**Position Paper for United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)**

*Topic 1: Role of Infrastructure in the Development of South-East Asia:*

One of the most important focuses for ASEAN members is how the diverse group of countries can collaborate to build infrastructure to bring vital investment to the region. This includes infrastructure development such as improving road networks, trade connectivity, mobility and power generation and supply. Using correct policies and programs will ensure the provision of quality services that can be used to optimal capacity. It is imperative that Southeast Asian countries create a favourable business environment that will attract investors to improve its social and economic status. While Asia is short of funding for infrastructure projects, governments of ASEAN countries are eager to attract to attract investment for large-scale investment projects. China is a major source of investment for the development of transport, energy and telecommunications infrastructure, and has already engaged in a number of initiatives to improve existing infrastructure as well as connect the south-east Asia region.

The underlying initiative supporting all overseas investments is the *One Belt One Road* (OBOR) path. With the support of over 100 countries, this initiative seeks to revive the iconic Silk Road via a trade-infrastructure network to increase interconnectivity between China, Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe through the development of transport, energy, trade, and communications infrastructure.[[1]](#footnote-1) OBOR includes over half of the global population, 75% of energy resources, and 40% of total GDP. Chinese infrastructure investment projects are in search of high financial returns, such as international pension funds, insurance companies, sovereign wealth funds, private equity funds. The state-owned development board of Singapore has partnered with the China Construction Bank, and committed about $22 billion to finance OBOR projects.[[2]](#footnote-2) Furthermore, in 2013, trade between China and the five Central Asian states totaled $50 billion, and surpassed trade with Russia, which amounted to $30 billion.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Established in 2015, the Chinese-led *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)* has 57 member countries, and represents the largest multilateral financing group in decades. China plans to provide a large proportion of the $100 billion initial capital. The AIIB will complement the work of existing financial institutions, and follows an environmental and social framework created with former World Bank safeguard specialists. Jin Liqun, president of AIIB, stresses commitment to be ethical and clean, with zero tolerance for corruption. The AIIB intends to invest US$1.2 billion this year, and is aiming to meet international standards of governance. The AIIB will join global clean-energy initiatives, and fund eco-friendly investment projects, avoiding allegations of promoting pollution. The AIIB is already involved in several initiatives, such as in Bangladesh, where a proposed power grid upgrade project will be solely AIIB financed. In June 2016, four co-financed deals amounting to $509 million with the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and UK Department for International Development, were approved - involving slum renovation in Indonesia and highway construction in Pakistan and Tajikistan.[[4]](#footnote-4) As well, India is the bank’s second largest shareholder after China, and is looking to receive a $500 million loan by the AIIB for solar projects.[[5]](#footnote-5) One of the AIIB’s biggest advantage is its thorough understanding of the experience and lessons of development in developing countries. Alternatively, the Export-Import Bank of China has lent more than $80 billion in 2015, and easily surpassed that of the Asia Development bank that lent $27 billion over the same period. China’s $46 billion economic infrastructure plan involving a pipeline, rail, roads, bridges and more, will establish a trade route connecting northwest China to Gwadar, a port on the Arabian Sea.

Liu Zhenya, chairman of the *State Grid Corporation of China* (SGCC), proposed a global electricity grid to be built by 2060, costing around $100 trillion over 45 years. Initiatives such as these can aid China and neighbouring countries to reduce their impact on climate change through lower greenhouse gas emissions, more efficient energy markets and dramatically accepted use of renewable energy. China’s expertise in high-seed rail (HSR) construction is an important asset in the development of transportation infrastructure. With more than 20,000km of track laid, China has the largest amount of HSR than the world, and can use this technology to connect China with Southeast Asia.

China is already a major contributor to the development of transport, energy and telecommunications infrastructure in Southeast Asia. China is a top investor in Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, and its investment in Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia is nevertheless increasing, while all ten ASEAN nations are members of the AIIB. Not only are the aforementioned trade proposals beneficial for the development of infrastructure for ASEAN countries, they provide distinct benefits for China’s economy. China requires new energy sources to replace wasteful coal energy and improve the health of urban Chinese residents. China is “overbuilt” internally, and is in need of international infrastructure projects to provide jobs for Chinese workers and prevent protests of unemployed. China’s Southeast Asia Infrastructure Drive and export economy will prevail and produce mutually beneficial agreements for all those involved, either by expanding its infrastructure industry overseas, or expanding its territorial acquisitions in the South China Sea. Although territorial disputes over the South China Sea have decreased relations with many ASEAN countries, joint development areas can enable China and Southeast Asia to reach a constructive, precedent-setting middle ground, and allow countries to concentrate on mutually beneficial economics. The OBOR and associated initiatives mark the beginning of new economic diplomacy for China, facilitating China’s integration and prevalence in the global economy, as well as deepening already-strong relations. The unbalanced economic development of ASEAN countries is a challenge, involving different import-export trade and political situations. Reaching a consensus on the South China Sea dispute is of vital concern to continue infrastructure development.

*Topic 2: Future of Food*

Sustaining food security is one of the most important goals for many countries. Strong income and population growth, urbanisation and rapid industrialization are the underlying forces pushing for structural reform in global food production and consumption patterns. The economies of Asia and the Pacific grew an average of 7.6% per year between 1990 and 2010, exceeding the 3.4% global average.[[6]](#footnote-6) In this period of expansion, China is moving away from an agricultural economy to one driven by technology and innovation. However, the rise in affluence, as well as a rapidly growing population, especially due to the end of the one-child policy, is not exclusive of the struggle with poverty and malnutrition. While reducing levels of poverty from 24.5% of the population in 1991, 9.2% of China’s population is still undernourished.[[7]](#footnote-7)

China is now the world’s largest producer and consumer of agricultural products. Although producing 25% of the world’s food, China’s national food security is facing challenges, as it feeds 20% of the global population using only 10% of arable land and available freshwater.[[8]](#footnote-8) A number of factors constrain China’s food production, such as the decreasing amount of arable land due to urbanisation, shortage of irrigation and rising production costs for labor and material inputs. China’s main solution to achieve food security is to be food, especially grain, self-sufficient. China is essentially self-sufficient in rice, grain, pork and seafood, however rapidly increasing populations have resulted in an increase in demand for imported foods, such as dairy, egg and meat products.[[9]](#footnote-9) The Chinese government has set a minimum of 120 million hectares of arable land, and a grain self-sufficiency target of 95%, and has maintained these standards for the past two decades.[[10]](#footnote-10)

To achieve China’s out-put oriented growth target, the nation must achieve long-term natural resource sustainability. Among China’s environmental problems for food production are soil contamination and the deterioration of land and water, all of which are results of poor air quality. China’s 13th five-year plan, for 2016-2020, has ten binding targets that place environmental protection among the main objectives, showing that the government is engaging in new development paradigms.[[11]](#footnote-11) The government plans to significantly decrease illegal food additives as well as substandard pesticide residues to reduce its environmental impact and improve the health of citizens.

Although China is still reliant on small family farms to produce much of its food, the traditional model is facing challenges as rural-urban migration has resulted in fewer small-scale farmers. Since 2003, the government has been offering subsidies and buying agricultural products at protective prices to encourage farmers to grow more grain. The government has invoked striker policies on using farmland for non-agricultural purposes. China has increased public funding in research for more sustainable and innovative irrigation methods, infrastructure and agricultural technologies. China has collaborated with countries such as Canada to prioritize research in food genetics and genomes, and has developed a ‘superstar’ rice crop to reduce pollution and production costs for farmers. The corn ethanol ban has been lifted to pursue cleaner air due to a shortage of non-grain feed stocks. The increased production and use of biofuels is expected to reduce car emissions in Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Chinese agricultural enterprises can also improve food security by diversifying globally. Chinese companies have the technology and funds to operate funds overseas, and can coordinate global resources to ensure the food security of its nation as well as improving that of other countries. *China Bright Food*, the second largest food group in China, is expected to acquire a controlling stake in Israel’s largest dairy producer Tnuva. This merger has efficiently approached the supply and demand of resources of both nations, and has lowered the risks of food insecurity by diversifying its portfolio. Chinese companies have engaged in many land and agriculture-related acquisitions in Southeast Asia, Russia, Australia, Latin America and the US in the past decade.[[13]](#footnote-13) China is increasing its environmental stewardship on the world stage, acting as a liaison between developed and developing countries in trade negotiations, advocating to increase development while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

*Topic 3: Labour Migration and Illegal Trafficking in the Asia-Pacific*

China has more people emigrating than at any other point in history, and in 2013, was the fourth-largest migrant-exporting country in the world.[[14]](#footnote-14) The opening of its economy in 1978 has led China to be a source, as well as an attractive destination for international migrants. Most Chinese emigrants tend to go to the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. There are 60 million overseas Chinese in 2015, and the World Bank estimates that China is the second largest recipient of remittances around the world.[[15]](#footnote-15) China is prone to a significant amount of international migration, as well as internal migration, with an estimate that almost 269 million migrant workers take part in rural-urban migration.[[16]](#footnote-16) 73.5% of total Chinese emigrants are concentrated in Southeast Asia, especially ASEAN countries.[[17]](#footnote-17) In 2009, there were approximately 145 million rural-urban migrants in China, which accounted for 11% of the entire population.[[18]](#footnote-18) One of China’s future challenges is that of “new generation” migrants, the population that is the driving force behind China’s migrant labour. Compared to 31.5% in the previous generation, 44.4% of new-generation migrant workers are employed in manufacturing industry.[[19]](#footnote-19)

In response to an increasingly mobile population, the government of China is increasing its border management and labour migration policy responses. As well, it is promoting migration and taking action to prevent irregular migratory movements, such as smuggling and human trafficking. The government is against irregular migration, and is especially focused on avoiding the ‘brain drain.’ Partially as a result of the One Child Policy, there is an uneven proportion of males to females, which is further increasing. A shortage of females has caused males to create a “marriage squeeze,” as well as a demand for foreign brides. Illegal immigrants are sometimes forced to marry poor Chinese men, and this epidemic of illegal migration is now becoming typical in China’s transnational migration era.

The Chinese government encourages foreign experts to work in China, to facilitate the introduction of new technologies and improve management of businesses. Since 2007, the International Organisation for Migration has been supporting the government’s efforts. China is also part of the “EU-China Dialogue on Migration and Mobility Support Project,” to contribute to a better management of legal migration between the EU and China. However, the Chinese government falls short in its laws relevant to transnational immigration, with a very limited quota of ‘green cars’ or permanent residence permits for foreign citizens. China’s immigration policy favours the highly educated or workers who can bring large investments to them.

It is possible for China to open the migration market to enhance its status in the global market economy, however, the government must also attract females to maintain gender balance and social harmony. Legalisation in China implies a whole new immigration strategy and innovation. Local governments in the region of the Yunnan province have explored a more flexible “blue card” policy to register and certify ‘foreign brides.’ The blue card encourages local residents to register their marriages, improving the government’s ability to administer the region, and separates marriage immigrants from illegal immigrants. Chinese governance functions plan to be constructed to adapt to China’s transformation from a migrant-sending country to a receiving country. China needs to prevent illegal immigration and strengthen its capacity in law making to effectively manage transnational migration.

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