



Global China as a security guarantor for African nations

Dr. Dinh Ba Hung Anh¹, Dr. Nguyen Hoang Tien²

^{1,2} Van Hien University, Vietnam

Abstract

Relations between China and Africa have been around for more than half a century, since the Indonesia Bandung Non-Aligned Movement Congress in 1955 in Indonesia. These relations are limited only to trade and economic partnership. For decades, Africa has been seen as a source of raw materials for China. Today China's presence in Africa in the field of economy as well as defense is growing. Signs show a shift in Beijing's foreign policy toward the continent, from economic cooperation as a strategic investor to political and diplomatic partnership as a security guarantor.

Keywords: China, Africa, security guarantor, strategic investor

1. Introduction

Africa is continually suffering from poverty, development lag and serious multiple diseases, especially HIV/AIDS epidemic. However, according to many African scholars, those are not the biggest problems of the continent. The problem that this continent is always facing in reality is political issues. The continuing instability of ethnic conflicts and violence is causing Africa's continuing poverty and disease, and then as a corollary of poverty and illness, the political instability and social insecurity is unceasingly rising.

Looking at contemporary African history, it can be seen that since 1957, Ghana was the first African country to stand for independence from the European colonial government and so far the number of independent countries in Africa was absolute. Most African countries were called democracies during the independence period, but by the 1990s, about 60% of the sovereign states in Africa had experienced military rule. At the same time, most African states were led either by the military or by the single political system. However, after almost half a century of independence, African nations have failed to realize the African dream. They are at the forefront of developmental delays. With external causes, the backward and underdeveloped economy, the overarching poverty and disease within Africa have given rise to the opposition of civil society that has made African politics increasingly instable, full of conflicts and violent developments and finally led to the emergence of a democratization wave in the 1990s, the second such revolution in Africa since the end of the World War II. The result of this climax has once again transformed African political patterns and led to a new political identity.

In Africa's development and cooperation relationships, we cannot fail to mention China. China is largest developing country in the world and Africa is the continent of many developing countries. China and Africa share many both common and supplemental things and as a consequence, ongoing cooperation between China and Africa contribute to solve the problem of poverty in many countries in Africa. China's investment in Africa has guaranteed jobs and social security for millions of local workers (Ha Thang, 2018) ^[4]. China is playing an important role in the rapid development

of African countries. Undoubtedly, this not only contributes to the development of African countries but also to the whole world. The Africa-China Cooperation Forum has directly helped many countries reduce poverty, improve education standard and create better environment for trade development, investment and multifaceted cooperation (Carlos Aguirre, 2018). As Africa's largest trading partner, China is playing an increasingly important role in this natural resource rich continent. In addition to cooperation on trade and investment, China has also focused on security commitments, from setting up its first foreign military base in Djibouti to reconciling conflict in South Sudan. In addition, Beijing also participates in peacekeeping and humanitarian relief operations in Africa (Thanh Dat, 2018) ^[18]. Recognizing the importance of the issue, the author chose to investigate the topic: "China as a guarantor of security in African countries", hoping to give the readers a better overview of the problem related to Sino-African relations and developmental cooperation and insight into current political and security situation and based on that to signal some adequate solutions to sustain the security of African nations.

2. General overview of security issues in Africa

2.1. Geopolitical position of Africa

Africa continent consists of 54 states. The only transcontinental state in this region is Egypt, with a small part of the territory situated in Asia, on the other side of the Suez Canal, but politically it is a member of the Union of Africa. Among African countries, one of the largest countries is Algeria, which occupies about 7% of the territory of the whole continent and the smallest is the Seychelles. Africa is largely surrounded by large oceans with a coastline of 26,000 km. In the north, Africa is bordered to the Mediterranean, in the West - to the Atlantic, in the East - to the Indian Ocean, and in the Northeast - to the Middle East and Arabian Peninsula. Africa is the third largest continent in the world, after Asia and the Americas, with an area of over 30 million km². Africa has many islands and archipelagos in the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean. The largest island is Madagascar, 400 km east-south of the mainland.

African population at present is comparable to the population of China. In ancient times people only knew North Africa. Through geographical exploration, other parts of Africa deep inside the continent are discovered. According to the development of history, it is possible to divide Africa into two North Africa and South Africa as those two regions are of great differences in terms of social, economic and political development. Africa is known for its luxury beaches and world-class resorts, including over hundred islands stretching along east coast of the continent. Colorful Morocco is in the first place among the most popular tourist destinations in this part of the world, followed by South Africa, Egypt and Tunisia. Because of relatively symmetrical location in northern and southern hemispheres, Africa's climate can be divided into six major areas. First is the central area near the Equator and Madagascar with a tropical climate characterized by hot, humid, heavy rainfall and high temperatures throughout the year. There are two tropical belts in the north and south, with savanna climate, high temperature and precipitation mainly in summer. These two areas are characterized by desert climate of Northern Sahara Desert and the Kalahari Desert in the south. The end of these two desert regions is the semi-desert prairie climate with precipitation concentrated in winter. Finally, the northern and southern poles of the continent are narrow, moderately subterranean climate with moderate weather. Due to the fragmentation of natural conditions and climatic zones by geographic position, this has partly affected the economic divisions in Africa, resulting in many favorable countries to develop agriculture and fisheries, but at the same time, many countries cannot guarantee their essential needs in food. Africa is rich in natural resources. There are many kinds of precious trees, oil trees, rubber, cotton, cocoa, coffee, sugarcane. There are also mines of mangan, copper, platinum, phosphorus, kerosene, gold, platinum, uranium, diamonds, etc. Africa also provides many precious animals to the zoological gardens of the world. Africa has a longstanding culture like Pyramids in Egypt that is one of the cradles of human civilization.

2.2. Economic and financial security

Many countries in the world, especially countries in the Eurozone, are suffering due to the impact of the global economic crisis. Africa has emerged as a bright spot with positive growth thanks to macroeconomic and political stability in many countries in the region. As the global economic boom is followed by the cycle of economic and financial crisis, Africa has maintained its steady growth since the beginning of the 21st century. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the African economy has maintained an average growth rate of 5%, those countries with higher growth rate than average are Nicaragua (7%) and Angola (8%) (Thu Thuy, 2012) ^[15]. In order to maintain this impressive growth rate, many African countries have reformed their macroeconomic policies, drawn from the lessons of financial management in the major economies of the world. The black continent has succeeded in reducing its public debt by 40% in 2008 from 100% in 2000 by increasing its foreign reserves (Thu Thuy, 2012) ^[15]. This is one of the key factors helping the regional economy to limit negative impacts from the global economic crisis. As many investors are losing confidence in the European Union due to the impact of public debt and the

weak performance of banking system, the sub-Saharan Africa is almost separated from the world financial system and its crisis symptom. The capital of banks in the continent is mainly mobilized internally, from African countries only. As a result, African countries are less affected by the financial crisis and global economic recession. In the past, consumption in this continent has also increased sharply, leading to the emergence of many new economic centers as strengths to attract investment and create leverage for economic development. In addition, maintaining trade with traditional trading partners such as the Eurozone and the United States accounts for 70% of the region's total exports. This is an advantage for African countries to maintain their steady growth. Keeping political stability is the first favorable condition for countries in Africa to focus on economic development and attract investors. They have learned a practical lesson through the "Arab Spring" in the Middle East and North Africa. Issues of peace and security in Africa have always been taken into account and brought into the debates of regional leaders.

However, volatility in the global oil market could hinder exports and investment flows of the continent in the future. Poverty and unemployment, especially among young people are at an alarming rate. This is also a big challenge to the sustainable growth of the Black Continent. According to ILO, more than 70% of the working age population is unemployed, of which 20% are young. Economic experts say that in order to continue to grow in the future, African countries need to focus more on creating jobs for young people, investing in skills development and education to improve productivity and promote the economic sectors with high employment potential. African countries also need to have policies to ensure food security, improve rural infrastructure, education and healthcare services.

2.3. Energy and natural resources security

Africa has a wealth of natural resources, with many of the world's most important raw materials. Of the world's 50 major minerals, Africa has the world's top reserves of 17 types: 90% diamonds (concentrated in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa, Namibia, Angola), 67% gold, more than 70% manganese and phosphate, 37% uranium, 87% lithium, 54% chromium, 21% copper and bauxite. Africa also has large reserves of oil and gas in Algeria, Nigeria, Angola, Libya, Galápagos, and Republic of Congo. With abundant rivers and lakes, Africa has the potential for abundant hydropower, accounting for 35.4% of the world's potential. However, resources are unevenly distributed. Some of regions are rich in strategic mineral resources such as diamonds, gold, and uranium in southern Africa, oil in North Africa and West Africa. In contrast, countries in Central and East Africa are very poor in income, poor in resources, even without access to the sea, so there are many difficulties in trading.

Africa has an abundant source of energy compared to other continents, but this is unevenly distributed. Africa owns 10% of the world's oil reserves, mainly in North and West Africa (Angola and Nigeria) and gas fields are also abundant in North Africa (65% concentrated in Algeria) and West Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Egypt. One-third of the oil and gas discoveries from 2011 to 2016 are done in sub-Saharan Africa. Africa is also highly valued for uranium (15% of the world's reserves). Water resources are abundant but not fully exploited. Many hydropower dams are being

built in Central and East Africa. The potential of renewable energy (sun and wind) is highly appreciated but is underdeveloped or developing too slowly. There is currently one African renewable energy project located in Morocco, but under construction (S. Phuong, 2017) ^[23].

Africa is also a land filled with sunshine, and this will facilitate the construction and development of the solar industry. Included in Access Power's investment projects is the 10MW solar power plant project in Soroti, Uganda. After the plant was completed, it was considered to be the largest power plant in East Africa. This is a joint project of Access Power and the largest privately-held energy company in the Sahara region, EREN Re. This solar power plant can provide clean power to more than 40,000 households and businesses in Uganda (Minh Thuy, 2016) ^[10]. With the richness in natural resources, African countries are fully capable of developing their economies if they know how to combine and properly use their advantages. Africa with richness in natural and mineral resources, while the economy is still underdeveloped, is perfect for China to realize its ambitions, expand the political and diplomatic influence easily.

2.4. Military and national defense security

Beijing wants to consolidate its military cooperation with African nations to protect China's substantial economic interests as well as to secure the lives of more than a million Chinese working in the Black Continent. In an effort to bolster its influence in Africa, China established its first foreign-based military base, located in Djibouti. According to Chinese officials, the purpose of the base is to provide logistics for anti-piracy operations in Somali waters. At the same time, China has increased its participation in peacekeeping missions in the hot spots of civil war such as South Sudan, Mali, Congo and Liberia, or Darfur in western Sudan. More than 2,000 Chinese peacekeepers are present in Africa. The warships have been also regularly escorting more than 6,000 Chinese and international commercial vessels in the Gulf of Aden and off the Somalia coast (Anh Minh, 2018) ^[11].

According to the United States Global Fire Power (GFP) website, in 2018, Algeria ranks second in Africa (after Egypt), and 23rd globally in terms of military potential. The rankings are based on many criteria such as armament, number of regular army (naval, continental, air force), fuel available for military operations, number of warfare machines, budget for defense, flexibility in wartime logistics. Algeria has 793,350 troops, of which 520,000 are full-time and 272,350 are in reserve. The country's annual defense budget amounts to \$ 10.57 billion (over 5% of gross domestic product). The Algerian Air Force is equipped with 528 aircraft, including 280 helicopters, 204 fighters, 326 transport aircraft and 70 trainers. In addition, the Algerian army owns 85 warships and 2,405 tanks. The Algerian army is large in number and strong in power, and is constantly in the process of modernizing and renovating to meet the requirements of protecting the sovereignty of the country. The Algerian military is currently ranked among the most powerful defense forces in the world, considering aspects such as modern equipment, professionalism, operating budgets, compliance with the standards of the world. According to the GFP report, African military forces are approaching the world military standards. Immediately after Egypt and Algeria, South Africa ranks 33rd in the rankings,

followed by Nigeria (43), Angola (48), Ethiopia (51), Morocco (55), Sudan (70), Libya (74), and Congo (75) closing the list of 10 countries with strongest defense capability in Africa (Vietnam News Agency, 2018) ^[12].

2.5. Social and political security

In Africa, infectious disease threats are emerging and reappearing due to the impact of many factors such as poor health and rapid population growth (the population of the continent is expected to grow to 2.5 billion people in 2050), rapid urbanization, strong migration, climate change, desertification and destruction of forests, enhanced interaction between animals and humans. Africa is also facing another threat of antibiotic resistance. It is estimated that if this situation continues, Africa will have an estimated 4.1 million people killed each year, and the overall African economy will lose about \$ 42 trillion by 2050. In addition, the continent is facing enormous challenges from non-transmittable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, respiratory and diabetes (Vietnam News Agency, 2018) ^[12]. The board of CDC (Africa Center for Disease Control and Prevention) urges countries to work closely within the AU to further strengthen its efforts to prevent epidemics, to train human resources, to boost logistics preparation as well as to strengthen the healthcare system.

In addition, food security situation in Black Continent is increasingly exacerbated by many shocks, including droughts, cross-border animal trafficking, pests and diseases, persistent conflicts and civil unrest in some countries (Vietnam News Agency, 2017) ^[12]. Not only that, hunger and malnutrition continue to rage here. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), of the 59 million children suffering from malnutrition in Africa, 14 million are in serious condition and can die at any time. However, in contrast, about 10 million children here are overweight, doubling from 2000 (Phi Hung, 2018) ^[12]. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the number of people suffering from hunger and malnutrition in Black Continent has grown from 200 million to 224 million between 2015 and 2016, and will continue to grow as the population grows, while climate change and the frequency of military conflicts show no signs of improvement (Phi Hung, 2018) ^[12].

3. China's Key Interest in Africa as a Strategic Investor

3.1. Chinese investments in Africa

Over the past 20 years, China has become Africa's largest trading partner after European Union, with trade volume larger than that between the US and Africa. China has become the largest contributor to foreign direct investment in Africa in 2016. Between 2005 and 2016, China invested in 293 foreign direct investment projects in Africa, with a total capital of about \$ 66.4 billion and creating 130,750 jobs (Ho Phuong, 2018) ^[3].

China is Africa's largest potential investor in mining and oil. China is also the largest M&A (merger and acquisition) investor in Africa in 2013, accounting for 37% of all transactions in value terms. About 80% of China's M&A deals in Africa are in the field of mining or oil. China's investment in Africa in 2011 was totaled at \$ 629 billion, and has grown rapidly since 2014. In 2000, China's trade with Africa was totaled only at \$ 10 billion. By 2014, this figure has increased to \$ 220 billion. Currently, over the past decade, China's trade with Africa has grown to about \$

300 billion and is approaching \$ 400 billion by 2020 to be step by step comparable with trade volume between China and European Union (Tran Nguyen, 2016) ^[16].

By 2017, China has invested by providing loans to African countries with a total amount in excess of \$ 100 billion. Over the past 10 years, China has built more than 100 industrial parks (40% in operation); constructed 5,756 km of railways and 4,335 km of highways, 9 ports, 14 airports, 34 power plants, 10 large hydropower plants and nearly 1,000 small hydropower plants. In particular, rail projects are considered to have changed the profile of the region and promote political integration in the Black Continent (Nguyen Nham, 2018). It can be seen that China's investment in Africa is comprehensive, in every field and truly meets the basic needs of regional countries. So, African officials consider this cooperative relationship as "win-win". China's increasingly widespread presence in Africa is a direct result of a proactive, pragmatic diplomacy that is always tuned to the specific situation that Beijing is pursuing, in which the national interests of China is always guaranteed (Hò Phuong, 2018).

3.2. Natural resources and economic interest

Africa's richness in natural and mineral resources can help quell the China's thirst of energy and raw material. In addition, with underdeveloped economies and large populations, Africa is the ideal market for goods imported from China (Ho Phuong, 2018) ^[3]. Chinese businesses are increasingly stepping up their acquisition of raw materials, agricultural land and expanding their influence in Africa. However, it also raises concerns about corruption, waste and environmental degradation in the continent.

African leaders are excited about low-cost foreign investment to build roads, railways and reservoirs. Foreign funds help boost development and create more jobs for Africans. The natural resources in Africa are exploited by Chinese companies and are bought at the price lower than market price due to friendly agreements between Chinese companies and local leaders. Resources explored by industrial machines do not add value to African people, while loan agreements can create huge debts that African countries cannot afford to pay in the future. China takes oil from countries like Nigeria, Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Uganda, South Sudan and Sudan; cobalt, cadmium, ferrochrome, platinum, diamond, and gold for industrial purposes from countries like Congo, Liberia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Africa's largest exporters to China are South Africa, Angola, Congo, Mauritania, Sudan, South Sudan and Zambia. As the world's largest importer of iron ore, China is also diversifying its traditional suppliers (Australia and South Africa) by trading with 15 African countries such as Guinea-Bissau, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia... (Tran Nguyen, 2016) ^[16]

At times, China has to rely on Africa for natural resources, including oil, copper, zinc and iron ore, to ensure its stable production at home. Day by day, Chinese economy receives oil from Angola and Nigeria, gold from Ghana, chrome from South Africa, copper from Zambia and bauxite and other rare minerals from Guinea. In recent years, Chinese companies, due to being complained by many countries about environmental harm, local labor force maltreatment, have adjusted the strategy, they strike alliance and acquire local mining companies, penetrated African mining industry

acquiring a nearly 20% stake in Ivanhoe Mines (Canada), which owns three major copper, zinc and platinum mining projects in southern Africa (Anh Minh, 2018) ^[11].

3.3. Strategic and geopolitical interest

Africa is the vehicle for China to expand its political and diplomatic influence, consolidate its strength through using soft power. China's influence has increased in direct proportion to its investments in Africa, serving Beijing's political interests. The generously offered financial assistance for Africa will enable China to effectively implement its alliance with more than 50 African nations to gain international diplomatic advantage (Hò Phuong, 2018). China is trying to expand its OBOR (One Belt One Road) initiative to Africa to bolster its position on global arena. In fact, China closely aligned the OBOR initiative with the African agenda of 2063, which sees it as a roadmap for future comprehensive Chinese-African cooperation. A manifestation of the soft power in cooperation with Africa is China's strong internationalization of the Yuan (Chinese currency) as main currency used in exchange with African countries. On the one hand, China's move to allow African countries to escape from the omnipresence of the US Dollar aims to overtake the global dominance of the dollar, at least in this continent.

From a security perspective, China has chosen Djibouti as its first overseas location to protect its interests in the region, including ensuring the security of the important sea routes weight. Globalization trends and processes are being reversed when the US, under the leadership of President Donald Trump, is seeking to separate itself from the rest of the world, trying to build a wall of tariffs for mainstream service with slogan "America first". This is good opportunity for China as the world's second largest economy to show its strong leadership through soft power and more open foreign policy. In that context, Africa is one of the key links in Beijing's ambitious roadmap to reaffirm its international standing.

4. Boosting Influence through Security Guaranteeing for African Nations

4.1. Chinese influence in Africa over last decade

China has become Africa's largest trading partner. Over the past decade, China's economic growth has shaped industries that demand high energy. Therefore, ensuring long-term energy supply to maintain the key industries is essential. China has invested in Africa through promoting the oil exploration and exploitation industry. Chinese companies are also diversifying their operations in Africa through investing in diverse industries such as infrastructure, manufacturing, telecommunications and agriculture (Tran Nguyen, 2016) ^[16].

China has become the world's largest producer and consumer of energy. Although based on coal to meet its energy needs, China remains the world's second-largest oil consumer and has become the world's largest oil importer in recent years. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), China will become the world's largest oil consumer by 2030. China's second largest oil importer is Africa, after the Middle East, with 1.4 million barrels a day. Although China's energy growth is down to 6.7% in 2016 and is expected to continue to decline further, it still remains a high growth energy consumption country (Tran Nguyen, 2016) ^[16].

China has adopted a multidimensional approach in economic relations with Africa, according to Deborah Brautigam of the China-Africa Research Initiative (SAIS-CARI – School of Advanced International Studies – China-Africa Research Initiative). China is a major foreign direct investor in Africa providing development loans to natural resource rich countries, investing in agriculture, developing trade and business cooperation. Especially, in some countries like Ethiopia, Nigeria and Zambia, China's financial channels for loans and credits are provided by People's Bank of China, China Development Bank, Export-Import Bank of China and China-Africa Development Fund. According to SAIS-CARI, between 2000 and 2014, Africa borrowed from China more than \$ 86 billion, with Angola, Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan being countries receiving the most support (Tran Nguyen, 2016) ^[16].

Opinion polls show that most of African nations recognize China as a major player and contributor to the development of the continent. On average, 63 percent of Africans see economic and political influence from China as positive. China's investment in Africa has helped boost general economic growth. However, China's economic slowdown has slowed down the growth in sub-Saharan countries, with 5% GDP in 2011 falling to 1.4% in 2016, according to the IMF statistics (Tran Nguyen, 2016) ^[16].

Africa is a big emerging market with rapidly growing population and lots of business opportunities for investing countries like China. Over the past decade, six of the 10 fastest-growing countries in the world are located in Africa. South Africa is the largest trading partner and also the second largest recipient of investment from China, surpassing Nigeria, based on the number of deals China has made with each African country.

4.2. Boosting influence through security guaranteeing

China is currently one of the leading arms suppliers to African countries. In July 2018, China hosted the first China-Africa Defense and Security Forum Attended by senior military delegates from 50 African countries and the first overseas Chinese military base opened in 2017 was also set in one of African countries, Djibouti (Thu Hoai, 2018) ^[20]. Chinese companies in Djibouti are building Africa's first national strategic ports and railways. In 2017, Beijing officially opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti, and the base was also a logistics and intelligence base. Experts predict that China will have more bases in the future, and Namibia is rumored to be home to the military base of the PLA (People's Liberation Army). Meanwhile in Tanzania where China's state-owned Merchants Holdings International hopes to invest in the Bagamoyo super port, Beijing has built a consortium to train the Tanzanian military since early 2018. At the mentioned first China-Africa Defense and Security Forum, Beijing announced it would fully support African countries on issues such as anti-piracy, counterterrorism (Trung Truc, 2018) ^[19].

4.3. Boosting influence through other means and measures

China is expanding its scope and influence through currency swaps, especially with many African countries. With ambition to push the Chinese Yuan into the international reserve currency, Beijing's main goal seems to be more strategic than trade-related. China's growing lending to Africa is raising concerns about a debt crisis similar to what

happened at the beginning of this century. With the advantage of being a lucrative source of financing, China has forced countries to accept their financial rules and often do not follow traditional international standards. These projects are often implemented in the form of natural resource substitution, in many cases often accompanied by the obligation to use Chinese contractors, workers, technology and materials without international bidding. The ambiguity of Chinese loan agreements is often accompanied by corruption and poor governance in most African countries. According to AidData research, many Chinese-funded projects are being conducted in the home of African leaders, more than three times as many as other places according to the Washington Post, or the projects are to build the headquarters for the President, the National Assembly, Ministries and key industries (Van Tan, 2018) ^[21].

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

As in other continents in the world, over the years, Africa has undergone many positive changes in the political, economic and social fields. The presence of the 54 African nations at the 7th China-Africa Cooperation Forum is also evidence of a stronger relationship between China and Africa. Not only being Africa's largest economic and commercial partner, China is increasingly becoming strategic partner in politics, diplomacy and security for many countries in the region. In other words, China is stepping up its superpower's role in the race to Africa. African governments cooperate with China to develop the economy through aid, investment, infrastructure development and trade. China's positive impacts on Africa are such as job creation, infrastructure development and economic growth. China has expanded its cooperation with Africa as part of its effort to show relative power and strength to other developing countries.

5.2. Solutions to retain sustainable security in Africa

For Africa, it is now urgent to tackle ethnic, religious, and power struggles (infighting) for peace, stability and economic development by the efforts of the people themselves not by external help and intervention. The new situation requires African countries to adjust their policies, implement democratic reforms, switch to multi-party regime, implement market economy policies, diversify and multilateralize international relations. The shift to a multi-party regime, the positive market economy is to make the political life more democratic, avoid the dictatorship, the military rule that has happened in many African countries, and set conditions to promote the creative capacity of people, contributing to promoting economic development. South African countries need to accelerate the diversification of the economy to avoid over-reliance on external and key economic sectors. In particular, the Southern African Development Community needs to accelerate the development of infrastructure, especially industrial zones, transport links and industrialization as it is considered to be a very important factor for future internal economic development.

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