in part explain why, by the time of the fieldwork, the project was performing the best in Kiryandongo.

The pilot project focused on the entire cassava production value chain, specifically:

1. **Productivity:** propagation of clean cassava cutting and change in unit yield in the pilot area
2. **Processing:** organization of farmer groups to improve harvesting, post-harvesting, and primary processing of fresh cassava
3. **Transformation:** development of value-added cassava products

These three objectives were largely targeted at addressing difficulties facing the Ugandan cassava sector, including a lack of disease-free planting materials, the declining productivity of cassava due to disease, and farmers' limited awareness of cassava's value chain, as identified in MAAIF's second Agricultural Sector Development Strategy and Investment Plan (2010-2015).²⁶ The two NDPs in 2010 and 2015 also emphasized cassava's important role in ensuring food security in Uganda, and called for additional efforts to explore cassava's commercial and industrial potential in Uganda's economic development.

Regarding the first objective, the project aimed to promote one particular cassava variety, NASE 14. NASE 14 was developed by the Ugandan National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) and has two important advantages: high yield and disease resistance. It can resist two of the principal cassava diseases, mosaic and brown streak disease, with the latter disease having posed frequent problems for Ugandan farmers since the 1990s. Because these particular cassava diseases are not found in China, Chinese experts were unable to provide any technical assistance in this regard. In order to promote the NASE 14 variety, 10 farmer groups composed of at least 25 farmers each were to be established. Each group was meant to contribute about 5 hectares of land to create a mother garden, in which NASE 14 was to be planted. Later on, farmers located outside these groups were expected to purchase the NASE 14 grown in the mother gardens, propagating the use of NASE 14 on a larger scale.

An additional component of the first objective was to demonstrate to local farmers the possibility of using mechanized methods to cultivate cassava on a large scale. Chinese experts were expected to use imported Chinese machines to create two demonstration plots in each of the four districts. Preliminary trainings were to be organized for local farmers in each district to demonstrate mechanized farming's efficiency as well as some planting methods used in China.

The second objective was to teach local farmers more effective and efficient ways of drying and processing the fresh cassava root. Improved drying and processing methods allow for the root to be made into high-quality cassava chips and flour that fetch better prices in local markets, and can also later be transformed into other value-added cassava food products. As a staple food in Uganda, cassava has always been processed in a rudimentary way. It is typically peeled manually and dried in the sun, making effective processing dependent on inconsistent weather conditions. The project intended to import four dryers, one for each pilot district. Within the districts, different farmer groups were encouraged to write business proposals, with a dryer awarded to those who put forward the best business plans.

In terms of the third objective, the pilot aimed to develop value-added cassava products. Given Uganda's low level of industrialization, the project decided to focus only on food products, though cassava can be used in other industries. Some local enterprises were expected to join in this process to develop new food products – including some snack and biscuit lines – with technical support from Chinese experts.

Contrary to some media reports, it is unlikely that the goal of increased Ugandan cassava production was to facilitate the products' export to China. Mother gardens (nurseries to supply improved cassava) were designed to sell cassava stems primarily to local district farmers, and the cassava food products developed by this project were also designed for local markets. However, it is worth noting that this pilot project

Table 2: Outline of the Ugandan Pilot

Objectives	Content	Ugandan Partners	Chinese Support
1. Productivity	Propagation of clean cassava cuttings; increased yield	National Agricultural Research Institute (NARO); 4 local districts	Production machines (plow, planter etc.); Chinese technicians
2. Processing	Improvement of primary processing of fresh cassava root	African Innovation Institute (AFrII); 4 local districts	Processing machines (batch dryer); Chinese technicians
3. Transformation	Development of added-value cassava food products	Makerere University's Department of Food Technology and Nutrition	Snack and biscuit production lines; Chinese technicians

could have certain regional impacts; for instance, some Rwandese farmers, hearing of the diseases-resistant NASE 14, also purchased cassava stems from mother gardens.²⁷

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

AS MENTIONED PREVIOUSLY, AGRITT'S DAILY MANAGEMENT was contracted to Landel Mills which then established the PMO. The PMO's head office was located in Beijing, with additional offices in Kampala and London. The PMO's three primary responsibilities consisted of: 1) managing and disbursing funds, including signing contracts with implementing partners; 2) developing annual work plans and budgets with the implementing partners; and 3) coordinating the implementation of the project and taking charge of regular supervision and evaluation. Overall, the PMO played a crucial role in the implementation of the Ugandan pilot.

A steering committee oversaw the PMO and the implementing partners, and was responsible for high-level decision-making. The committee was comprised of representatives from the three partner countries, and their respective institutions, including MAAIF, NARO, MOA (usually represented by one person from the European Affairs Bureau and another person other from the FECC), and DFID-China.²⁸ The committee met once a year and was in charge of approving annual work plans, budgets, and all significant changes related to the project.

Although MOFCOM is the primary ministry that manages China's foreign aid budget, its participation in this steering committee proved to be sporadic. For instance, it was absent from the latest meeting held in Malawi in March 2016. According to DFID-China, given the large number of aid projects under MOFCOM's supervision, it was impossible for MOFCOM staff to be involved in every project; MOFCOM's level of participation also depended on MOFCOM officials' interests in this trilateral initiative.²⁹ The Chinese Embassy's Economic and Commercial Counselor's Office in Uganda also seemed to play a marginal role: it did not participate in the steering committee and its contact with the project was limited to courtesy visits by Chinese experts within their first days of arrival in Uganda.³⁰ In principle, DFID-Uganda was also a member of the committee. However, it was not very active and was also absent from the annual meeting in Malawi in 2016. This tepid engagement could be attributed to the fact that this triangular project did not fit into DFID-Uganda's working goals. Instead, the TDC was initiated by DFID-China to realize its own strategic goal of engaging China in development cooperation. Consequently, DFID-Uganda, already burdened with bilateral development projects, was not obliged to actively engage with this project and seemed to do so only at the request of their Beijing-based colleagues. However, in the early stages of this project, DFID-Uganda did play an important role in soliciting Uganda's interests and providing advice on financial management.³¹

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS AND THEIR ROLES

COORDINATED BY MAAIF, THE UGANDAN GOVERNMENT'S signatory of the AgriTT MOU, the pilot included four principal Ugandan implementing partners. Within MAAIF itself, responsibility for coordination was assigned to the Directorate of Crop Resources. The remaining three Ugandan partners were each engaged in realizing one of the three project objectives: increased productivity, processing, and development of value added food products. As the implementing partner in charge of improving productivity, NARO provided disease-free cassava stems, NASE 14.³² The African Innovation Institute (AFrII), a Ugandan NGO specialized in developing the cassava value chain, lead processing efforts. Pulling from its experience with another cassava-focused project, C:AVA (Cassava: Adding value for Africa), AFrII organized local farmers in groups and provided training on cassava processing and business management. Finally, Makerere University's Department of Food Science and Nutrition was involved in developing cassava food products with Chinese experts.³³ In addition to these four partners, local districts, particularly district production officers and district agricultural officers, were required to mobilize farmers to form groups in support of activities carried out by Chinese experts as well as other implementing partners, and to encourage local agricultural extension workers to join planned technical trainings.

On the Chinese side, as the party in charge of implementing China's foreign aid projects in agriculture, the FECC constituted the primary Chinese implementing partner. In principle, the FECC was responsible for identifying suitable Chinese

experts and technicians, providing them with cultural and linguistic training, and organizing their replacement when necessary. The terms of reference for recruiting Chinese experts were prepared by the PMO in consultation with both MAAIF and the FECC.³⁴ The FECC then selected candidates and the PMO signed consultancy contracts with Chinese technicians upon arrival.³⁵ By the time fieldwork was conducted in May 2016, six Chinese experts specialized mainly in cassava planting and processing had been sent to Uganda for missions lasting at least one month.

Technicians and experts were selected primarily from Guangxi University and the Chinese Academy of Tropical Agricultural Sciences in Hainan Province, as both institutions had been mandated to send experts to support the project. The choice of these two institutes was deliberate as Guangxi and Hainan are the two principal cassava production regions in China. Additionally, these two institutes belong to China's National Agricultural Research System (CNARS) of Cassava, which is institutionally composed of one research center and a number of trial stations. MOA created CNARS in 2011 with the goal of promoting agro-food industries and agricultural technologies on 50 different crops. It fit well with the value chain approach advocated by this pilot project, and provided a talent pool from which the FECC could draw pertinent experts.

The FECC also provided administrative support to facilitate the export of Chinese machines to help achieve the projects' objectives. TAGRIM, a Guangxi-based company, provided a plow, tiller, ridger, planter, and a harvester in addition to committing to send technicians to Uganda to deal with any technical difficulties that might arise in using the machinery. During the author's fieldwork in May 2016, dryers for the snacks production line had also been ordered.

RESULTS **PROJECT PROGRESS AS OF MAY 2016**

BY THE TIME OF THIS FIELDWORK IN MAY 2016, the project's performance on the third objective was considered by many interviewees to be the most promising. With the assistance of a Chinese expert on food products from Guangxi University, Makerere University's Department of Food Science succeeded in producing cassava biscuit and snack samples. The department made public announcements in local newspapers to recruit interested companies to join the project. Additionally, two companies, House of Rusa and Family Diet, joined the local team to learn relevant techniques to produce food products on a larger scale for local markets.³⁶ Ideally, these food samples should have been made from the cassava roots produced by the pilot project. However, due to the delay in implementing the first phase, the samples were developed using cassava roots produced by the aforementioned C:AVA project.³⁷

Despite delays, the implementation of the first phase had, by and large, met initial project expectations. Due to coordination difficulties outlined in the next section, the project did not start planting cassava in mother gardens until October 2014, with some

The financial management system was described as “rigid”, “demanding”, “slow in decision-making”, and requiring too much paperwork in order to have earmarked funds released.

mother gardens planted as late as December 2014, when Uganda had already entered the dry season unsuitable for cassava cultivation. Given the delays, some mobilized farmer groups had already planted other crops in lands that were originally designated to be mother gardens, while other farmers decided not to plant cassava taking into consideration the onset of the dry season. Ultimately, according to the interviewee from the PMO’s Uganda office, the project established 37 mother gardens on 337 acres of land.³⁸ Two Chinese technicians helped with the planting process by demonstrating techniques to local farmers, such as the ridge and furrow method. As expected, the project saw some performance variation between different pilot districts. Kiryandongo was considered to be the most successful district, because the farmer groups there planted cassava earlier than other districts, before the beginning of the dry season. In addition, Kiryandongo has also traditionally grown cassava, which may have impacted their level of preparation prior to project implementation. During the author’s visits to farmer groups in Kiryandongo, the increase in cassava yields from their mother gardens encouraged many of them to clear additional lands to plant the NASE 14 variety.

The project also made steady progress establishing the demonstration plots for mechanized farming. MAAIF insisted on including this component despite DFID-China’s initial hesitation. During the Steering Committee’s annual meeting in Uganda in March 2015 members decided to establish two demonstration plots in Kiryandongo. With imported production machines and one locally procured tractor, two Chinese technicians established two plots in Kiryandongo during their time in Uganda between October 2015 and January 2016. At the Steering Committee’s 2016 annual meeting, they agreed to establish similar demonstration plots in the remaining districts, given the success of the two plots in Kiryandongo.³⁹ By the time of the author’s fieldwork, another two-person team of Chinese technicians was busy establishing the remaining demonstration plots in the other three districts, expected to be finished by June 2016.

Local farmers first cleared the demonstration plots manually. When the Chinese technicians arrived, they used the tractors and the imported plow and tiller to re-clean the field, and then employed the ridger to form ridges. This usually took one to two days, depending on weather conditions. Once the ridges were formed, Chinese technicians would use the planter to plant cassava roots in parts of the field, and left the rest to be planted during the training sessions. There was one training session in each district, during which the Chinese technicians first gave a brief PowerPoint presentation about some cassava planting methods used in China, and went on to demonstrate how the machines worked. The training was aimed at showing the efficiency of mechanized farming within a limited time frame.

As of March 2016, the project had not made much progress toward the second objective, processing cassava. The main reason for the delay was due to the difficulty in identifying suitable dryers to import from China, which will be discussed in more detail below. However, AFRiI did manage to organize and host a business management training to raise local farmers’ awareness about cassava’s commercial value.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT: A DIFFICULT OBSTACLE TO OVERCOME

AFTER THE SIGNING OF THE AGRITT MOU IN NOVEMBER 2012 and the establishment of the PMO in March 2013, the three countries did not come to an agreement on the final development plan for the pilot until the end of 2013. With a plan finally in place, the pilot should have entered the implementation stage in 2014. However, the parties encountered significant difficulties in creating a financial management system capable of satisfying all parties' demands. In addition, a highly publicized discovery of donor funding embezzlement in Uganda from 2012 further hindered implementation of the pilot.⁴⁰ Although the case did not involve DFID funds, DFID proceeded to suspend £4 million in aid earmarked for the Ugandan prime minister's office after that office was implicated in the scandal. DFID established an independent audit to investigate the alleged fraud, and announced on November 16, 2012 that it had halted all direct aid payment to the Ugandan government while investigations continued.⁴¹ This decision came only four days after the announcement of AgriTT at the second Africa-Britain-China Conference on Agriculture and Fisheries, and therefore posed additional implementation challenges.

According to the contract between DFID and Landel Mills, the PMO was in charge of developing proper fund disbursement mechanisms. Initially, DFID-China asked each party about its opinions on financial management, and MAAIF suggested that the budget earmarked to the PMO Uganda office should be transferred directly to its own account instead.⁴² DFID-Uganda did not reject this proposition right away, however, due diligence exercises later showed significant reservations about the integrity of MAAIF's internal financial management system.⁴³

Against the background of DFID's decision to suspend all its direct aid to Uganda and the result of due diligence exercises, the PMO showed extra prudence when it came to funding disbursements and the creation of a specifically allocated account for those funds. Without this account, there was concern that "the money would be thrown into the sea and nobody could supervise it".⁴⁴ Discussions among MAAIF, the PMO, and DFID-China about opening a designated account proved time-consuming. The Ugandan side sent conflicting messages regarding the possibility of creating such an account. Later, it appeared that MAAIF needed to first obtain approval from the Ugandan Ministry of Finance to create said account; however the Ministry of Finance was not present in the second Africa-Britain-China Conference and was not a signatory to the AgriTT MOU.⁴⁵ In other words, the MOU signed by MAAIF did not allow it to open a designated account, which would require a separate agreement signed between DFID and the Ugandan Ministry of Finance. Ultimately, MAAIF was unable to open a designated account for the pilot project and the PMO considered alternate fund disbursement methods, to either AFRII or Makerere University, which, according to the due diligence exercises, had relatively solid financial management systems. After many consultations and an open bid, the PMO recruited a local accounting firm to serve as an intermediary to receive funds from the PMO and disburse them to Ugandan implementing partners.

While the PMO eventually established a financial management system that conformed to DFID rules, MAAIF experienced significant difficulties in adapting to this financial management system. In one AgriTT annual review, an interviewee states: “given the trilateral nature of the program, there has been a degree of lesson learning needed from the partners in terms of financial management and financial reporting which is compliant with the DFID standards and expectations.”⁴⁶ The financial management system was described as “rigid”, “demanding”, “slow in decision-making”, and requiring too much paperwork in order to have earmarked funds released.⁴⁷

These difficulties engendered a sense of frustration and powerlessness among some Ugandan partners. They believed that the required financial formalities did not facilitate the disbursement of funds, which should have been disbursed in line with work plans approved by the steering committee. Without timely disbursement, they argued that planned calendar activities could not be carried out on time, which in turn posed additional challenges to the implementation of an agricultural pilot hinging on seasonal activity. Tensions were triggered by the different priorities between the PMO and MAAIF. While the former was primarily concerned with establishing a financial management system that ensured the proper use of DFID’s funds in Uganda, the latter prioritized the necessity of disbursing funds according to the agreed calendars, so that project activities could be carried out on time.

DFID-China recognized that there were important disagreements between DFID and MAAIF regarding financial management. “We have different ideas. Given DFID is financing this project, we are obliged to follow our rules and PMO should be responsible in front of DFID,” explained one interviewee from DFID-China, who also admitted that the financial management system established by the PMO did have some disadvantages.⁴⁸ According to AgriTT annual reviews and the mid-term review, the financial management system helped avoid fiduciary risks to the detriment of efficiency. “PMO and Landel Mills continue to improve this system... which however is still quite different from what MAAIF is used to,” added this interviewee.⁴⁹

During 2014, the pilot achieved little progress in its first year of implementation. The disagreement on financial management was one of the key reasons, as the “PMO did not dare to disburse funds until it had sufficient confidence on the recipients’ capability in financial management.”⁵⁰ Frustration about the lack of project progress became so great that Ugandan staff started to question whether this project would actually continue. In addition, Chinese personnel changes included replacing a staff member initially involved in establishing this trilateral project. The new official was pessimistic about the project’s prospects.⁵¹ There were also other practical challenges. For instance, against the background of the anti-corruption campaign in China, it took longer for Chinese experts holding “service passports (公务护照)” to get official permission to go on a mission abroad. Moreover, the first two Chinese experts dispatched had never worked abroad and underwent a certain level of cultural shock in Uganda.⁵²

Because the author was unable to conduct interviews with staff from FECC, MOA, and MOFCOM, this report cannot adequately discuss the position of the Chinese side regarding the disagreement on financial management. Given that the pilot was primarily funded by DFID and the role of Chinese partners was primarily limited to technical assistance, it is likely that the Chinese side, especially in the daily management of this project, tried to keep a certain distance from financial management disagreements. However, the Chinese side was obliged to engage in the discussion during the Steering Committee's annual meetings. Although even on these occasions their opinions appeared to be mixed.⁵³

The two Chinese technicians acknowledged that the financial management system lacked efficiency, and that there had been delays in payment.⁵⁴ In keeping with the official Chinese position on trilateral cooperation, they suggested publicly that the Chinese side should take into consideration the opinions of their Ugandan partners. However, in private, they expressed concerns about whether the funding would have been properly used if it had been directly transferred to the Ugandan side, given widespread corruption in Uganda.

Based on their experiences in the field, the Chinese technicians formed their own perspectives on the political context in Uganda, and shared similar concerns with DFID, questioning the impact of the local political context on the sustainability of the project. They understood the rationale behind the establishment of a solid and strict financial management system in a country where corruption remains rampant. In this regard, although China did not make any direct financial contributions to this pilot project and therefore assumed a minimal role in financial management, one can reasonably conclude that TDC can contribute to a better understanding among Chinese partners of traditional donors' logic and project management practices. It remains to be seen whether or not this results in a gradual shift of the Chinese position towards traditional donors. If China's position does evolve in this direction, it will be confronted with the same dilemma faced by traditional donors, that is, the balance between project implementation efficiency and the need to avoid fiduciary risks.

DOES TRIANGULAR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION CONTRIBUTE TO A MORE HORIZONTAL NORTH-SOUTH RELATIONSHIP?

TDC IS BELIEVED TO BE BASED ON THE PRINCIPLES of partnership, equality, and mutual interests, in addition to conceiving of North-South relations as “a form of dynamic process composed of exchanges, complementarities and inter-dependences”.⁵⁵ One oft-claimed “advantage” of TDC is that it could contribute to a more horizontal relationship between traditional donors and recipient countries.⁵⁶ The incorporation of emerging donors in triangular arrangements plays an important role because their similarities with recipient countries are likely to reinforce the negotiation position of recipient countries and help remedy the unequal power relations between traditional donors and recipient nations. These similarities are

mostly predicated on their shared identity as developing countries, their common history of colonization, and their similar socio-economic development contexts, all of which are often underlined by emerging donors in their own bilateral aid programs and development partnership discourse.

However, interviews with the implementing partners in Uganda suggested that the perception of an unequal relationship between the traditional donor and the recipient country persisted, despite the trilateral nature of this pilot project. This perception was due primarily to the disagreements about financial management. For instance, MAAIF's difficulty in adapting to the financial management system, which it deemed inefficient, gave rise to a strong sense of frustration. The rules and procedures required by this system were referred to as "conditions" imposed by DFID, while DFID was also described as an "invisible partner" and a "hidden hand".⁵⁷ This invisibility can be partly attributed to the management structure of this project, which appeared to limit the possibility of direct communication between MAAIF and DFID during the implementation stage. DFID-China lacked the human resources necessary to directly manage this project, as it only had one staff member in charge of the entire cooperation between DFID and China in agriculture and natural resources. The daily management of this pilot project was therefore contracted to Landel Mills, which was required to manage it in compliance with DFID's regulations. With this management structure in place, from the Ugandan point of view, the PMO established by Landel Mills served as the spokesperson for DFID.⁵⁸ Each time MAAIF disagreed with the PMO, especially when it came to financial issues, it tended to attribute the problems to DFID. DFID is characterized by the Ugandan project partner as a Northern development agency detached from the local context of the South, a stereotypical paternalistic figure of traditional North-South development aid narratives. Occasionally, the conditions put in place by the financial management system were described as symbolizing DFID's mistrust vis-à-vis the Ugandan side.⁵⁹

From the Ugandan point of view this triangular project did not contribute to a more horizontal relationship with DFID. On the contrary, what we observe is a sense of frustration by MAAIF resulting primarily from its subordination to the financial management structure put in place by DFID. In theory, as stipulated in the Bogotá Statement, TDC is regarded as a process led by the Southern countries.⁶⁰ However, in practice with this particular triangular project, DFID served as a traditional donor, who financed the project, had the power to control the flow of financial resources, and held other partners accountable.⁶¹

The presence of China as an emerging donor did not seem to have transformed the Ugandan perception of an unequal relationship between DFID and MAAIF. Emerging donors, including China, often highlight their shared identity as developing countries and their common histories of colonization and imperialism with recipient countries. However, these identity "similarities" – which themselves are debatable – do not necessarily translate, in a trilateral arrangement, into a natural alliance. As mentioned previously, the opinions of Chinese participants were divided on financial management and were not automatically sympathetic to their Ugandan partners.⁶²

The presence of China as an emerging donor did not seem to have transformed the Ugandan perception of an unequal relationship between DFID and MAAIF.

The arrangement of this pilot project allowed China to largely distance itself from the tug-of-war related to financial management, which also helped distance China from Uganda's criticism of DFID. The project was almost exclusively funded by DFID, not by a China-UK joint funding pool, and China's role was essentially limited to providing technical assistance. This arrangement does not reflect the more balanced and integrated form of TDC, which, according to Li and Bonschab, is when the three parties work together on each stage of the project, including its planning, financing, implementation, and monitoring.⁶³

Given that this pilot project is one of the first trilateral projects that China has supported in collaboration with a traditional donor in Africa, it is perhaps understandable that China has adopted a prudent approach by limiting its engagement. Nevertheless, as shown by this project, this "weaker" modality of trilateral cooperation is less likely to contribute to effective mutual dialogue and learning among the parties. This pilot also made it difficult to observe the potential advantages that trilateral cooperation could bring, such as the improvement of relations between traditional donors and recipients.

In this project, China's role was akin to that of a technical assistance contractor. They did not engage substantially with either their British or Ugandan partners over differences or disagreements on development policies or project management approaches. This weaker modality could serve to reduce potential difficulties that China encounters in trilateral cooperation with traditional donors and make trilateral cooperation more attractive to China. More importantly, it also gives Beijing more maneuverability, permitting it to observe and learn from its DFID colleagues, without giving the impression of being in collusion with traditional donors and thus perpetuating a Northern domination of development norms, policies, and practices.

However, herein lies the contradiction. By limiting its role to technical assistance without a deep engagement in other project aspects, it is unlikely that China will bring any important changes to the vertical relations between Britain and Uganda (or between any other traditional donors and recipient countries) embodied in this project. Additionally, the fact that this project was launched by DFID-China instead of by DFID-Uganda, indicated that this initiative was targeted at engaging China in development cooperation. It is very unlikely that China and the UK, in their decision to establish this pilot project, would prioritize the need to make aid relations between Britain and Uganda more horizontal.

ARE CHINESE TECHNOLOGIES SUITABLE FOR THE UGANDAN CONTEXT?

AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF THIS PILOT PROJECT was the import of Chinese technologies, particularly Chinese machines deemed suitable for use within the Ugandan context. The rationale behind this project design holds that China shares more similarities in terms of agricultural development experience with Uganda than the UK, therefore, Beijing could contribute know-how and technologies that better respond to Ugandan agricultural development needs. This line of reasoning was also

evident in one of the short speeches given by a member of the pilot management team during a training session, which took place in Biiso on May 26, 2016:

“...if we look at Europe, many of the machines used by the farmers are very big. They are not suitable to the small-scale agriculture in Uganda. On the contrary, in China, many technologies are developed for small-scale agriculture and also for the environments that are similar to Uganda...”

However, the implementation process has shown that the reality is much more complex, and the supposed similarities between China and Uganda in agricultural development does not necessarily guarantee the adaptability of Chinese technical assistance to the Ugandan local context.

In late April 2015, a team composed of representatives from MAAIF, AFRII, and the four local districts went to Guangxi, China to identify appropriate cassava cultivation and processing machines to use for the pilot, particularly the cassava dryer, which Uganda previously lacked. The identification of cassava cultivation machines went relatively smoothly. The delegation was taken to visit TAGRIM, a Guangxi-based agricultural machine producer, where a plow, tiller, ridger, planter, and a harvester were chosen.

However, the team encountered greater difficulties in identifying a suitable processing machine. During their initial visits to several cassava processing facilities in Guangxi, the team’s first impression was that these facilities, which were able to process between 100 and 200 metric tons of manioc per day, were simply too big for Uganda. In TAGRIM, they were presented with a bean peeler, cutter, and dryer, which had the capacity to produce about 1.5 tons of cassava chips per day. Initially, this small-scale machine appeared to be suitable; however, after careful examination, the adaptability of this machine to the Ugandan context was called into question.⁶⁴

Firstly, cassava is primarily a staple food in Uganda, whereas it is grown mainly for industrial use, not for food consumption in China. Consequently, concern arose around whether a processing machine designed for industrial use could produce cassava chips that conformed to Ugandan food safety standards. Two factors led to this concern. First, the peeler could not peel off all the non-edible cassava skin. In order to resolve this problem, the Ugandan delegation decided not to purchase the peeler and to opt for manual peeling. Second, both the bean dryer and the blades of the cutter were made from iron, which were likely to rust. The delegation discussed with TAGRIM the possibility of using stainless steel in all the parts of these two machines in direct contact with cassava.

With these two problems solved, the team was confronted with another even bigger obstacle, related to the bean dryer’s energy source. Coal, as the principal energy source in China, remains accessible and cheap within the Chinese market, and therefore is used to power the bean dryer. Uganda, however, does not have any coal deposits. Two solutions were proposed, although without success. One was to use wood. However, considering its environmental impact, especially within the framework of a development aid project, this proposition was rejected. The other was

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to rely on briquettes. This was also proved to be infeasible, as the bean dryer needed to operate for 14-16 hours per day and for each hour, 100 kilos of briquettes would be needed. The cost and logistics for this method were thus deemed too great.

It was during their second trip to Guangxi in January 2016 that the team finally found a solution. The director of the Starch Research Institution at Guangxi University suggested another type of small-scale dryer – the batch dryer –, which was able to efficiently retain heat through insulation and, more importantly, be fueled by agricultural waste. Some parts of the batch dryers needed to be retrofitted with stainless steel components to ensure the quality of the final product, however. During the author’s fieldwork, this batch dryer was still being shipped to Uganda, and it remained to be seen whether or not it could be adapted to the Ugandan context. However, in theory, the biggest obstacle of finding an energy source was overcome. Reflecting on this experience, one interviewee said,

“I have always thought that no matter which type of equipment, or what your needs are, you could always find them in China, but this is not always the case, especially if it is about small scale [equipment] for processing cassava. It is not that easy. And the dynamics are also very different; especially when it comes to energy.”⁶⁵

AFrII spent almost nine months looking for suitable alternative energy sources to power the bean dryer, posing significant delays for the second phase of the project.

This episode demonstrates that the supposed similarities in terms of agricultural development between China and Uganda need to be put into perspective. While cassava is an important root crop in the agriculture sector primarily composed of small-scale farmers in both Uganda and China, the differences in cassava cultivation and processing are still significant. Taking into account these key differences proved to be crucial in order to ensure the applicability of the proposed Chinese technologies and machines to the Ugandan context. Emerging donors like China, compared to Northern donors, enjoy more recent development experiences and have encountered similar development challenges faced by recipient countries of the South. However, this does not necessarily make technology transfer any easier. What is needed is a deep understanding of recipient countries’ local contexts in order to identify which type of technical assistance emerging donors can offer that will be best suited to the needs of recipient countries.

CONCLUSION

AGAINST THE BROADER CONTEXT OF DONOR diversification, TDC has received renewed interest from the donor community to bridge traditional North-South cooperation with growing South-South cooperation; however, little fieldwork-based research has been carried out to empirically investigate TDC, not to mention Chinese engagement in this modality of development cooperation. This paper has attempted to

fill this research gap, focusing on China's trilateral development project with the UK in Uganda's agricultural sector.

In this TDC project, transaction and coordination costs proved to be high. Enormous time and effort is required so that various partners with different operational rationales and methods, in three different countries, are able to reach a consensus on a common work plan, administrative rules, and financial procedures. The beginning of this project was characterized by a time-consuming, back-and-forth negotiation process, which engendered significant implementation delays; and the under-performance of the project during the first year even led DFID-China to consider suspending it. There is a need to avoid conceptualizing the implementation of TDC projects as a linear process, but to allow enough space and time for test and trials early on in the project design.

Due to implementation delays, the Steering Committee decided during their March 2016 annual meeting to extend the project to the end of 2016. By the time of fieldwork in May 2016, a number of interviewees in Uganda suggested that there had been no serious discussion about any follow-up project, and some advised that if DFID decided to withdraw its support China should consider pursuing bilateral cooperation with Uganda. Although, the interview with DFID-China suggested that the experimental TDC pilot would have finished by the end of this project, and that DFID would need time to digest and reflect on the engagement before starting new initiatives. Looking back now, these predictions by interviewees have come true and there has indeed been no follow-up project after the AgriTT finally concluded in March 2017.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Given the above findings and field observations in Uganda, this paper proposes the following four policy recommendations for future trilateral development projects:

1. **TDC planning should build in ample time during its implementation to attend to the higher transaction and coordination costs associated with involving a larger number of interested parties.** As demonstrated by this pilot project, the beginning of a trilateral development project is underlined by coordination problems resulting from different policies, procedures, and working methods of various institutions involved. More time should be allowed for them to seek and build consensus on processes and project implementation systems. It is highly likely the early stage of TDC projects will be faced with delays and setbacks, therefore, participant countries need to take into due consideration the possibility of delays in the project design so that they can be well prepared both psychologically and in terms of resources. Instead of being seen as a linear process, a trilateral development project, particularly a pilot one, should be conceptualized as a dynamic interaction

among different partners, which necessarily entail tests and trials as well as frequent back-and-forth project revisions and adjustments.

2. **Extensive research and analysis is required to understand the recipient countries' development needs in order for the technical assistance provided to be appropriate, properly targeted, and contextualized.** This field research shows that, while it is likely that emerging donors share similarities with recipient countries in terms of development challenges and experiences, and therefore have more know-how and expertise to be harnessed, the key to ensure a successful transfer of agricultural technologies lies more in understanding their development differences.
3. **Recipient countries need to play a dominant role from the inception of trilateral projects, so that donors' interests, policies, and priorities will not take precedence over those of recipient countries.** Current trilateral projects are far too often implemented as the result of initiatives from the donor side, for the sake of enhancing collaboration between traditional donors and emerging Southern donors. There is a risk that TDCs will simply become arrangements financed by traditional donors, outsourced to emerging donors as budget friendly technical contractors, and implemented in recipient countries, which remain passive agents in TDC as in traditional North-South development cooperation.
4. **In terms of financial arrangements, traditional donors, interested in pursuing deeper trilateral cooperation with China, should establish a joint pooled fund with contributions from all three sides.** While it is highly likely that traditional donors remain the key contributors, a joint pooled fund would help to guarantee a stable commitment by both China and recipient countries to the initiative. Through this mechanism, both traditional donors and China could have increased opportunities to engage in a more critical reflection about their own development project management, and recipient countries could be in a better position to assert their own development priorities and agendas. ★

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55. Direction de la Francophonie économique. 'La Coopération Sud-Sud et Tripartite Dans L'espace Francophone: ÉTATS DES LIEUX'. Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, June, 2014: 28, http://www.francophonie.org/IMG/pdf/cooperation_sud-sud_vdef.pdf.
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57. Interview with an officer in MAAIF, Kampala, May 10, 2016.
58. Interviewee at DFID-China also mentioned other practical challenges. For instance, while in the beginning they tried to have regular phone meetings with the Ugandan side, the call quality was so terrible that for a non-native English speaker, it was difficult to understand the Ugandan interlocutors.
59. *Ibid.*
60. OECD, "Bogota Statement: Towards Effective and Inclusive Development Partnerships," March 25, 2010. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/45497536.pdf>
61. See e.g. Cheryl McEwan and Emma Mawdsley, "Trilateral Development Cooperation: Power and Politics in Emerging Aid Relationships," *Development and Change* 43, no. 6 (2012): 1185–1209. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2012.01805.x>.
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