Chinese Investments in Nigeria's Infrastructure and the Impact on Economic Security

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Abstract

This study focused on the examination of the Chinese investment in Nigeria's infrastructure and its impact on economic security. Infrastructure remains a vital enabler and requirement for sustainable economic growth, national competitiveness, and economic stability. Although Nigeria has continued to experience a multitude of transportation, energy, and other critical infrastructure gaps, they have also constrained economic activity, costs of doing business, industrial productivity and access to public services. The aim of the research was basically to examine the effects of Chinese investments in Nigeria's infrastructure on the nation's economic security and to assess how Chinese investment in infrastructure influences Nigeria's economic security. The research was anchored on the Dependency Theory proposed by Raul Prebish. The research was descriptive with secondary data sources, obtaining data from relevant academic literature, journal articles, government documents, policy documents, publications from international bodies and others. Due to the research findings, it was very clear that the Chinese investments have significantly upgraded the infrastructural design of Nigeria, especially in the areas of transportation and logistics; it was further observed that investments in railway, road and ports have helped to address the gap in railway, road and port services, thereby adding to infrastructure development; such investments have also contributed to the reduction of transport costs, increasing connectivity, and stimulating trade and economic activities, which has improved the country's firm economic security. Despite all this progress, the persisting benefits depend upon effective management of associated risks. The study recommended that the Nigerian government should strengthen its governance and monitoring of Chinese financing in its infrastructure investments through more transparency in contractual terms of the loans, particularly in its disclosures on the full extent of the debt, and a good cost-benefit and risk assessment before granting approval to any new project.

Keywords: Infrastructure, economic security, investment, dependency, Nigeria and China

Introduction

Economic security has emerged as a crucial concern for countries in the current global landscape, significantly transforming international relations, worldwide trade and patterns of economic cooperation. As national economies have become more connected in today's era of trade, investment, finance, and global supply chains, some countries are benefiting from these

connections and gaining economic development, whilst others are exposing to risks that threaten national development and sovereignty, as the North-South imbalance was more and more being highlighted after the end of the Cold War (Raffer & Singer, 2001).

In recent times, there has been a rising use or threat of economic and political power as a negotiating and influencing tool, making decisions often underpinned by the relative leverage and potential of States in achieving concessions (Woolcock, 2017). The 21st century has witnessed an unprecedented development of the global power structure, and the major role played by China as a foremost world economy. China has gone through a fast rise from a developing to a second-largest economy, making profound changes in global trade patterns, global investment patterns, development funding and international relations. In addition to its internal economic changes, China has steadily increased its presence in the developing world through strategic economic deals to enhance its presence around the world. In parallel to the internal economic changes, it has consistently added strength to its developing world influence through strategic investment baskets that increase its presence globally (Heginbotham, 2015).
In Nigeria, persistent shortages in transportation, energy, and other critical infrastructure have continually impeded economic growth, increased business expenses, reduced industrial output, and limited the availability of essential public services (Okegbemi, 2024). Limited domestic revenue, dwindling government finances, and inadequate capital investment have obstructed successive administrations from financing the infrastructure essential for national progress and as a result Nigeria has increasingly relied on external finance and global partnerships, particularly with China, to address its infrastructure shortage through loans, investments, and engineering contracts (Madu et al., 2025; Onyetube, 2025; Chukwwuemeka, 2019). Over the past two decades, Chinese investment has become a crucial funding source for major infrastructure initiatives in Nigeria. These investments have enabled the construction and renovation of railways, roads, airports, seaports, bridges, energy plants, and telecom systems (Manko et al., 2025; Isma'il et al., 2025; Ocholi & Okonkwo, 2023). While these initiatives seek to enhance economic activities via improved transportation, trade facilitation, and industrial expansion, they have generated concerns regarding their long-term impact on Nigeria's economic stability (Adebayo, 2019; Madu et al., 2025).

Growing reliance on Chinese financial assistance has sparked concerns over escalating public debt sustainability, technology transfer, trade imbalance, local engagement, and the nation's ability to retain economic autonomy while depending on external funding for infrastructure projects (Madu et al., 2025; Uche & Olatunji, 2023). China's increasing financial involvement in the country's image has raised worries regarding its long-term economic effects and returns (Isma'il et al., 2025; Chukwuemeka, 2025; Opusunju, 2020). Therefore, understanding the relationship currently being formed between Chinese infrastructure investment and Nigeria's economic security is relevant. It is on this note that this study examines the sectoral areas of Chinese investments in Nigeria's infrastructure and to analyze the impact of Chinese investment on Nigeria's economic security.

Theoretical Underpin

The research adopted the Dependency Theory formulated by the economist Raul Prebish in the late 40's and early 50's, which continually paints a picture in which the economies of one group of countries are shaped by the economies of other countries. Other prominent

proponents of the theory include Andre Gunder-Frank, Walter Rodney, Dos Santos, Claude Ake, among others. The modernization theory attributed the reasons for the underdevelopment of third world countries to Dependency Theory. The origin of the theory is traced to the late 1950s, when it was the brainchild of Raúl Prebisch, Director of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (Mumuni & Abdulyakeen, 2025). The success and growth of the affluent industrial nations did not necessarily translate into development for the less-privileged countries, according to the proponents. Their idea reveals that when the prosperity of the industrialized countries increased many developing countries experienced substantial economic issues.

Dependency theorists argue that the economic hardships, poverty, diseases, unemployment, and inequalities prevalent in developing countries can be attributed to the forced integration of their economies into the global capitalist system, where they are relegated to the roles of raw material producers and consumers of finished products from industrialized Western countries (Larrain, 2013). This has hindered economic growth in developing nations referred to as the 'periphery' states to the benefit of the 'core' states.

Dependency theory posits that different applications of resources are more desirable than the utilization patterns dictated by powerful states (Hills, 1994). A definite description shows a favored pattern whereby the West benefits and a lack on the part of the periphery economies. For instance, a prevalent state practice frequently criticized by dependency theorists is agricultural exports. The criticism states that numerous impoverished economies face significantly high levels of malnutrition despite producing large quantities of food for export. Numerous dependency theorists contend that agricultural lands ought to be utilized for domestic food production to decrease malnutrition rates.

Dependency Theory is pertinent to this study because it explains the possibility for developing countries like Nigeria to become economically dependent on more advanced countries through foreign investments, loans, as well as development assistance. The theory holds that overdependence on external financing inflows and technologies may constrain the economic independence of a country and make it more vulnerable to external factors. The findings of this research raise concern about the impact of reliance on investment in Nigeria's infrastructure and the possibility of economic insecurity, financial instability, and the economic growth of Nigeria with such investment from China. The theory sets a good direction for assessing whether the investments made in Nigeria's infrastructure are sustainable or creating dependency issues that may undermine the economic stability and development in Nigeria.

Concept of Economic Security

Security from an economic perspective means that the state can sustain economic growth, economic development, and the well-being of its citizens against threats including being free from dependence on other countries, financial crises, and structural deficiencies (Berebon, 2025). Economic stability in developing countries has been linked to certain structural changes, diversification and the ability to withstand external shocks. Economic security for Nigeria with a crude oil-weighted economy translates to less dependence on crude oil maiden, solving the balance of payments problem and establishing infrastructure and investment partnerships that will provide decent stability (Eze & Okafor, 2019). China and Nigeria's economic relations are

most often judged on their contribution to Nigeria's economic stability. Human economic activities have always depended on security. In order to ensure that the protection and survival of all were guaranteed by an organized political authority (the government), the Social Contract asked individuals to willingly surrender their rights and responsibilities to the organized political authority, motivated by the fear of loss of protection (Boucher & Kelly, 2003).

Cooper (1994) believes that economic security is the social status of an individual to rely on others or the societal mechanisms to attend to his or her economic needs, through consistent work and social assistance. This is in addition to a personal dimension. Concerns surrounding security have generally been a central theme in conversations about development (Araraume and Enwere, 2024). Attempts to extend the concept of security to embrace societies and individuals, and to move beyond military to non-military issues, confirm this view (Krahmann, 2015). The concept of human security is fundamentally based along two different lines. One is based on neo-realist theory and underscores the importance of the state in terms of security. The other is a theoretical model that emphasizes the state in the security idea. It often stands for security on the basis of the basic nature of the state.

On the individual level, economic security entails the capacity of a person to meet his fundamental needs in a continuous manner. To Fogel (2000), economic security is about avoiding economic crises and the equitable distribution of essential resources for individual thriving in society. This view provides the focus of the study's discussion especially in relation to China's investment in Nigeria infrastructure.

Empirical Review

Chiedozie et al. (2024) carried out a research work titled: Nigeria-China Relations and Economic Development with a broad coverage of the political and economic issues that were relevant to Nigeria-China relations in the year ranging from 1999 to 2023. The study aimed to evaluate the benefits of this relationship and the Nigerian way of coordinating its relationship with China to maximize its national interests. The study adopted a mixed-method approach in collecting data, with Nigeria being a country that benefits more from China than from its old Western partners, considering that the Sino-Nigeria relationship over the years has been one of exploitation on the part of the West. Field data was collected directly from government sources at the Chinese Embassy and Nigeria's Ministry of External Affairs as well as key informant interviews with experts on Nigeria-China relations. Secondary data collection was done from the library, books, journals and the internet. The study revealed that Nigeria has not derived economic benefits akin to the one experienced by China in the trade relationship, through a qualitative analysis based on the Complex Interdependence Theory. Political and socio-cultural relations are, however, increasingly of a fairly balanced and advantageous nature for both sides, mainly through diplomatic agreements and cultural cooperation. The authors concluded that the current economic arrangement is still bias in favour of China and advised Nigeria to focus on developing a trade centre-based firm, that favours exportation for a fairer and more balanced agreement. Ocholi and Okonkwo (2023) analyzed the features of China-Nigeria relations in their research entitled China-Nigeria Diplomatic, Political and Economic Relationships: Strategic Alliance or Sino-Colonialism. This study meticulously investigated if the bilateral relationship was an actual strategic alliance or a form of modern

Sino-imperialism. Using the Ex-Post-Facto research technique, they used secondary data (trade data and policy documentation) and found the two-way relationship predominantlyh one-sided and extractive. The authors suggested, in light of this concern, an overall review and renegotiation of the trade agreements with a view to removing practices that exploit and increasing fairness. The research by Agah and Ikenga (2023), conducted with a qualitative approach using secondary data from various scholarly sources, government documents, and reports, revealed some key political and economic agendas of China which has often been seen as working against Nigeria's agenda over the years of the Buhari's administration (2015-2022). It brought to light risks of going into debt, especially from the Chinese, which the government of Nigeria has not managed well. In Sino-Nigeria Relations and Global Oil Politics, 1999-2023: Asymmetrical or Symmetrical, Ogunnowo (2024) investigated the bilateral relations in the context of global oil politics using secondary data and a geopolitical perspective. It was discovered that the relation was one-sided. China was able to get access to Nigerian oil while Nigeria could not get comparable economic benefits from China. Nigeria's need to find ample investments and diversification from oil to bolster the relationship was emphasized in the conclusion. The results of the research indicated some specific beneficial measures that can be implemented to diversify the Nigeria economy as well as attracting investment to other sectors.

Results and Discussion

China stands as Nigeria's main railway development partner in the world, financing and building several key railway corridors intended to foster rail connectivity, facilitate trade and promote economic growth in Nigeria. To enhance and promote trade, agriculture, manufacturing technology, and creating jobs investment and living standards, a pact was formed in the year 2002 to establish a Nigeria-China Trade Office (NCTO) which officially opened in the year 2006 (Opusunju et al., 2020). In 2004, Nigeria and China signed an agreement cfor an oil mining lease in the Niger Delta and in 2005, Nigeria pledged to provide China with 30,000 barrels of oil each day, which costs around $800 million.

Table 1, which outlines key investments in Nigeria's railway infrastructure by China to improve trade and investment growth in Nigeria. The table clearly reveals some Chinese railway investment projects in Nigeria including those completed and projects that are still in progress. Examples of achieved works include Abuja – Kaduna SG Railway (US$1.5b) in 2016 and Lagos-Ibadan SG Railway (US$1.6b) in 2020.

Table 1: China Investment in Railway Lines in Nigeria

Railway Line	China's Investment (USD)	Duration (kilometers)	Period
Abuja-Kaduna	$1.5Billion	186.5KM	2016
Kaduna-Kano	$254.76Million	203KM	2016
Port Harcourt-Maiduguri	$2.550Billion	1,443KM	2018
Ibadan-Kano	$3.975Billion	2,733KM	2019
Lagos-Calabar	$1.3Billion	1,400KM	2020

Lagos-Ibadan	$1.26Billon	156KM	2020
Abuja-Warri	$2.925Billion	549,2KKM	2021
Abuja–Warri Standard Gauge	US$3.90 billion (75% proposed Exim Bank of China financing)	418	Proposed/Planning Stage (2025)
Kano–Maradi Standard Gauge	US$1.30 billion (CCECC-led Chinese consortium financing)	284	Under construction (2025)

Source: Researcher's Compilation (2025) culled from UN Commodity trade statistics database (2024)

Table 2 below showcases key infrastructure investments by Chinese companies in Nigeria. These projects include those in the transport sector, Power sector, Information technology, Ports, roads and bridges among others.

Table 2: Key China Infrastructure Investment in Nigeria

Year	Total Investment (USD Billion)	Major Projects
2015	2.5	Lagos-Kano Railway, Abuja-Kaduna Railway
2016	3.0	Lagos-Ibadan Expressway,Zungeru
2017	3.5	Hydroelectric Power Project
2018	4.0	Lekki Deep Sea Port, Mambilla Power
2019	4.2	Abuja Light Rail, Apapa Port Complex
2020	4.5	Cross River Superhighway,
2021	4.8	Kano-Maradi Railway
2022	5.0	Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone, Lagos-Calabar Coastal Railway
2023	5.5	Ibadan Dry Port, Enugu-Onitsha Expressway Kaduna-Kano Pipeline Benin City Power project Second Niger Bridge Abuja IT Park

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) (2025) adapted from Madu et al. (2025)

Table 2 above clearly show the investment of china in infrastructure in Nigeria from 2015 to 2023 and the worth of the projects in dollars. Projects are spread across various sectors

including railways, roads and bridges, ports, IT, power sector among others. China has been a a key financier of projects in Nigeria since Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Table 3 below highlights the prominent Chinese firms operating in Nigeria, detailing their industries, total global assets, workforce size, and particular investments or initiatives within the nation. The table showcases the extensive involvement of Chinese companies in Nigeria, encompassing sectors like oil and gas, construction, electric power, cement engineering, and telecommunications. This highlights the important and varied contribution of China's private sector to Nigeria's economic growth.

Table 3: Key Chinese Firms Operating in Nigeria

Name of Company	Active Sector
SINOPEC	Oil and Gas
CNPC EPC	Oil and Gas
SEPCO CONSTRUCTION	Electric Power Construction
CCECC	Construction
CNOON	Offshore Oil and Gas
SINOMA	Cement Engineering Construction
HUAWEI	Telecom
ZTE	Telecom
CSCEC CRCC CGC CHEC	Construction

Sources: Researcher's compilation from Anyamenre (2025); UN Comtrade (2023)

China has been involved in the construction of road infrastructure, including the rehabilitation of Ikot Akpaden-Okoroette in 2003-04, railway activities (light rail projects in Abuja, Lagos and the Abuja-Kaduna line) (Aja & Bakare, 2021), the Headquarters of the Nigerian

Telecommunications Commission in Abuja involving US$16.7 million, and the launch of Lekki Free Trade Zone near Lagos. In the communication and information services industry, Chinese telecom firms are also exploring the market in Nigeria. Zhong Xing Telecommunication Equipment Company (ZTE) produces mobile devices in Nigeria and provides equipment to Operators like MTN, Airtel, Globacom Limited and Visafone (Li, 2017). It includes China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation (SINOPEC; oil/energy), China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC; oil/energy), Shandong Electric Power Construction Corporation (SEPCO; electricity power construction), CCEC (construction and real estate), China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC; construction and real estate), CNOOC (offshore oil/gas), Sinoma (cement engineering construction), China Geo-Engineering Corporation (CGC; construction), Huawei (telecommunications industry) and Zhong Xing Telecommunication (ZTE; telecommunications industry). In Nigeria's telecommunications industry, Huawei and ZTE are the major companies (Egbula & Zheng, 2011;(Li, 2017).

Implementing the oil infrastructure project was done through a public-private partnership between the Nigerian National Oil Corporation (NNPC) and the China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC). Unfortunately, it was scrapped due to a widespread corrupt oil bidding process and the notion of providing oil for infrastructure was replaced by oil for cash plans. Nigeria had a seven-point agenda for implementation in order to meet the vision 20:2020 in 2007, which at the time covered wealth creation, land tenure reform, education and human capital development, national security, food safety, energy and transportation. This strategy is viewed as attainable by forming bilateral relationships with China to alleviate poverty (Emehelu & Oboreh, 2022) and in 2009 an agreement worth $311 million was made to enhance collaboration on communication and space initiatives, with China's help in launching Nigeria's communication satellite, Nigcomsat-1, from the Xichang Satellite Center in China and in 2011 Nigeria launched its first domestic communication satellite center marking it as Central Africa's first communication satellite and positioning Nigeria as China's fourth largest trade partner (Ejiroghene, 2022). It was created in 2013 and the Nigerian cultural center in Beijing sought to present Nigerian art, culture, and heritage in China, facilitating cultural exchange efforts to enhance mutual understanding between both countries and in that same year, approximately 80% of Nigeria's economy was impacted by Chinese investments, coinciding with the initiation of the BRI and China has boosted its investment in infrastructure projects, and Nigeria seems to benefit from this effort by obtaining vital funding for its infrastructure. Nigeria has signed three credit lines deal with BRI this year and these three signed contract involve Nigeria Light Rail Project, Abuja (which amounts to $500 Million), four Nigeria airport terminals project ($100 Million) besides project to improve the connectivity between government agencies in Nigeria (Galaxy Backbone - NICAF- $500 Million), the former government Delegate of the ROC in Nigeria was asked to change its name to Trade Representative Office of Taipei, mainly to promote the interest of the Government of Taiwan and to do support and protection for the Taiwanese expatriates in Nigeria, and it serves as the reflective of Taiwan's Government. This was to make Nigeria become Taiwan's third most significant trading partner in Africa; the cooperation benefits Nigeria in addition, including scholarships to qualified Nigerian students to study at Taiwan's universities. In 2018, Chinese companies have invested over $20 billion in over 218 enterprises in the industrial sector in Nigeria (Manko et al., 2023). Furthermore, Nigeria signed a deal with Chinese manufacturer Great Wall for two communication satellites from China and for these, Chinese

businesses were going to have an equity stake in the Nigerian satellite company, NigComSat, with a reported value of some $550 million. Impact of Chinese Investment in Infrastructure on Nigeria's Economic Security China's investment in Nigeria has led to economic security gains and losses. Projects supported by China have helped to tackle Nigeria's infrastructure deficit, enhance transportation systems, and boost economic activities. On the other hand, concerns about sustainability, lack of local engagement, dependence on external tools, and governance questions have raised questions regarding the impact of this financing. In doing so, the opportunity of China's involvement in the area of infrastructural development presents an avenue of economic development opportunities while also creating threats for Nigeria's long term financial stability. A key benefit of Chinese investments is the enhancement of Nigeria's transport infrastructure, leading to improved connectivity, decreased logistics expenses, and boosted economic productivity. The Lagos-Ibadan Standard Gauge Railway, being largely financed through a preferential buyer's credit of US$1.267 billion obtained from the China Exim Bank, has since opened, greatly reducing travel time on one of Nigeria's busiest business corridors with a turnover of millions of travellers. The railway has helped to alleviate road traffic pressure, improve logistics capacity and lower transportation costs for enterprises, which has brought trade efficiency to the norm, enhanced national competitiveness and pushed companies to change from road transportation to rail transportation mode. Likewise, the Abuja-Itakpe-Warri railway project took off, signed by China Railway Construction Corp in a US$3.9 billion project, which has improved the country's freight carrying capacity and helped to move agricultural and industrial materials across the country. Chinese investment has enabled Nigeria to realize infrastructure projects, which might not have been affordable on its own. China moved to advance key infrastructure projects like railways, roads and port access facilities through its concessional loans and longer repayment term. It involves the US652 million China ExIm bank-funded roadway project that connects Lekki Deep Sea Port to the Dangote Refinery that will improve transport of freight and industrial connectivity as some form of investments to boost trade and logistics.The proposed roadway it is moving is US652 million grant by the China ExIm bank that will connect Lekki Deep Sea Port with the Dangote Refinery, as it will boost transport of cargo and industrial connectivity, hence the opportunity to invest in trade and logistic efficiency. Such investments have boosted capital investment, provided jobs for construction workers, brought business development, offered better productive capacity and national economic resilience, resulting in economic growth (United Nations, 2023). The development of better infrastructure has also promoted private sector investment by lowering production and transportation costs and facilitating market access to domestic and regional markets. Improved transportation networks strengthen agricultural marketing, minimize post-harvest loss, boost Nigeria's industrial development and its competitiveness in the African Continental Free Trade Area (Falaju, 2026). Overall, the results contribute to the economic security of the country through the development of productivity, the expansion of exports, and the enhancement of economic shocks' resilience of the country.

Despite these advantages, infrastructure development efforts in China have caused significant financial difficulties, which may compromise its long-term economic stability and potentially impact Nigeria as well. The external debt to the Chinese government has also been significant in the country, whose total external debts at the end of 2023 are estimated by the Debt Management Office to be closer to US$5 billion, with China being among the major bilateral creditors of the country (Debt Management Office, 2024).

Another issue has to do with the tendering process for different kinds of infrastructure projects which are funded with Chinese money. Building-related activities like construction companies, implementing the equipment, engineering activities, and technical personnel must hire Chinese companies according to most contracts. As a result, many of the costs associated with the projects are being borne by Chinese companies rather than boosting the engineering and manufacturing sectors in Nigeria. As a result, many of the costs associated with the projects are being borne by Chinese companies rather than boosting the engineering and manufacturing sectors in Nigeria (Onyetube, 2025). Construction work is performed using Nigerian manpower, but other key tasks including project design, production of equipment and high-level engineering are being carried out by foreign companies. This restricts technology transfers, local capacity development, and limits the increased investment in investment in the future.

Project execution problems have also impacted the economic advantages of particular China-financed infrastructure projects. Many projects have faced changes in funds, project delays, contract changes and others. Railway link for Kano-Kaduna was hit by funding challenges which necessitated an additional funding of US$254.76 million by the China Development Bank as a result of earlier funding challenges (Tunji, 2026). The delays cost more on the project and delay the expected returns from money invested, and contribute to the burden of government finances. In the event projects do not generate expected revenue, government guarantees and subsidies will become necessary, contributing to budget deficits and the need to narrow the budget room for other development priorities. Moreover, there are strategic concerns with China investing in Nigeria regarding Nigeria's economic security. The majority of essential energy and transportation facilities depend on Chinese technology, spare parts and know-how for their operation and maintenance.

The governance problems make the connection between China's investments and economic security more complicated. Poor institutional controls raise risks of budget overruns, poor resource use, and corruption, which negates the developmental benefits of infrastructure investments. Furthermore, while Chinese construction activities bring many temporary employment opportunities, limited involvement in the transfer and utilization of technical expert knowledge within Nigeria limits the establishment of sustainable industrial development and trained manpower to serve Nigeria’s long-term needs (Isma’il, et al., 2025).

Conclusion

Nigeria has greatly benefited from Chinese investments in improving infrastructure, especially in the transportation and logistics sector. Railways, roads, and ports investments have helped to complement infrastructure imperfections, enhance connectivity and reduce transportation costs, thus boosting the short-term economic stability of the country, and promoting trade and economic activities as well. Nevertheless, there are risks that have to be managed for continued benefits to be seen. The increasing number of debt service obligations, technology transfer, low local content participation, dependence on participation of Chinese experts and governance-related issues pose a challenge to fiscal stability, economic security, and enhanced potential for domestic industrial growth unless addressed effectively.

Recommendations

The paper makes the following recommendations:

i. The Nigerian government should boost transparency between loan deals, identify all costs and risks associated with the financing of Chinese infrastructure projects and check these factors to ensure that benefits outweigh the economic security threats before further approval of more projects and signing of deals to protect Nigeria's economic security.

ii. The federal government should also incorporate more stipulations of local content and technology transfer in all Nigeria-China infrastructure projects and ensure increased participation of Nigerian firms, engineers and skillful job seekers in the project designing, construction, operation and maintenance in future contracts to enhance the growth of local industries.

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