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# The Political Economy of China's Aid in Malawi: Crossroads-Kanengo Road Project, 2021-2025

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**ABSTRACT:** Malawi's pursuit of infrastructure-led development under persistent financial and technological constraints raises key concerns over economic sovereignty. This study examines the *Crossroads Roundabout to Kanengo Junction Upgrading Project (2021-2025)* to analyse how Chinese infrastructure aid influences Malawi's autonomy in economic governance. Guided by Theotonio Dos Santos' Dependency Theory and supported by Jeffrey Sachs' developmentalist framework, the research identifies five dependency mechanisms: monopoly of technology, foreign financing, profit repatriation, foreign control of capital, and externally oriented development. Using qualitative content and thematic analysis of policy documents, loan agreements, and government reports, the study finds that Chinese-funded projects, while bridging investment gaps, perpetuate structural dependence. Dominance of foreign contractors, minimal technology transfer, and limited local participation reinforce historical dependency patterns. The findings highlight how financial decision-making is externally conditioned, challenging the notion of equitable South-South cooperation and emphasizing the need for stronger local content and accountable aid governance.

**KEYWORDS:** Economic sovereignty, Dependency Theory, Chinese aid, Malawi

## I. INTRODUCTION

Economic sovereignty has become a central concern for many developing countries, particularly in Africa, where infrastructure development is increasingly viewed as a critical pathway to economic transformation. Transport corridors, energy systems, and urban infrastructure are not only necessary for enabling trade and productivity but also for deepening regional integration and attracting investment (Collier, 2010). Yet, despite the acknowledged importance of infrastructure, many African nations including Malawi face enduring financial and technical constraints. With limited domestic revenue and reduced access to concessional credit, these countries often turn to external partners to fund and implement large-scale public works (Moyo, 2009). Among the most prominent of these external actors is China, whose rapid rise in global development finance has redefined the contours of aid and investment across the continent.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 2007, China has emerged as a key infrastructure partner for Malawi. Through bilateral agreements and frameworks like the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), Beijing has financed and executed flagship projects including the Malawi Parliament Building, the Bingu National Stadium, and most recently, the Crossroads Roundabout to the Kanengo Junction Upgrading Project (Government of Malawi, 2022; Chimodzi, 2022). These projects are often structured as grants or concessional loans and executed by Chinese state-owned enterprises under a model of turnkey delivery. Unlike traditional Western donors, China espouses a principle of non-interference and frames its aid as mutually beneficial, a stance that has been appealing to many African governments seeking infrastructure without policy conditionalities (Brautigam, 2009; Alden & Large, 2019).

The Crossroads Roundabout to Kanengo Junction Upgrading Project (2021-2025) forms part of Malawi's broader strategy to modernize its urban transport system and stimulate economic activity in the capital city. The corridor links a major commercial hub at Crossroads to the industrial zone of Kanengo, making it a critical artery for domestic trade, commuter mobility, and regional logistics (Government of Malawi, 2022). Due to the country's long-standing fiscal constraints and limited domestic engineering capacity, the Government of Malawi secured financing from the Government of China under its concessional infrastructure cooperation framework. The project was awarded to a Chinese state-owned enterprise under a turnkey arrangement, reflecting China's prevailing model of financing, constructing, and delivering infrastructure in partner countries (Brautigam, 2009; Alden & Large, 2019). While the project aims to reduce congestion, improve urban connectivity, and strengthen Lilongwe's economic competitiveness, it also embodies many of the structural features that define Malawi-China development relations. These include the use of Chinese contractors, imported machinery, externally determined technical standards, and loan-based financing modalities.

As several studies indicate, such arrangements can generate short-term infrastructure gains while creating long-term risks related to debt exposure, technological dependence, and limited domestic participation (Chimombo, 2020; Afrobarometer, 2020). The project therefore offers an important empirical entry point for examining how Malawi's pursuit of infrastructure-led development intersects with broader political-economy dynamics of South–South cooperation.

Against this backdrop, the Crossroads-Kanengo Project is highly relevant to debates on economic sovereignty and dependency. Its financing structure, contractor dominance, and minimal technology transfer provide a concrete case through which to assess whether Chinese aid promotes transformative development or reinforces the structural constraints highlighted by Dependency Theory. At the same time, the project enables an evaluation of Sachs' developmentalist claim that aid can support growth if aligned with local priorities and institutional strengthening. Thus, the project not only contributes to Malawi's infrastructure ambitions but also serves as a critical site for analyzing the persistence of economic dependence despite the promise of South-South cooperation.

Furthermore, public sentiment has also shifted in recent years. Initially welcomed as evidence of development and partnership, Chinese infrastructure projects are now met with growing skepticism. Between 2014 and 2020, Afrobarometer data shows a 23% decline in the number of Malawians who viewed China's influence as positive (Afrobarometer, 2020). Citizens increasingly cite the dominance of Chinese firms, poor-quality imports, and a perceived lack of transparency in loan agreements as sources of concern. These critiques mirror broader African unease with the structure of China's development cooperation, especially when projects appear to benefit donor interests more than they empower local economies (Tsoka, 2020; Brautigam & Tang, 2020).

Essentially, this study responds to these concerns by examining the Crossroads Roundabout to the Kanengo Junction Upgrading Project (2021-2025) as a case study of Chinese infrastructure aid in Malawi. It seeks to answer the research question: Why does economic dependency on Chinese infrastructure aid persist in Malawi, despite the country's pursuit of development through South-South Cooperation? Using Theotonio Dos Santos' Dependency Theory as the primary analytical framework, the study investigates how mechanisms such as technological monopoly, foreign financing, capital repatriation, and foreign-oriented project design operate in the Malawian context. It also draws on the insights of Jeffrey Sachs, who argues that aid can play a developmental role if it is aligned with local priorities and institutional capacity-building.

By analyzing this case through a critical political economy lens, the paper contributes to debates on infrastructure aid, development sovereignty, and the evolving character of South–South partnerships. It aims not only to diagnose the structural challenges embedded in foreign-funded infrastructure but also to offer policy-relevant insights into how aid modalities might be restructured to better serve national development goals.

## II. DEPENDENCY THEORY AND DEVELOPMENTALIST APPROACH

To understand the political economy of Chinese infrastructure aid in Malawi, this study employs two complementary yet contrasting theoretical perspectives: Theotonio Dos Santos' Dependency Theory and Jeffrey Sachs' developmentalist approach. Using both frameworks provides a balanced analytical foundation for examining the Crossroads Roundabout to Kanengo Junction Upgrading Project (2021-2025), allowing the research to interrogate the structural constraints associated with foreign-funded infrastructure while also considering the potential pathways toward sustainable development. These theories serve not merely as academic lenses, but as practical tools for interpreting how international cooperation shapes local development trajectories.

Dependency Theory emerged in Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s through scholars such as Theotonio Dos Santos, Andre Gunder Frank, and Celso Furtado. Their work challenged modernization theory, which suggested that underdevelopment was simply a transitional stage on the universal path to industrialization. Instead, dependency theorists argued that underdevelopment was deliberately produced through a historical process in which peripheral economies were incorporated into the global capitalist system under structurally unequal conditions. Within this perspective, development and underdevelopment coexist relationally meaning the prosperity of dominant states is linked to the continued deprivation of dependent ones.

Dos Santos' influential work, *The Structure of Dependence* (1970), conceptualizes dependency as a situation in which the economic growth of peripheral countries is conditioned by and subordinated to the expansion of dominant economies. He identifies several mechanisms through which this relationship is reproduced: the monopoly of complex technology, reliance on foreign financing, the repatriation of high profits, foreign control over capital and technology, and foreign-oriented development. These mechanisms form the analytical variables guiding this research, each illustrating a different dimension of how dependency persists, even under contemporary forms of South-South cooperation.

In contrast, Jeffrey Sachs offers a far more optimistic outlook on international development. Sachs (2005) argues that poverty is often the result of structural domestic challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, weak institutions, and low levels of capital accumulation not necessarily the consequence of global exploitation. From this perspective, foreign aid can act as a catalyst for long-term development if it is sufficient, well targeted, and integrated into national development strategies. Sachs advocates large-scale investments in infrastructure, education, technology, and governance systems, insisting that well-managed aid can help countries escape the "poverty trap."

Henceforth, bringing these perspectives together enables a more nuanced assessment of Chinese-funded infrastructure in Malawi. Dependency Theory illuminates the structural risks and power asymmetries embedded within foreign development partnerships, while Sachs' developmentalist view provides space to consider the potential developmental benefits that may arise when aid is strategically governed and aligned with national priorities. Rather than assuming that Chinese assistance is inherently exploitative or unquestionably developmental, this dual lens allows the study to interrogate how outcomes vary depending on who controls capital, technology, financing decisions, and the distribution of economic gains. The critical question, therefore, is whether the Crossroads Roundabout to Kanengo Junction Upgrading Project reinforces dependency dynamics or whether it functions as a catalyst for autonomous, sustainable development. To answer this question, the analysis now turns to the empirical dimensions of the project through five measurable variables derived from Dos Santos' framework monopoly of complex technology, reliance on foreign financing, repatriation of profits, foreign control of capital and technology, and foreign-oriented development to evaluate how each manifests in the Malawian context.

## III. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the political and economic implications of Chinese infrastructure aid in Malawi, with specific focus on the Crossroads Roundabout to the Kanengo Junction Upgrading Project (2021-2025). The research seeks to answer the question**:** Why does economic dependency on Chinese infrastructure aid persist in Malawi, despite the country's pursuit of development through South-South Cooperation? To address this question, the study integrates document analysis as its primary method, drawing on the traditions of interpretive political economy and critical development studies. This approach is appropriate for unpacking the structural, institutional, and discursive dimensions of aid relationships, particularly within the context of South-South cooperation.

Data were collected from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including official policy documents, loan agreements, infrastructure project reports, government press statements, and Chinese embassy communiqués. These were supplemented by scholarly journal articles, Afrobarometer survey data, think tank reports (such as SAIS-CARI), and public commentary relevant to the China-Malawi development partnership. The selected materials span the period from 2021 to 2025, corresponding with the planning and implementation timeline of the Crossroads Roundabout to the Kanengo Junction Upgrading Project.

The unit of analysis in this study is the infrastructure project itself, considered as both a financial and political instrument of development. However, the analysis extends beyond the technical features of the project to include its financing model, execution structure, stakeholder composition, and alignment with national development strategies. These dimensions are analyzed through the lens of the analytical framework, which combines Dos Santos' Dependency Theory and Jeffrey Sachs' developmentalist approach, allowing the research to interpret both structural constraints and possible avenues for transformative development. Eventually, the study operationalizes five key variables drawn from the analytical framework: technological dependence, justification of foreign financing, repatriation of profits, foreign control of project inputs, and alignment with external development interests. These variables are not quantified but explored qualitatively through interpretive reading of the documents, aiming to reveal the underlying logics, power dynamics, and policy rationales that inform Malawi's engagement with China. Hence, this qualitative design is particularly suited for a case study that prioritizes depth over breadth. It allows for a detailed, context-specific understanding of how Chinese infrastructure aid operates in practice, how it is justified in political discourse, and what it reveals about Malawi's position within broader global development structures. The method also allows for critical reflection on the nature of South-South cooperation, moving beyond rhetoric to assess its material implications for national sovereignty and development strategy.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### a. Reliance on Foreign Technology Due to Limited Local Capacity (Monopoly of a Complex Technology)

One of the clearest indicators of dependence within the Crossroads Roundabout to Kanengo Junction Upgrading Project lies in Malawi's continued reliance on foreign-specifically Chinese technology and engineering capacity. The dual-carriageway expansion, covering approximately 10 kilometres in Lilongwe, was financed at an estimated CNY 177,250,000 (approximately US$24-25 million depending on exchange year), and implemented under a turnkey model in which the Chinese construction firm Shandong Luqiao Group Co. Ltd. was contracted to deliver the full project package, from technical design to execution and machinery provision (Construction Review Online, 2023). Under this arrangement, the Roads Authority served primarily as an oversight institution rather than a technical lead, while the project manager, Peng Shiwan, oversaw the engineering and implementation process on behalf of the Chinese contractor (Construction Review Online, 2023).

This structure reinforced Dos Santos' (1970) assertion that technological monopoly is a defining mechanism of dependency, whereby peripheral states are denied control of advanced productive forces and must rely on external actors for industrial and infrastructural development. In the Malawian case, critical project components-including engineering software, prefabrication technology, machinery fleets, and quality-control systems-were imported and operated solely by the contractor. Consequently, local engineers and construction technologists had minimal involvement in the project's core technical phases, except in supervisory or basic support roles, limiting opportunities for structured knowledge transfer or institutional learning (Chimombo, 2020). The absence of a formal capacity-building clause meant that knowledge transfer was treated as informal on-site exposure rather than a deliberate

development component, contradicting national priorities articulated in Malawi 2063, which emphasizes local content and skills development (Government of Malawi, 2023).
From a developmentalist perspective, Jeffrey Sachs (2005) has long argued that foreign development assistance can serve as a catalyst for transformation only when it integrates institutional strengthening and human-capital development. Instead, the implementation model adopted for this project resembles what Sachs (2008) warns against: aid that constructs physical infrastructure but leaves the internal capacities of recipient states unchanged. While the physical road may address congestion and mobility challenges within Lilongwe's commercial and industrial corridors, the technological and managerial core of the project remained external, reinforcing Malawi's position as a consumer of foreign technology rather than an autonomous producer of it (Chimombo, 2020).
This outcome reflects precisely what Dos Santos (1970) described as technological subordination where development appears progressive on the surface, but structurally consolidates asymmetry because the means of production, adaptation, and innovation remain externally held. As a result, Malawi is likely to remain dependent on foreign contractors for similar infrastructure projects in the future, reinforcing long-term developmental vulnerability and undermining the pursuit of technological sovereignty.
The broader implication is that infrastructure aid under South-South cooperation, rather than representing a break from historical dependency patterns, may instead replicate them under new terms. Unless future aid agreements include binding requirements on skills transfer, local contracting quotas, and equipment-ownership transitions, Malawi's road-building progress will continue to mask an enduring technological dependence. In this sense, the Crossroads–Kanengo Project provides empirical evidence supporting Dos Santos' critique of structurally unequal development partnerships, while simultaneously falling short of Sachs' vision of aid as a pathway to independent growth.

**Table 1: Financial Data for the Crossroads-Kanengo M1 Dual Carriageway Project**

| Item | Value |
|---|---|
| Grant amount from China | CNY 177,250,000 |
| Equivalent in constant USD (approx.) | US$22.8 million (2018 commitment) |
| Project length | 10 km dual carriageway |
| Start date | December 28, 2020 |
| Expected completion date | December 27, 2023 |
| Actual completion | 2025 |

**Source: (Processed by the author, 2025)**

**b. Chinese Financing Framed as Necessary or Superior Due to Budget Limits (Foreign Financing)**

As highlighted earlier on, the infrastructure upgrade along the M1 corridor in Lilongwe is largely enabled through external financing, notably from the People's Republic of China. The project's structure a grant of CNY 177,250,000 (approx. US$22.8 million) for a 10-kilometre dual carriageway segment reveals that Malawi is relying on external capital for major infrastructure upgrades (Infrastructure Transparency Initiative Malawi, 2022). The specification of such financing underscores that the implementation finances are not endogenous; the country did not mobilise equivalent domestic resources to initiate this phase in isolation.
From a dependency theory lens, this financing relationship places Malawi in the role of external resource recipient, rather than equal architect of its infrastructure trajectory. According to Dos Santos (1970), when peripheral states rely on central capital flows for essential infrastructure, the dependency link is reinforced structurally: the centre retains agenda-setting power, defines modalities, and thereby influences sequencing and terms of development. In this case, the financing came with predetermined design and contractor modalities (China Ministry of Commerce via AidData records) which limited Malawi's negotiation space over local content or alternative funding options (AidData, 2018).
Moreover, while a grant might superficially appear favourable compared to high-interest loans, the fact that the grant is packaged with expectation of Chinese design, procurement, and contractor selection means the host country remains locked into a pattern of external dependency. Sachs (2005) argues that development assistance can catalyse transformation only when it allows institutional autonomy not when it imports externally driven modalities. Here, Malawi's Ministry of Transport announced the US$25 million expansion via a Chinese grant, yet the financing model did not significantly widen the space for Malawian financial innovation or project financing alternatives (Mining & Trade News, 2021).
Finally, the risk is that Malawi's future infrastructure programmes become shaped by donor/financier logic rather than local priorities. When major works rely on external financing, the recipient state may compromise sovereignty over scheduling, contractor procurement, and future maintenance funding. As such, the project advances Malawi's road network, but simultaneously institutionalises dependency via foreign-sourced financing and associated conditions, aligning with dependency theory's prediction that peripheral states are embedded in unequal financial relations (Dos Santos, 1970; Sachs, 2008).

**c. Profits Flowing Back to the Donor State with Limited Local Reinvestment (Repatriation of High Profits)**

A recurring pattern in Chinese-funded infrastructure projects in Malawi is the outward flow of economic value after project implementation. Although the Crossroads Roundabout to Kanengo dual carriageway was publicly celebrated for improving road capacity in Lilongwe's industrial and commercial corridor, the internal economic benefits remain modest because most financial gains generated during construction were not retained domestically (Infrastructure Transparency Initiative Malawi, 2022). Major supplies, construction equipment, design inputs, and specialised labour were imported, meaning the bulk of expenditures circulated within Chinese rather than Malawian markets. This dynamic restricted the multiplier effect normally associated with large-scale public works and limited opportunities for Malawian private-sector participation during implementation.

This situation illustrates what Dos Santos (1970) classifies as repatriation of economic surplus, a mechanism through which dependent states transfer value to dominant economies rather than accumulating capital internally. Chinese-funded infrastructure in Malawi often follows tied-financing structures, where project funds must be spent on goods and services sourced from the donor country (Chimombo, 2020). This model results in a closed economic loop: although funds enter Malawi as aid or investment, they are subsequently recycled back to the financier through materials procurement, expatriate salaries, and construction-related service payments. Local firms, where included, typically participate as minor subcontractors or suppliers of low-value materials a pattern that reinforces dependency rather than creating domestic capacity for industrial growth (Oh, 2021).

From a developmentalist perspective, Sachs (2005) argues that development assistance should stimulate broad economic participation, including domestic employment and local business growth. Yet, in the case of the Crossroads-Kanengo corridor, economic participation remained concentrated around foreign technical networks, with the Roads Authority and local businesses acting more as observers than partners. Without deliberate reinvestment mechanisms such as profit-sharing agreements, public reinvestment funds, local subcontracting quotas, or domestic procurement mandates infrastructure delivery can strengthen visible development outputs while simultaneously weakening the economic base required for self-sustaining growth (Mohan & Lampert, 2013).

The implications stretch beyond the immediate project. Because surplus from infrastructure development is externalised rather than retained, Malawi must repeatedly seek external financing for subsequent phases of road expansion and maintenance, entrenching a circular dependency. In this sense, the Crossroads-Kanengo project becomes an empirical example of Dos Santos' (1970) broader claim that dependency is reproduced each time the periphery consumes development but fails to accumulate the productive capacity that would enable autonomous progression. The infrastructure stands visibly transformed, yet the underlying economic foundations remain externally determined.

**d. Foreign Control of Capital, Technical Decisions, and Project Management (Foreign Control of Capital and Technology)**

Control over the key financial and technical dimensions of the Crossroads-Kanengo upgrading project reflects an asymmetrical decision-making structure in which authority was largely situated outside Malawi's institutional framework. Although the project was delivered through a publicly announced bilateral partnership, operational control including design standards, financial disbursement sequencing, procurement frameworks, and construction timelines resided primarily with external actors responsible for implementation. This dynamic aligns with Dos Santos' (1970) argument that dependency is sustained when peripheral nations lose autonomy over the most strategic levers of development, particularly capital and technology.

In practice, Malawi's participation throughout the implementation process was largely confined to supervisory oversight through the Roads Authority, while technical planning and execution decisions were directed within foreign project management hierarchies. This means that key engineering standards, quality monitoring protocols, and material selection decisions followed external templates rather than being sourced from Malawian engineering institutions or regulatory agencies. As Chimombo (2020) notes, such decision structures internalize technical authority within donor-linked networks and marginalize local institutions that might otherwise cultivate autonomous project-delivery capability. Consequently, although the infrastructure is publicly owned, the processes that determine how it is conceived, designed, and delivered remain externally controlled.

From Sachs' (2005) developmental standpoint, this type of external dominance inhibits the potential developmental spillovers that infrastructure should generate. He emphasizes that infrastructure investments must function as vehicles for institutional strengthening, capacity absorption, and autonomy-building. However, when financial capital, engineering expertise, and project management authority are consolidated exclusively in external hands, domestic institutions remain dependent unable to acquire experiential knowledge or negotiate technical decisions on equal footing (Sachs, 2008). What emerges is a model of infrastructural development that delivers tangible outputs but does not equip the recipient state with mechanisms for independent replication.

The long-term implications are significant. When foreign actors retain control over technology, oversight, and resource deployment, Malawi's development planning becomes reactive rather than strategic, relying on external arbitration rather than internal technical sovereignty. This reinforces a structural dependence in which future road projects, maintenance regimes, and infrastructural expansions are expected to require renewed external intervention consistent with Dos Santos' (1970) view that dependency persists when internal productive capability is not permitted to develop. The project, while visibly transformative, therefore deepens institutional reliance rather than enabling independent capacity.

**e. Infrastructure Shaped by External Development Priorities Rather than Domestic Planning (Foreign-Oriented Development)**

A final dimension of dependency in the Crossroads–Kanengo upgrading project concerns the orientation of infrastructure development towards external rather than internally defined priorities. Although the road expansion has been publicly framed as critical for mobility and congestion reduction within Lilongwe, the decision-making behind major Chinese-funded infrastructure projects in Malawi is often negotiated at elite bilateral levels, with limited participatory consultation or bottom-up developmental planning. As Oh (2021) notes, large transport projects financed through external partnerships tend to reflect geopolitical visibility and diplomatic symbolism rather than an organic prioritization derived from local socioeconomic needs assessments. This governance pattern raises the question of whose development logic ultimately structures these investments.

Dos Santos (1970) argues that dependency is sustained when the productive structure of peripheral economies evolves to serve external strategic interests rather than endogenous development priorities. Within this perspective, infrastructure becomes a conduit for donor influence: its placement, scale, and technical configuration align with the economic and geopolitical aspirations of the dominant partner. In Malawi's context, Chinese-funded road and public-works projects commonly cluster around politically symbolic or strategically visible zones parliamentary precincts, stadiums, capital-city arteries, and diplomatic corridors mirroring broader patterns of infrastructural diplomacy across Africa (Brautigam & Tang, 2020). The Crossroads-Kanengo corridor, situated in the capital and linking commercial and industrial zones, enhances developmental image-making and bilateral visibility, yet its selection process was not subjected to transparent public prioritization or parliamentary debate.

From a developmentalist standpoint, Sachs (2005) underscores that aid-financed infrastructure must arise from coherent national strategies built through participatory and institution-driven processes. When projects are prioritised without broad-based scrutiny or alignment with long-term industrialization goals, the result is what he describes as fragmented modernization: visible physical upgrades that coexist with persistent structural weakness. In the case of the Crossroads-Kanengo project, the absence of systematic integration with Malawi 2063 implementation frameworks and industrial capacity-building signals that the project's long-term benefits remain uncertain beyond immediate road access improvements (Government of Malawi, 2023).

The broader implication is that infrastructure delivered under South-South cooperation may reproduce patterns that Dos Santos warned against development directed outward, where the periphery adapts its internal structure to global rather than domestic logic. This type of orientation limits the transformational potential of aid because the selection, sequencing, and rationale of infrastructure no longer reflect endogenous developmental needs, but instead reinforce a clientelist dependency relationship mediated through political and diplomatic ties. Even as roads improve mobility, institutional sovereignty over development pathways becomes diluted.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine why economic dependency on Chinese-funded infrastructure persists in Malawi despite the country's pursuit of development through South–South cooperation, using the Crossroads Roundabout to Kanengo Upgrading Project as an empirical frame. The analysis showed that while the project delivers visible improvements to mobility and urban connectivity, its deeper structural implications reflect the mechanisms of dependency identified by Theotonio Dos Santos. Malawi's reliance on foreign technology, externally sourced financing, limited reinvestment, and donor-dominated decision structures reveal an infrastructure model that produces physical progress but simultaneously entrenches long-term dependency. Viewed through this lens, the project reinforces rather than disrupts the structural asymmetries between donor and recipient states, challenging the narrative that South–South cooperation inherently provides an emancipatory alternative to traditional development partnerships.

At the same time, Jeffrey Sachs' developmentalist perspective illuminates that the problem is not the presence of aid itself, but the manner in which it is governed. The project demonstrates that without strong institutional ownership, enforceable technology-transfer mechanisms, and transparent participatory planning, infrastructure aid cannot act as a catalyst for autonomous growth. Instead, the absence of domestic capacity building and profit retention mechanisms limits transformative outcomes and constrains future developmental sovereignty. Therefore, Malawi's experience suggests that meaningful progress requires a renegotiation of aid modalities toward models that embed local agency, prioritize internal capacity formation, and align external financing with national development strategies. Only through such reforms can infrastructure cooperation evolve from symbolic modernization into a foundation for genuine economic independence.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, Malawi must adopt a more assertive and strategically negotiated approach to foreign-funded infrastructure if it is to break the structural cycle of dependency illuminated through Dos Santos' theoretical framework. Strengthening institutional capacity is central to this process. Future infrastructure agreements should include binding technology-transfer provisions, transparent procurement mechanisms, and enforceable local content requirements that guarantee participation of Malawian engineers, universities, private contractors, and skilled labour. Parliament and civil-society oversight bodies must be formally integrated into project approval processes to ensure accountability and alignment with national long-term strategies such

as Malawi 2063, rather than elite bilateral political interests. Such institutional reforms would help ensure that infrastructure development contributes not only to physical connectivity but also to the building of national technical and managerial expertise.
Additionally, Malawi should diversify its development partnerships and reduce over-reliance on single-donor infrastructure financing. Expanding collaboration with regional institutions such as the African Development Bank, SACREEE, and COMESA, alongside responsible private-sector capital and blended finance tools, would create alternative pathways and strengthen bargaining power in aid negotiations. Furthermore, establishing public reinvestment frameworks, such as infrastructure maintenance funds financed through project-based revenue retention, would prevent capital from flowing outward without local economic circulation. Aligning external financing with structured strategies for industrialization and domestic revenue generation would shift Malawi from reactive dependency to proactive development planning, enabling aid to function more in the transformative spirit envisioned by Sachs rather than reinforcing systemic dependence.

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