

China-Ethiopia ties example for all of Africa

China-Ethiopia ties represent the best type of relationship that two nations can have and are a good example for Africa and the rest of the world of how two sides can work on a win-win basis, the Ethiopian ambassador to China says.

"China's engagement in Africa has been positive. Africa is changing rapidly. China contributes to the change taking place in the south in general, and in Africa particularly," says Berhane Gebre-Christos.



Berhane Gebre-Christos, Ethiopian ambassador to China, says China's engagement in Africa has been positive. Provided to China Daily

He says China has played an important role in Africa's development of infrastructure, manufacturing and agriculture as well as its poverty-reduction and modernization efforts.

"It's beneficial for everybody, for China's growth and Africa's rise. It's not taking from Africa one way Ethiopian people welcome Chinese companies a lot, and we need to expand the cooperation," he says.

The relationship between China and Ethiopia was defined as a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership in May 2017 during the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation when Ethiopian prime minister Hailemariam Dessalegn visited China.

One example of the cooperation between the two countries is the pushing forward of industrial zones that have fueled Ethiopia's economy. Three such zones have been established and 15 more are being built by the Ethiopian government and Chinese companies.

"We believe this is not enough. We need to do more. We are working very closely with China," Gebre-Christos says.

As a part of Ethiopia's sustainable development and poverty relief program, the Eastern Industrial Zone near the capital of Addis Ababa has attracted more than 20 Chinese companies since it was launched in 2007, including Huajian International Shoe City and Great Wall Packing Material.

Huajian, which manufactures women's shoes that are sold mainly in Europe and the United States, has hired more than 1,500 Ethiopian workers and more than 300 Chinese.

There are also companies from Turkey, India, Brazil and other parts of the world in the industrial zones, but the number of Chinese companies has been growing significantly since the Johannesburg Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2015, Gebre-Christos says.

"Chinese companies have a good understanding of our situation. They see things properly and get engaged strongly.

"In terms of fundamental outlook, China and Ethiopia share the same views, especially when it comes to development. Sharing experiences between the two countries becomes easier," he says.

Another industrial zone, which is run by China Civil Engineering Construction Corp in Hawassa and began operations in 2016, aims to offer 50,000 jobs and generate \$1 billion a year, Gebre-Christos says.

"We want to make Ethiopia an industrial hub in Africa. China has been very supportive, encouraging companies to go to Ethiopia. We offer good conditions, including land, infrastructure and everything they need in one place," he says.

"China is moving to a higher phase of development - that is technology and innovation," Gebre-Christos adds. "Quite a number of companies are leaving China, and we welcome them to Ethiopia."

He says other African countries can learn from the China-Ethiopia cooperation. "If you look at China, it has done marvelously well in achieving modernization. Any nation that wants to improve, that wants to reduce poverty, that wants to advance, would so much like to learn from China.

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BERHANE GEBRE-CHRISTOS
Ethiopian ambassador to China

"As Ethiopia is making progress, many countries are looking to Ethiopia's experience. We want to learn from other African countries as well, and we would like to share the experience," he says.

The Ethiopian economy has seen double-digit growth for the past 14 years, reducing poverty by 55 percent, Gebre-Christos says. In addition to China's support, factors that have contributed to success are the vision of the ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front; the country's development strategies and policies; and people's commitment to development, he says.

The Ethiopian government, like China, makes five-year plans for economic development. Gebre-Christos says the first phase of the country's growth and transformation plan began in 2010, and now the country is in the second phase of the plan, which aims to develop Ethiopia into a lowlevel developed nation within 30 to 35 years.

"We say that this century should be Ethiopia's century of rise We have built 17 international airports. Seventeen million people out of the population of 105 million are in school," he says.

"It has to continue," Gebre-Christos adds. "What has been done so far has been very good. Everybody is getting benefits, as well as the growing of ties and understanding. This harmonization of policies, financial cooperation and people to people relationship is comprehensive (between China and Africa), especially with the Belt and Road Initiative."

Since his arrival in China in October, Gebre-Christos has traveled to Nanjing, Hangzhou and Chongqing for forums and meetings, promoting Ethiopia and presenting investment opportunities to Chinese companies.

"In a forum in Hangzhou, 320 delegates from companies in Zhejiang province and nearby provinces showed great interest in going to Ethiopia. Quite a number are planning to visit Ethiopia, and contracts are being signed," he says.

"We all have to work hard to cooperate with (the Belt and Road Initiative), to improve what we have laid down. We need to work hard for the realization, which had been showing great advances and success," he adds.