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A Study on the Status Quo and Path Optimization of Anti-Poverty Cooperation between China and Afghanistan

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Abstract

Afghanistan is a nation plagued by decades of conflict, political instability, and economic decline. It remains one of the poorest countries in the world, and despite substantial international aid, including China's investments in infrastructure and resource development, poverty persists at alarming levels. This study investigates the status quo and potential pathways for optimising anti-poverty cooperation between China and Afghanistan. A qualitative research design was employed, and a thematic analysis of scholarly sources, government reports, and policy papers was performed to provide a comprehensive examination of the socio-economic challenges that contribute to Afghanistan's entrenched poverty. The analysis highlights Afghanistan's complex socio-economic landscape, focusing on key factors such as systemic corruption, governance inefficiencies, and environmental challenges. The study also evaluates China's role as a pivotal development partner, emphasising its strategic investments in infrastructure, mining, and agriculture. While these initiatives have the potential to position Afghanistan as a regional trade hub, their success is contingent upon addressing significant governance and security challenges. Based on the analysis, the study posits that a holistic development paradigm, characterised by robust governance, institutional fortification, and synergistic Sino-Afghan partnerships, is imperative for meaningful poverty reduction. Addressing these challenges is essential for optimising anti-poverty cooperation and ensuring that the partnership between China and Afghanistan yields sustainable and impactful outcomes.

Keywords: Sino-Afghan relations; poverty cooperation; economic development; economic diplomacy; development aid

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INTRODUCTION

Decades of conflict have scarred Afghanistan, leaving the country in the midst of dire humanitarian and economic crises. Nearly half of the population lives in poverty, a pervasive issue further exacerbated by high unemployment and underemployment (World Bank 2023). Although agriculture is the backbone of the economy, the sector is severely hampered by the impacts of climate change, ongoing conflicts, and limited access to both technology and markets. These cumulative challenges have rendered Afghanistan a fragile state incapable of providing basic services or security to its citizens (Bizhan 2018). Even with substantial financial assistance from many countries, the nation continues to

grapple with inefficient administration and insufficient progress in its economy. This predicament emphasises the necessity of development aid, which includes initiatives, programmes, grants, investments, loans, and trade-related mechanisms that promote economic growth, reduce poverty, and foster stability (Dalek 2023).

In this context, international cooperation has become a critical component of Afghanistan's development trajectory, particularly in the wake of the 2021 U.S. withdrawal. China's ascendancy as a regional economic powerhouse has established it as a pivotal partner for development. Since 2001, Beijing has contributed approximately US\$800 million in aid and infrastructural



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development, highlighting its commitment to rebuilding the war-torn nation (Ali 2022; Khan 2015). China's involvement in Afghanistan can be best understood within a broader strategy of influence-building through targeted development initiatives. Although there were difficulties in the early project implementation, early reports indicate promising progress in Afghanistan's private sector, suggesting that China's investments could act as a catalyst for economic recovery (Byrd 2024).

China views Afghanistan as an important partner. The country's strategic geographic location and untapped natural resources render it a crucial node of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The geopolitical convergence presents a unique opportunity for mutually beneficial cooperation. As a war-torn nation in dire need of reconstruction funds and state-building support, Afghanistan stands to gain immensely from Chinese investments. In turn, China can leverage Afghanistan's strategic position to expand its economic influence westward. China has emerged as a leading force in Afghanistan's post-conflict reconstruction, assuming the roles of catalyst, visionary, and benefactor in driving socioeconomic development (Huasheng and Kuchins 2012).

However, the chasm between China's substantial financial contributions and Afghanistan's persistent poverty raises critical questions about the efficacy of current development strategies. While Chinese investment has undoubtedly benefited infrastructure and trade, it remains unclear how much these gains have translated into tangible improvements in the lives of ordinary Afghans. Despite billions in foreign aid and reconstruction efforts, Afghanistan remains one of the world's poorest countries, grappling with rampant poverty, unemployment, and a struggling education system, with over one-third of its population (36%) living below the poverty line (Wigton-Jones 2021). This paradox highlights the limitations of a solely economic approach to development. Afghanistan's complex challenges, including protracted conflict, over-reliance on agriculture and foreign aid, and the absence of a comprehensive pro-poor strategy, are key factors that entrench Afghanistan's high poverty rate. The question, therefore, is not about the amount of aid but its quality, targeting, and integration into a broader, sustainable development framework. It is imperative to move beyond the prevailing paradigm of isolated projects and towards a holistic, people-centred approach that addresses the root causes of poverty. Research on China–Afghanistan relations has primarily focused on geopolitical interests, security cooperation, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and China's strategic

engagement in Afghanistan. Similarly, studies on Afghanistan's poverty have largely examined internal socioeconomic constraints, governance weaknesses, conflict, and humanitarian challenges. However, researchers have given limited attention to the intersection of Sino-Afghan cooperation and poverty reduction, especially in the context of Afghanistan's post-2021 socioeconomic transformation. Existing studies often discuss Chinese investments and development assistance separately from their potential implications for poverty alleviation and sustainable development. Therefore, understanding how to optimise bilateral cooperation for more effective poverty reduction in Afghanistan remains a gap.

This study seeks to address this gap by providing a comprehensive assessment of the current status of anti-poverty cooperation between China and Afghanistan and proposing pathways for optimising future collaboration. The study contributes to the existing literature in three ways. First, it integrates perspectives from development studies and international cooperation to examine the relationship between Chinese engagement and poverty alleviation in Afghanistan. Second, it evaluates opportunities and constraints affecting anti-poverty cooperation in the post-2021 political and economic context. Third, it proposes a policy-orientated framework for enhancing the effectiveness of Sino-Afghan cooperation in support of sustainable development and long-term poverty reduction.

This study suggests that China's involvement may offer insights into more effective anti-poverty strategies, given its own successful poverty alleviation experiences. Therefore, the study aims to examine the status quo and path optimisation of the anti-poverty cooperation between China and Afghanistan. It specifically looks at how China has helped Afghanistan build its social and economic infrastructure and how it has supported peace efforts both in Afghanistan and in the region as a whole. The research is guided by the following questions: a) what role does China play in Afghanistan's economic development, b) how has the Sino-Afghan friendship aided Afghanistan in its war against poverty, and c) how has Chinese government support facilitated anti-poverty cooperation with Afghanistan?

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the status quo and path optimisation of anti-poverty cooperation between China and Afghanistan. A



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qualitative approach is particularly appropriate because the study seeks to explore complex socioeconomic, political, and developmental issues that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative analysis alone. The research relies on documentary analysis and thematic content analysis to synthesise evidence from diverse sources and generate a comprehensive understanding of the topic (Yin et al., 2021).

Data were collected from multiple sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, policy documents, publications from international organisations, and reputable institutional reports. Key sources included reports from the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Food Programme (WFP), and other organisations involved in development and poverty reduction in Afghanistan. Additional literature on Sino-Afghan relations, economic cooperation, foreign investment, and poverty alleviation was reviewed to provide theoretical and contextual insights. (Ogunyemi et al., 2024).

The selection of documents was guided by three criteria. First, the sources had to be directly relevant to poverty, economic development, China–Afghanistan cooperation, or regional development initiatives. Second, recent publications were given priority so that the analysis

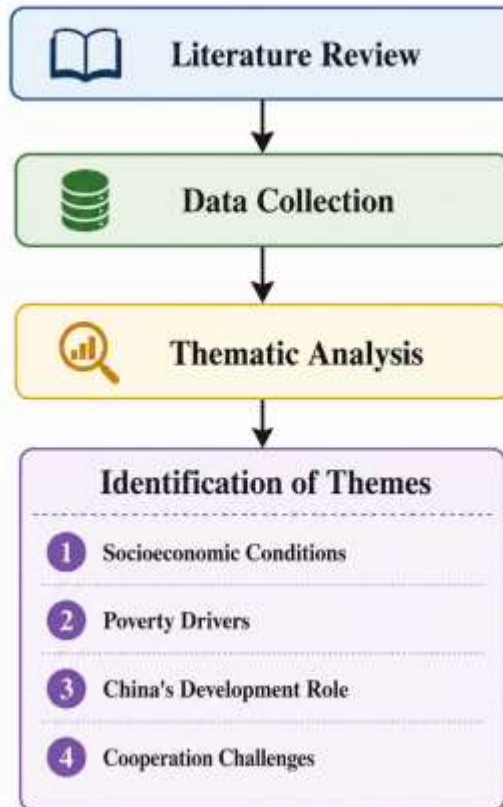
would show how the political and economic situation in Afghanistan changed after the 2021 transition. Third, only sources from credible academic, governmental, and international institutions were included to enhance the reliability of the findings (Cappelletti, 2019).

The collected materials were analysed using thematic content analysis. The analysis involved four stages. First, the documents were systematically reviewed and categorised according to their relevance to the research objectives. Second, key themes and recurring patterns were identified. Third, the findings were organised into major analytical themes, including Afghanistan's socioeconomic conditions, determinants of poverty, China's development engagement, challenges facing bilateral cooperation, and potential pathways for improving anti-poverty collaboration. Finally, the identified themes were interpreted and synthesised to generate policy recommendations and a framework for optimising future cooperation between China and Afghanistan (Naeem et al., 2023).

By integrating evidence from multiple sources and employing a systematic analytical procedure, this study provides a comprehensive assessment of the opportunities and challenges associated with Sino-Afghan anti-poverty cooperation.



Figure 1. Analytical Framework of the Study



Conceptual Framework of Sino-Afghan Anti-Poverty Cooperation

A development-orientated conceptual framework guides this study, explaining the relationship between bilateral cooperation and poverty reduction in Afghanistan. The framework posits that foreign investment or development assistance alone does not directly generate anti-poverty outcomes. Instead, poverty reduction occurs through a series of interconnected economic and institutional mechanisms (International Monetary Fund, 2006).

Within this framework, China's engagement in Afghanistan through infrastructure development, trade promotion, agricultural cooperation, resource development, and investment initiatives serves as an important catalyst for economic growth. These interventions can stimulate employment generation, improve market connectivity, enhance productive capacity, and increase government revenue. The

resulting economic opportunities contribute to income growth and improved livelihoods among local populations (Zaki & Tian, 2024).

However, governance quality, institutional capacity, transparency, and security conditions significantly influence the effectiveness of these interventions. Weak governance, corruption, political instability, and insecurity can undermine the developmental impact of investments by reducing efficiency, discouraging private sector participation, and limiting the equitable distribution of benefits. Conversely, strong institutions and effective governance can enhance the poverty-reduction effects of development cooperation by ensuring that resources are used efficiently and reach intended beneficiaries (Njoku & Mbionwu, 2025).

Accordingly, this study conceptualises poverty reduction as the outcome of the interaction between



development cooperation, economic transformation, and institutional effectiveness. The framework highlights that sustainable anti-poverty cooperation between China and

Afghanistan requires not only financial investment but also improvements in governance, security, and local capacity development.

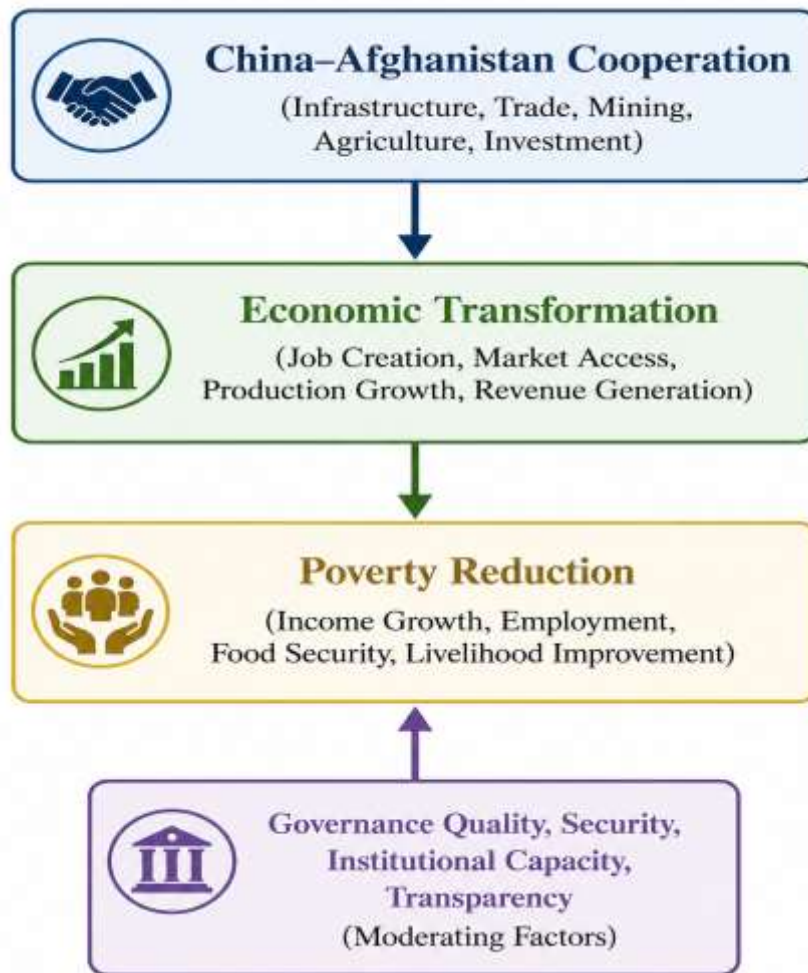


Figure 2:. Conceptual Framework of Sino-Afghan Anti-Poverty Cooperation

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Afghanistan socioeconomic background and current situation

Afghanistan is a landlocked country in South-Central Asia with a total land area of 650,000 km² (National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) 2020). It is defined by its extensive and complex borders, sharing

over 5,500 km of boundaries with Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan (Collins 2011). Historically, this strategic geographic position has significantly influenced the country's sociopolitical and



economic trajectory. Home to an estimated 32.9 million inhabitants in 2019, with a slight male majority of 51% and females making up 49% (NSIA 2020), Afghanistan's population is predominantly young, with 47.2% being under 15 years of age and 2.8% being more than 65 years. The geographical distribution is largely rural, with approximately 75% of the population residing in rural areas. Islam is the official state religion, with Sunni Muslim Pashtuns constituting the predominant ethnic group at 40%, followed by Tajiks (30%), Hazaras (15%), Uzbeks and Turkmens (10%), and other smaller minorities including Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, and Baha'i (European Union Agency for Asylum 2023; Jabarkhail and Dooley 2019).

Economically, Afghanistan has faced an unprecedented downturn since August 2021. The country experienced a staggering 20.7% contraction, followed by an additional 3.6% decline in 2022, signalling a collapse driven by international sanctions, the withdrawal of foreign aid, and structural weaknesses (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2023; World Bank 2024). This economic devastation has triggered a liquidity crisis, leading to widespread poverty and unemployment. With declining external financing for essential off-budget

expenditures and a private sector fraught with structural deficiencies, economic stagnation threatens to further deepen the crises. Currently, half of the population is already mired in poverty, and approximately 15 million people are grappling with food insecurity (World Bank 2024).

Environmental and climatic challenges further exacerbate Afghanistan's economic decline. The country has seen its third straight year of economic downturn, aggravated by drought, excessive cold, and natural calamities (Asian Development Bank 2024). Agriculture, industry, and services all witnessed large decreases, dropping by 5% to 7% recently (Figure 3).

Agriculture, traditionally the backbone of Afghanistan's economy, was particularly hard hit, with a 6.6% contraction due to severe crop losses caused by a multiyear drought—the most severe in three decades—extreme cold waves and natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods (International Fund for Agricultural Development 2020). The services sector, which is the largest part of the economy, also witnessed a 6.5% decline in 2023, following a massive 30.1% decline in 2022, reflecting the broader economic malaise that has engulfed the nation.

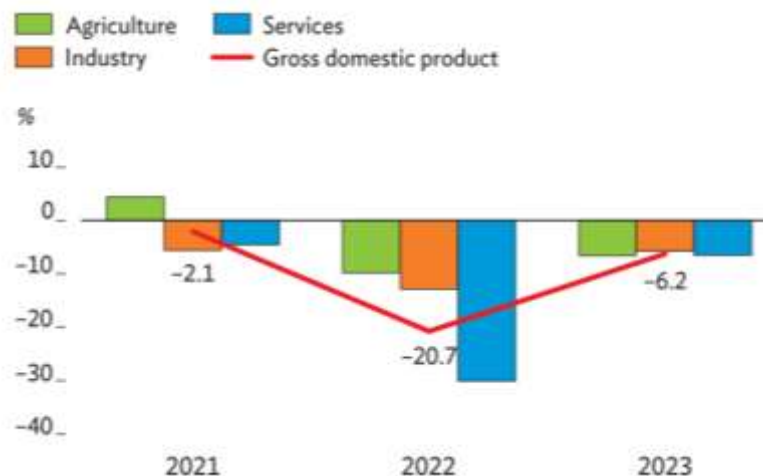


Figure 3: Economy decline for three consecutive years in agriculture, industry, and services sector.

Source: Asian Development Bank (2024)

Poverty and contributing factors

The poverty situation in Afghanistan is characterised by 47.3% of the population living below the poverty line, highlighting the country's persistent and structural poverty

(Asian Development Bank 2021). This dire situation is exacerbated by a food crisis of catastrophic proportions, with over half of the population suffering from severe



hunger, and a staggering 9 million people on the brink of famine (Samim and Zhiquan 2020). The economic hardships are further evidenced by the dismally low earnings of the employed population. In 2019, 34.3% of workers were earning less than \$1.90 a day, placing them well below the international poverty threshold (Asian Development Bank 2021).

The situation only worsened with time, as per capita income reached an all-time low in 2021 (Figure 4). By August/September 2022, the average monthly household income had plummeted to AFN6,489 (approximately

US\$75), translating to just AFN978 (US\$11.2) per person per month. The median household income was AFN6,000 (US\$69), and individuals made just AFN833 (US\$9.6) per month. These figures reveal the harsh reality faced by many Afghan households, where 4% reported having no income at all, while a significant 55% of households had expenditures that far exceeded their income, with an average monthly deficit of AFN4,217 (US\$48). The suspension of annual development assistance, which amounted to \$4.2 billion in 2019 (Batha 2022), further compounds this financial strain

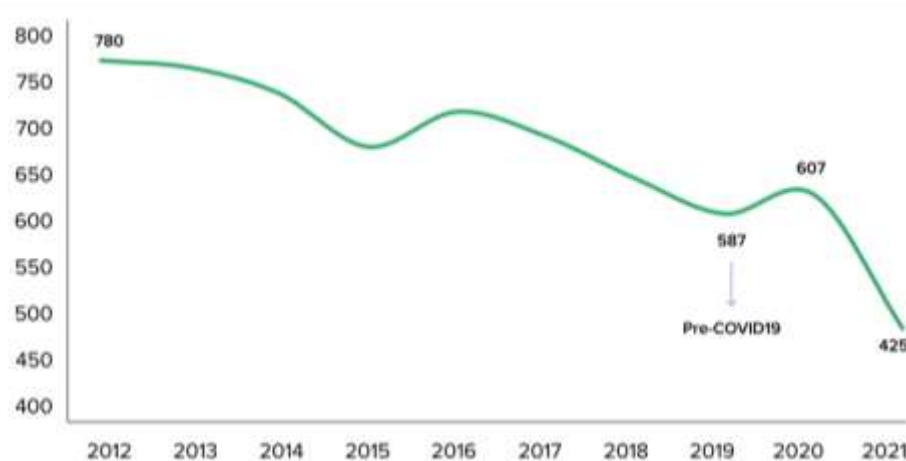


Figure 4: Afghanistan per capita GDP (US\$)

Source: UNDP (2023)

A confluence of political, economic, and social factors shapes the deeply entrenched poverty in Afghanistan, making it a complex issue. Foremost among these is the pervasive political corruption that has long plagued the nation. Afghanistan was ranked 165th out of 179 countries in the global corruption perception index in 2020, reflecting the depth of its governance challenges (Afghanistan Voluntary National Review 2021). Corruption is a systemic problem that cripples the very institutions meant to alleviate poverty. Corrupt practices that prioritise personal gain over the welfare of the people undermine the ideal of democracy, which is fundamentally based on serving the public good (Haider and Kumar 2019). The Kabul Bank scandal serves as a prime example of the deeply rooted corruption in Afghanistan. It

also shows the abuse of power and mismanagement of economic aid, which not only undermines public trust but also weakens the legitimacy of the Afghan government. Moreover, it diverts resources that are urgently required to alleviate the suffering of the people (McLeod 2016).

The US withdrawal in August 2021 and the Taliban's subsequent takeover of the nation's capital further exacerbated the already fragile economic situation in Afghanistan. The political upheaval plunged the country into a state of economic freefall, with projections suggesting that its \$20 billion economy could shrink by as much as 20%, thereby driving poverty to even more alarming levels (Vieira 2021). With business growth stifled by uncertainty, both unemployment and underemployment skyrocketed, which deprived



individuals or households of income and hindered their ability to meet basic needs and escape the poverty cycle. During the period between April and June 2023, only 12% of the population was estimated to be engaged in salaried employment, whether in the public or private sectors (World Food Programme 2023).

Cooperation between China and Afghanistan

China appears to be a beneficial and benevolent neighbour, extending substantial support to Afghanistan, particularly during times of crisis. Amid the global turmoil induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, China's provision of funds and exports played a critical role in stabilising Afghanistan's economy, resulting in an impressive 11% growth (Figure 5). While Afghanistan's exports to traditional partners like Iran and Pakistan saw a steep decline of 46.7% and 29%, respectively, exports to China surged by 78%, highlighting Beijing's pivotal role in sustaining the Afghan economy during these turbulent times (World Bank 2021).

Beijing further demonstrates its commitment to Afghanistan's development by engaging in a diplomatic relationship with the Taliban leadership. A notable example is the promotion of the 'Pine Nuts Air Corridor', a strategic initiative aimed at boosting Afghan agriculture by

exporting pine nuts to China (Wescott 2022). This initiative provided immediate economic relief and signalled China's intention to cultivate long-term agricultural partnerships. Further, China's substantial investments in Afghanistan's mining sector also highlight its strategic economic interests. As Pandey (2019) notes, the China Metallurgical Company secured mining rights worth \$4.4 billion at the Mes Aynak copper field in Logar, a deal with the potential to generate \$250-300 million annually in state revenues—an increase of 17%—and \$800 million in fees over the contract's duration.

The successful bidding for oil exploration in the Amu Darya Basin in northern Afghanistan by China National Petroleum Corporation has significantly deepened Beijing's economic influence in the country, establishing it as Afghanistan's largest foreign investor. The Afghan government will receive an estimated \$7 billion over the contract period through this 25-year agreement, which includes a revenue-sharing structure. The contract stipulates a 20% tax on income, 15% royalty, 70% revenue share, and an annual payment of \$304.35 million (Dkhar et al. 2021). The oilfields, with reserves exceeding 87 million barrels, have the potential to catalyse economic growth and development. Currently, the project provides approximately 1,500 direct and indirect jobs, a much-needed employment boost to the local population (Ariana News 2024).



Figure 5: Export growth to major trade countries
Sources: National Statistics and Information Authority, NSIA (2020)



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China and Afghanistan cooperation in anti-poverty

One of China's earliest contributions was in 2002 when it committed \$150 million for the construction and renovation of hospitals in Kabul and Kandahar. These healthcare facilities offered vital services to the Afghan population, meeting urgent medical needs and establishing a foundation for a more resilient healthcare sector (Weitz 2021). Simultaneously, the Parwan Irrigation Development project addressed another critical need, which is access to clean water for agricultural purposes. This is especially important in a country where agriculture forms the backbone of the economy. These projects were both immediate responses to the humanitarian crisis and strategic investments in Afghanistan's long-term sustainable development.

From a poverty alleviation perspective, the significance of these projects extends beyond their immediate developmental benefits. Investments in healthcare contribute to poverty reduction by improving human capital, reducing healthcare-related financial burdens, and increasing labour productivity. Similarly, irrigation infrastructure enhances agricultural productivity, which is particularly important in Afghanistan, where a substantial proportion of the population depends on agriculture for income and subsistence. Improved agricultural output can strengthen food security, increase rural household incomes, and reduce vulnerability among poor communities. These outcomes demonstrate that development cooperation can generate indirect but meaningful poverty-reduction effects when investments target fundamental socioeconomic constraints.

The Chinese involvement in Afghanistan has had far-reaching implications beyond economic assistance, particularly in inhibiting the motivations of extremist and terrorist movements (Ahmadzai and Khan 2021). The convergence of economic development and security is a strategic move, as it tackles the socio-economic circumstances that frequently breed extremism. In essence, China's policy highlights the fundamental fact that economic growth is a strong defence against instability. This strategy aligns with the tenets of capitalist peace theory, which posits that economic interdependence can be a potent deterrent to armed conflict (Jurencyk 2022). Recognising Afghanistan's strategic importance, China went on to utilise an economic approach to foster security in the region. The

shared goals of security and development have driven Sino-Afghan cooperation, which not only strengthens bilateral relations but also contributes to broader regional stability. As a result, trade relations between China and Afghanistan have seen substantial growth over the past two decades, reflecting a deepening economic interdependence between the two nations (Figure 6).

What began as modest trade exchanges has rapidly expanded. Trade volumes increased from \$19.91 million to \$704 million, which is a clear indicator of the evolving economic ties between these countries. Afghan exports to China, while still relatively small, have experienced a notable increase, rising from a mere \$0.08 million to \$11.7 million between 2002 and 2020, signalling Afghanistan's growing participation in this bilateral trade relationship (Bashardost 2019). A detailed analysis of trade data from January 2001 to April 2021 reveals that China maintained an average monthly export of \$18,913 to Afghanistan, with fluctuations reflecting the broader geopolitical and economic conditions of the time. The highest recorded export value during this period was in August 2018, when it reached \$76,903 (Rasooli et al. 2023).

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has also played a pivotal role in stabilising Afghanistan's economic development. It actively works against terrorism and supports the creation of a narcotics-free and poverty-free Afghanistan (Felbab-Brown 2020). The SCO's involvement emphasises the importance of regional cooperation in addressing complex challenges that transcend national boundaries. By providing a platform for collaborative efforts, the SCO enhances the effectiveness of anti-poverty initiatives and contributes to regional stability.

China has been a vocal advocate for creating a favourable investment environment in Afghanistan. It encourages Afghanistan to foster an investment-friendly climate for neighbouring countries and seeks assistance from the international community and the United Nations to support its development (Wei 2018). This diplomatic and economic encouragement is crucial for attracting foreign investments, which are vital for sustainable economic growth. By promoting a favourable investment environment, China helps Afghanistan build a resilient and diversified economy.

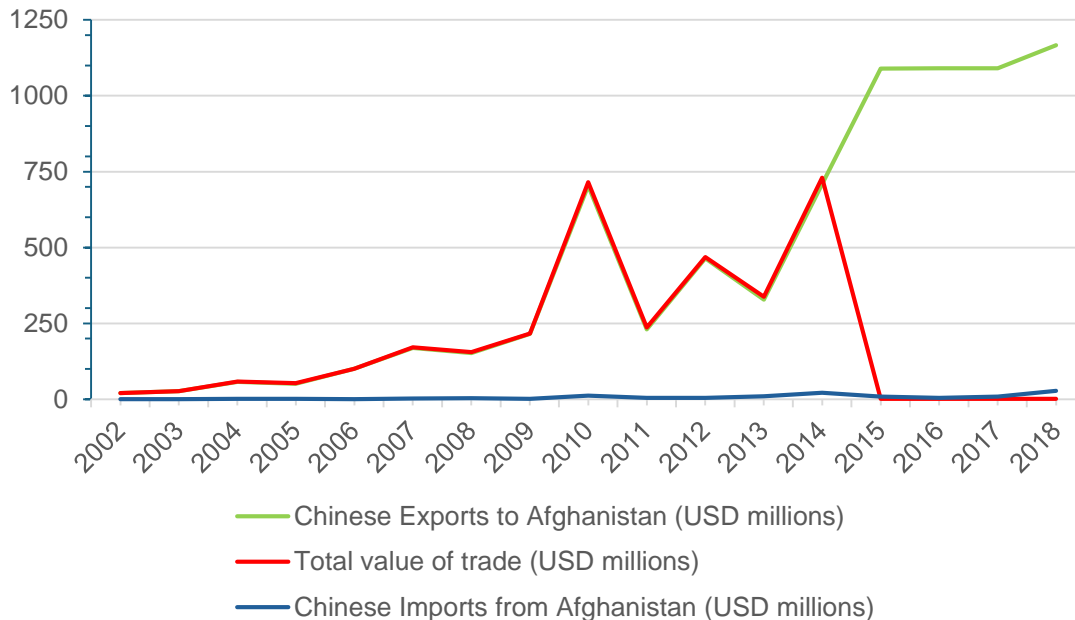


Figure 6: Trade between China and Afghanistan from 2002 to 2018
Source: Bukhari (2012), Munadi (2014), and NSIA (2018).

Anti-poverty cooperation between China and Afghanistan

The realistic dilemma

The cooperation between China and Afghanistan is built on a foundation of diplomatic relations and mutual interest in regional stability, a relationship that is rooted in the historical legacy of the Sino-Afghan friendship established in 1955 (Jureńczyk 2022). This partnership is shaped by the distinct political landscapes of the two nations. China, with its relatively stable political environment under the Chinese Communist Party, benefits from the ability to engage in long-term policy planning and execution. Afghanistan, on the other hand, has endured decades of conflict, leading to a fragile political environment. The intermittent, often violent militant attacks, terrorism, and religious extremism pose severe threats to security and stability. The Taliban's takeover in 2021 was a dramatic transition, and it presents the international community with complex challenges in governance, human rights, and security.

China's pivot towards Afghanistan represents a dramatic departure from centuries of diplomatic indifference (Ali 2020); one that is rooted in the allure of

Afghanistan's untapped mineral wealth and its strategic location as a linchpin connecting Central Asia to the Silk Road Economic Belt (Momeni and Tonzai 2021). For Afghanistan, reeling from economic isolation and the fallout of international sanctions (acaps 2023), China's overtures serve as a crucial means of support. The country's geographical, climatic, and infrastructural challenges have stifled the development of the diverse economy. As a result, people are forced to rely on the illegal drug trade, which is a perverse economic lifeline that perpetuates a vicious cycle of poverty and dependency (Prantl and Goh 2022). There is much to be done to stimulate the country's economy, particularly that generate employment opportunities for locals, so they have the means to escape the clutches of poverty.

Chinese projects, which have the potential to catalyze significant economic growth in Afghanistan, have been repeatedly thwarted by pervasive insecurity endangering both personnel and infrastructure. For example, ongoing battles for control at the Mes Aynak copper field in Logar



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province, which is a Taliban stronghold, have led to repeated attacks culminating in the evacuation of forty Chinese engineers (van der Kley 2014). The incident highlights the dire need for a secure operating environment, which is a prerequisite for any meaningful economic development. In addition, local residents have endured the hardships of forced relocation without compensation and the devastation of their essential resources (Felbab-Brown 2020). Other initiatives, such as the scrapped 400-MW coal-powered energy plant and the unbuilt rail line from Sherkhan Port to Torkham, further exemplify the challenges faced in such a precarious context (Khan 2008).

The success of Chinese bids and investments in Afghanistan creates a competitive environment, making it challenging for other countries to rival the presence of Chinese companies. For instance, a consortium of Indian companies, including Exxon Mobil, faced stiff competition from the Chinese in securing the tenders for the Shaida copper mine and the Afghan-Tajik Basin oil and gas, respectively (Aziz 2012). China's strategic advantage ultimately prevailed as it reportedly offered more enticing incentives to the Afghan government, which proved decisive in both cases. Furthermore, the growing tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, particularly in the context of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative, have not only strained bilateral relations but also significantly curtailed opportunities for broader regional cooperation.

Despite these challenges, Afghanistan's participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) remains a crucial opportunity for the country's economic growth and development. The potential benefits for Afghanistan are substantial, including infrastructure development, increased trade, and greater integration into regional markets, which could serve as catalysts for economic growth and poverty alleviation. However, these opportunities come with significant risks. As Afghanistan deepens its ties with China, the country may find itself increasingly dependent on a single, powerful neighbour, which could constrain its ability to pursue a balanced and diversified foreign policy. Furthermore, the BRI's emphasis on large-scale infrastructure projects may overlook the more nuanced and localised development needs that are crucial for sustainable poverty reduction.

Development Cooperation and Poverty Reduction Mechanisms

The evidence reviewed in this study suggests that China's contribution to poverty reduction in Afghanistan operates through several interconnected channels. First, infrastructure investments improve transportation networks, market accessibility, and economic connectivity. Second, agricultural cooperation strengthens productivity and export opportunities for rural communities. Third, mining and energy investments generate employment opportunities and government revenues that can support development programmes. Fourth, trade expansion enhances market integration and facilitates income generation among producers and businesses. Collectively, these mechanisms contribute to economic transformation and create conditions conducive to poverty reduction. However, the effectiveness of these channels is highly dependent on governance quality, institutional capacity, and security conditions, which continue to represent major constraints to sustainable development in Afghanistan.

Targeted measures for path optimization

To optimise the path of anti-poverty cooperation between China and Afghanistan, it is imperative to implement targeted measures that focus on strategically leveraging Afghanistan's abundant natural resources. The vast deposits of copper, iron, coal, and other valuable minerals are reportedly worth approximately \$1 trillion that hold significant potential for economic growth and development (Zhang 2022). By drawing on China's expertise in mining and resource management, these resources can be harnessed to create jobs, build infrastructure, and generate revenue, all of which are essential components of a robust poverty alleviation strategy. However, the approach must be grounded in principles of sustainability and responsibility. This is to ensure that the long-term benefits extend to local communities while also minimising environmental and social impacts.

Investing in infrastructure is essential to unlock Afghanistan's resource potential. Chinese investments in



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roads, railways, and energy supply would not only support the mining sector but also improve access to markets and services, boosting the broader economy. Additionally, technology transfer and capacity building are crucial for empowering Afghanistan to develop its own mining capabilities, reducing dependency on foreign expertise and creating sustainable economic benefits. To further optimize this cooperation, promoting value-added industries related to mining, such as metal processing and manufacturing, would diversify Afghanistan's economy and create more jobs. Encouraging private sector involvement, particularly through partnerships between Chinese and Afghan enterprises, could drive investment and development, contributing to economic growth and poverty reduction.

Large-scale investments in the mining and energy sectors possess significant potential to contribute to poverty alleviation through employment generation, government revenue creation, and infrastructure development. If managed effectively, resource extraction projects can provide financial resources for public services, education, healthcare, and rural development programmes. Nevertheless, international experience suggests that natural resource wealth does not automatically translate into poverty reduction. The developmental benefits of resource-based investments depend heavily on governance quality, transparency, and equitable distribution of revenues. Without strong institutional oversight, resource projects risk reinforcing regional inequalities and generating limited benefits for vulnerable populations.

Regional collaboration, particularly through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), offers an opportunity to integrate Afghanistan's resource sector into a broader, resilient regional economy. By attracting international investment and creating an investment-friendly environment, China and Afghanistan can foster economic stability and reduce poverty. However, these efforts must address significant challenges, including security concerns and corruption. Improving local governance and security, along with combating corruption and ensuring transparency, are critical for creating a safe and equitable environment for resource development. Through these targeted measures, the cooperation between China and Afghanistan can effectively optimize the path to poverty reduction and sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

This study on the status quo and path optimization of anti-poverty cooperation between China and Afghanistan reveals a complex but promising landscape. China's investments in Afghanistan, particularly through infrastructure development, have the potential to transform the country into a regional trade hub. However, realising this potential requires addressing significant challenges, especially in terms of security and governance. The current governance environment in Afghanistan, marred by corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies, poses a serious obstacle to the effective implementation and management of anti-poverty initiatives. The deficiencies in coordination between Chinese and Afghan agencies also complicate these efforts, often resulting in fragmented and inefficient project execution.

For Sino-Afghan cooperation to truly contribute to sustainable poverty alleviation, it is crucial to address these institutional weaknesses. Establishing robust governance frameworks and transparent processes can enhance coordination, improve efficiency, and ultimately lead to more successful outcomes. By focusing on strengthening institutional capacities and ensuring better governance, the partnership between China and Afghanistan can achieve more impactful and lasting development results. These measures are not just necessary for the immediate success of anti-poverty projects but are also essential for breaking the cycle of poverty and dependency that has long hindered Afghanistan's development. In conclusion, while China's involvement in Afghanistan presents significant opportunities, the true measure of this partnership's success will be determined by its ability to overcome internal challenges, thereby optimizing the path toward sustainable development and long-term poverty reduction. Without addressing these foundational issues, the promise of Sino-Afghan cooperation risks being undermined, leaving both countries short of their shared aspirations for development.

Author Contributions

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Ethical approval

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