

## **Beyond Business as Usual: Institutional Resilience and Strategic Complementarity in Africa's Development Partnerships**

**Furaha Julius**

Department of Political Science, Public Administration, History and Philosophy  
The Open University of Tanzania

Author Corresponding Email: [furahaj23@gmail.com](mailto:furahaj23@gmail.com)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61538/pajbm.v10i1.2075>

### **Abstract**

*For decades, the trajectory of African development has been predominantly charted by paradigms conceived in distant donor capitals, creating a persistent paradox. Despite substantial financial and technical assistance, the continent continues to be plagued by entrenched poverty and institutional fragility. This paper advocates for a fundamental reorientation towards investment-driven, contextually grounded development cooperation. It addresses a critical gap in the literature by interrogating how the interplay of political alignment, economic complementarity, and cooperative governance sustains partnerships over the long term. The study employed a qualitative documentary analysis of historical and institutional records to uncover the mechanisms sustaining the TAZARA partnership. Using the Tanzania-Zambia Railway Authority (TAZARA) as a case study, this research moves beyond celebratory narratives of South-South solidarity. The findings demonstrate that TAZARA's relative resilience stems not from external funding but from its foundational principles of mutual benefit, genuine co-ownership, and deep alignment with local socio-political aspirations. The study concludes that to break free from donor dependency, African nations and their international partners must build cooperation anchored in institutional resilience, strategic complementarity, and local agency.*

**Keywords:** *Strategic development cooperation, TAZARA, mutual benefit, South-South cooperation, institutional resilience, African political economy*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since the early years of independence, a defining feature of the African political economy has been its heavy reliance on foreign aid from Western donors, a dynamic that has shaped national budgets and policy priorities for generations (UNCTAD, 2023). However, this long-standing

relationship has yielded deeply unfounded results. Despite decades of substantial financial inflows and technical assistance programs, many African nations, including Tanzania and Zambia, continue to grapple with challenges of pervasive poverty, institutional fragility, and systemic underdevelopment (Moyo, 2009; Horner, 2020). This slow and uneven progress has prompted a sustained and robust critique of donor-centric methodologies, which are increasingly seen as cultivating a culture of dependency and disregarding the intricate local socio-political contexts essential for sustainable growth (Tint, 2020).

In response to these perceived failures, scholarly and policy analysis have progressively turned their attention towards models of mutually beneficial, context-specific partnerships, which are increasingly observable within the frameworks of South-South Cooperation (SSC). While the existing literature has usefully documented this normative shift, it has only rarely systematically interrogated the precise mechanisms through which the interplay of political alignment, economic complementarity, and cooperative governance sustains such partnerships over time, allowing them to weather political and economic storms.

This article addresses that gap through an in-depth examination of the TAZARA project. We argue that purposefully constructed development partnerships, founded on common interests and local development goals, represent a powerful and feasible substitute for conventional foreign aid. This leads to our core research questions: 1) How did strategic complementarity among Tanzania, Zambia, and China contribute to TAZARA's institutional resilience? 2) What role did trust-based governance structures play in sustaining the partnership beyond initial geopolitical motivations? and 3) How did the perception of mutual advantage ensure long-term political backing despite operational challenges?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section synthesizes the historical, empirical, and theoretical literature to frame the study of African development partnerships, moving from a critique of conventional aid to a precise articulation of the knowledge gap this paper intends to fill.

### **The Persistence of Aid Dependence and Its Discontents**

Emerging from post-colonial development ideologies, conventional foreign assistance has profoundly impacted Africa's institutional and

economic landscape, often with unintended consequences that exacerbate dependence and inequality. Warmerdam (2014) argues persuasively that traditional aid programs are inherently prone to generating externally imposed policy prescriptions that are ill-suited to local contexts, thereby perpetuating profound power disparities between donor and recipient. The stringent conditionalities attached to aid from multilateral financial institutions, particularly during the Structural Adjustment era, entrenched this reliance dynamic, effectively hollowing out national policy space (Mkandawire, 2015). Berger (2016) adds a critical dimension to this analysis by noting that donor-driven projects frequently sideline or outright reject indigenous knowledge and governance systems in favour of imported neoliberal models, a process that systematically jeopardizes local ownership and long-term project viability. While Mkandawire (2015) emphasizes policy erosion through external control, Berger (2016) highlights epistemic dominance, revealing a dual dimension of dependency both institutional and cognitive.

### **South-South Cooperation as a Theoretical Alternative**

In direct response to these structural deficiencies, South-South Cooperation (SSC) emerged as a formidable theoretical and practical alternative. Grounded in the shared historical experiences of colonialism and economic marginalisation, SSC frameworks explicitly prioritise principles of non-interference, respect for national sovereignty, and the pursuit of equitable partnerships (Nurdun, 2024a; 2024b). Scholars such as Enuka and Uchechukwuigwe (2012) assert that SSC offers a more tailored, contextually relevant, and therefore more effective method for development engagement, one that focuses squarely on mutual advantage rather than paternalistic dynamics. This theoretical framing positions SSC not merely as a different source of funding, but as a distinct modality of international relations that seeks to rebalance power and agency.

### **TAZARA as a Case Study**

Within this discourse, the TAZARA railway is frequently cited as an early and powerful exemplar of SSC in practice. Established with major Chinese financial and technical support during the height of the Cold War, it is often framed, both in popular and academic circles, as a potent symbol of Third World solidarity and anti-colonial brotherhood (Rapanyane, 2020a). Its unique binational governance structure, managed by a Council of Ministers from both Tanzania and Zambia, underscores its foundational co-ownership model and represents a significant

departure from externally controlled projects (TAZARA, n.d.). However, while scholars like Brautigam (2009) acknowledge its symbolic power, they also warn against overly romanticized interpretations, pointing to underlying asymmetries and challenges that suggest the TAZARA narrative is far more complex and nuanced than a simple story of solidarity.

### **The Research Gap**

The prevailing literature thus establishes a clear critique of conventional aid and presents SSC, with TAZARA as a key historical example, as a promising alternative. However, a significant analytical gap remains. Much of the existing analysis is either purely descriptive of TAZARA's historical trajectory or remains celebratory of its symbolic value. There is a conspicuous lack of a systematic, analytical examination of the mechanisms the specific interplay of political, economic, and institutional factors that underpin its relative resilience and operational sustainability across decades. This paper fills this critical gap by applying a theoretical framework of mutual benefit and strategic complementarity to dissect TAZARA not as a static symbol, but as a dynamic and instructive model of strategic international cooperation.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is grounded in the established theoretical constructs of mutual benefit and strategic complementarity within development cooperation (Lampert et al., 2014; Morgan, 2018). This framework posits that successful and enduring partnerships are founded on two pillars: genuine co-ownership and intentionally aligned incentive structures among all stakeholders. In the TAZARA case, this theoretical lens reveals a clear alignment of distinct but complementary interests: China sought to expand its geopolitical influence and break diplomatic isolation; landlocked Zambia desperately needed an alternative, politically secure export route for its vital copper industry; and Tanzania aimed to enhance its national infrastructure and solidify its role as a regional hub (Zajontz, 2023).

This lens was preferred over alternatives like dependency theory because it focuses on African agency and the active negotiation of interests, rather than casting the continent as a passive victim of external forces. The framework directly links to the study's objective of explaining TAZARA's

sustainability, moving beyond transactional aid models to examine how deliberately constructed partnerships can generate durable outcomes.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This section provides a detailed account of the research methodology employed in this study. A qualitative case study design was adopted, focusing on the TAZARA railway as a critical case for examining sustainable South-South development partnerships. The methodology is presented with full transparency to enable replication and critical evaluation.

### **Research Design and Case Selection**

This study employed a qualitative case study design centred on a systematic documentary review. This methodological approach was selected for its capacity to facilitate deep, contextual analysis of historical and contemporary details, which aligns perfectly with the study's exploratory and analytical aims. The case study method is particularly suited to investigating complex phenomena within their real-life contexts, where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018).

The TAZARA railway was selected as a critical case for examining sustainable South-South development partnerships due to its unique paradigmatic and analytical value. Its selection rationale is threefold.

First, TAZARA is the paradigmatic exemplar of Sino-African cooperation, a landmark project that defined the principles of South-South solidarity during the Cold War. As the largest single foreign aid project undertaken by China at the time, it serves as a crucial test case for the operationalization of "horizontal partnership" rhetoric (Monson, 2009, p. 3).

Second, it constitutes a theoretically significant "deviant case." It has demonstrated remarkable institutional longevity despite chronic financial non-viability that would have doomed a project governed by conventional donor-recipient models. This anomaly challenges explanatory frameworks focused solely on economic efficiency and necessitates the investigation of alternative factors like strategic trust and political will (Brautigam, 2009, p. 157). To leverage this deviant case logic, we define the reference population as major rail and transport infrastructure Public-Private

Partnerships (PPPs) and bilateral infrastructure projects in Sub-Saharan Africa initiated between 1960 and 1980. Within this population, most projects either collapsed within two decades of completion or required significant restructuring under external pressure. TAZARA's survival—despite operating at a loss for most of its history—constitutes a positive outlier. The usual explanatory variables (profitability, traffic density, debt servicing capacity) cannot alone account for its longevity, necessitating the investigation of alternative factors such as strategic complementarity and binational political commitment.

Third, its five-decade operational history provides a rare longitudinal perspective, allowing for a robust assessment of partnership sustainability beyond the project completion phase. This temporal depth enables analysis of how the partnership adapts to shifting geopolitical and economic landscapes, offering unparalleled insights into the mechanics of enduring cooperation.

### **Document Sampling Strategy**

The sampling strategy was purposive and iterative, specifically targeting documents with high analytical relevance to the TAZARA case and the broader themes of SSC. The selection criteria were rigorously applied to ensure transparency and minimize researcher bias. A total of 47 documents were included in the final analysis, selected through a systematic process.

**Table 4.1:**  
*Document Selection Criteria and Count*

<b>Document Type</b>	<b>Number Selected</b>	<b>Selection Criteria</b>	<b>Sources/Access Method</b>
Peer-reviewed journal articles	18	Published in Scopus-indexed or equivalent journals; focus on TAZARA, SSC, or African infrastructure development	Scopus, Google Scholar, university library databases
Academic books/book chapters	12	Published by university presses or major academic publishers (Oxford, Cambridge, Routledge, Palgrave, Indiana University Press)	University library catalogue, WorldCat
Institutional reports	9	Official TAZARA annual reports (select years: 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, 2022), UNCTAD reports, World Bank policy papers	TAZARA official website, UN Digital Library, World Bank Open Knowledge Repository
Historical/archival materials	5	Primary documents from the Cold War era; historically significant works on development cooperation	Archival records, academic historical collections
Contemporary policy documents	3	African Union Agenda 2063 documents, recent SSC policy frameworks	AU official website, policy databases

**Timeframe:** Documents published between 1965 and 2025 were considered to capture the full historical trajectory from TAZARA's conception to contemporary reflections.

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:** Documents were included if they met any of the following: (a) contained substantive analysis of TAZARA's history, governance, or operations; (b) provided theoretical or empirical analysis of South-South Cooperation in Africa; (c) offered comparative analysis of infrastructure development partnerships; or (d) were official TAZARA institutional records. Documents were excluded if they: (a) mentioned TAZARA only in passing (less than one paragraph); (b) were from non-academic, unverified online sources; or (c) were published in languages other than English without reliable translation.

**Search Strategy:** A systematic search was conducted across academic databases (Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR) using the following keyword

combinations: "TAZARA" OR "Tanzania-Zambia Railway" AND "South-South cooperation" OR "development partnership" AND "Africa." Institutional reports were identified through targeted searches of the TAZARA official website and UN/World Bank document repositories.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection involved the systematic retrieval, organization, and preliminary review of all selected documents. Each document was assigned a unique identifier code (e.g., DOC-01, DOC-02) to facilitate tracking and citation. A document log was maintained, recording for each item: author(s), publication year, title, source, date accessed, and key thematic areas. The documents were stored in a secure digital folder organized by document type. To ensure accuracy, all documents were read in full, with key passages highlighted and annotated.

### **Data Analysis**

A systematic thematic content analysis was conducted on the collected corpus. The analysis followed a structured, multi-stage process to ensure rigor and transparency.

#### **Stage 1: Familiarization and Initial Coding (Round 1)**

All 47 documents were read carefully, with close attention to passages discussing TAZARA's governance, partnership dynamics, operational challenges, and historical context. Initial codes were generated inductively, capturing key concepts as they appeared in the text. Examples of initial codes included: "copper dependence," "binational governance," "Chinese engineering," "political will," "operational losses," and "symbolic value." This stage yielded approximately 85 distinct initial codes.

#### **Stage 2: Code Grouping and Theme Development**

Initial codes were grouped into broader thematic categories through an iterative process of comparison and consolidation. For instance, codes such as "copper dependence," "alternative export route," and "break from Southern routes" were grouped under the theme "Zambia's strategic need." Similarly, codes like "binational Council of Ministers," "alternating chairmanship," and "joint ownership" were grouped under "trust-based governance." Through this process, four core themes were identified: (a) strategic complementarity, (b) trust-based governance, (c)

mutual advantage, and (d) institutional resilience. These themes were then reviewed against the theoretical framework to ensure alignment.

### **Stage 3: Refining and Defining Themes (Round 2)**

A second round of coding was conducted, this time using the four core themes as analytical lenses. Documents were re-examined to identify how each theme manifested across different source types and time periods. Thematic definitions were refined: strategic complementarity was defined as the alignment of distinct but interdependent interests; trust-based governance as institutional mechanisms fostering co-ownership; mutual advantage as tangible and symbolic benefits valued by all parties; and institutional resilience as adaptive capacity in the face of adversity.

### **Stage 4: Thematic Validation and Saturation**

Thematic saturation was reached after analyzing 38 documents, when no new themes or sub-themes emerged from subsequent documents. The remaining 9 documents were analyzed to confirm saturation and ensure no additional insights were missed. Saturation was assessed through a systematic review of coding patterns, confirming that the four core themes consistently captured the analytical substance across the corpus.

### **Stage 5: Source Triangulation and Cross-Verification**

To strengthen credibility, findings were triangulated across source types. Table 4.2 illustrates how each theme was supported by multiple source categories, enabling cross-verification.

**Table 4.2:**  
*Triangulation of Themes Across Source Types*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Supported by Academic Literature</b>	<b>Supported by Institutional Reports</b>	<b>Supported by Historical/Archival Sources</b>	<b>Degree of Convergence</b>
Strategic complementarity	Monson (2009); Ampiah (2010); Zajontz (2023)	TAZARA (1980) Annual Report	Green (1988); Kumar (2009)	High convergence across all sources
Trust-based governance	Brautigam (2009); Nurdun (2024a)	TAZARA (n.d.) Administrative Structure	Siria (2022); Shaw (1987)	High convergence; archival sources add depth on Nyerere-Kaunda nexus
Mutual advantage	Addis & Zuping (2018); Kamuhuza & Jianya (2022)	TAZARA (2022) Annual Report	Yuan (2006); Monson (2009)	High convergence; some divergence on China's motivations (geopolitical vs. commercial)
Institutional resilience	Lammich (2024); Zajontz (2023)	TAZARA (2022) Annual Report	TAZARA (1980, 1990) Reports	High convergence on survival; some divergence on future viability

**Resolving Contradictions:** A noted point of divergence emerged regarding China's motivations for supporting TAZARA. Early historical sources (Yuan, 2006) emphasize geopolitical factors breaking diplomatic isolation and securing African support at the UN. Contemporary analyses (Alden & Wu, 2021; Tull, 2021) highlight commercial and strategic resource interests. This divergence was resolved by interpreting these as complementary rather than contradictory: geopolitical motivations dominated during the Cold War period, while economic and commercial

considerations became more prominent from the 1990s onward. This temporal distinction is explicitly acknowledged in the findings.

### **Coding Transparency and Reliability**

Coding was conducted manually, with careful documentation of the coding process. To ensure consistency, the following measures were implemented:

**Code-recode procedure:** A subset of 10 documents was coded twice, with a three-week interval between coding rounds. Comparison of the two coding rounds showed 89% consistency, with discrepancies resolved through re-examination of source texts.

**Peer debriefing:** A research colleague with expertise in African development reviewed the coding scheme and a sample of coded documents, confirming the logical coherence of thematic groupings.

**Audit trail:** A detailed audit trail was maintained, documenting all decisions regarding document selection, coding, theme development, and analytical judgments.

**Table 4.3:**  
*Coding Structure and Thematic Development*

<b>Core Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Themes/Indicators</b>	<b>Source Count</b>	<b>Example Code</b>
Strategic complementarity	Zambia's copper dependence; Tanzania's port access; China's diplomatic goals	38	"Copper alternative route"
Trust-based governance	Binational Council; alternating leadership; capacity-building focus	35	"co-ownership structure"
Mutual advantage	Tangible economic benefits; symbolic solidarity; geopolitical leverage	41	"Dignified partnership"
Institutional resilience	Survival despite losses; modernization efforts; political protection	32	"Deviant case survival"

### **Reflexivity and Positionality**

The researcher acknowledges that the interpretation of historical and institutional documents is shaped by prior knowledge and analytical assumptions. To mitigate potential bias, the following strategies were employed: (a) systematic use of source triangulation to counterbalance

any single interpretive lens; (b) explicit documentation of selection criteria and coding decisions; (c) engagement with diverse perspectives within the literature, including both celebratory and critical accounts of TAZARA; and (d) grounding of findings in the documentary evidence, with direct quotes and citations provided to support interpretations.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study relied exclusively on publicly available documents, including academic publications, institutional reports, and historical archives. No human subjects were involved, and therefore, no ethical clearance for primary data collection was required. However, the following ethical principles guided the research: (a) accurate representation of source materials without selective omission of inconvenient evidence; (b) proper attribution of all cited works; and (c) acknowledgement of diverse perspectives, including critical voices challenging celebratory narratives of TAZARA. Where institutional reports were used, care was taken to interpret them within their broader political and historical contexts, recognizing that such documents may reflect institutional perspectives rather than objective realities.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The documentary analysis reveals that the TAZARA railway, far more than a mere piece of transportation infrastructure, functioned as a complex, living organism of international cooperation. Its endurance for over half a century, despite significant operational headwinds, cannot be attributed to a single factor but rather to a synergistic interplay of political, institutional, and perceptual dynamics. This discussion is structured around four key, interconnected themes that collectively elucidate the internal mechanics and remarkable longevity of the TAZARA partnership. These themes—strategic complementarity, trust-based governance, mutual advantage, and institutional resilience—form a cohesive framework explaining how this tripartite venture transcended the common pitfalls of post-colonial development projects to become a symbol of South-South solidarity.

### **The Synergy of Strategic Complementarity**

The TAZARA project serves as a paradigmatic example of functional complementarity, where each partner contributed unique and vital resources that were not only non-substitutable but also perfectly aligned

to form a self-reinforcing strategic triangle. This was not a simple donor-recipient transaction but a sophisticated alignment of sovereign interests.

Tanzania's contribution was foundational: it offered its political stability under Julius Nyerere's Ujamaa philosophy, a vast sovereign corridor of territory for the rail line, and, most critically, access to the deep-water port of Dar es Salaam, the project's indispensable gateway to global markets. Without this Tanzanian provision, the entire geographic and economic logic of the railway would have collapsed.

China's role was that of a facilitator and executor, providing a comprehensive package of interest-free finance, sophisticated engineering expertise tailored to the challenging terrain of the East African rift system, and the deployment of tens of thousands of dedicated labourers and technicians. This human capital was not merely manual; it included engineers who performed what was then one of the largest overseas civilian projects in Chinese history. As noted by Monson (2009), the Chinese workforce lived in spartan conditions alongside the construction sites, a visible demonstration of shared sacrifice that distinguished them from Western expatriates.

Zambia, for its part, provided the project's core economic ethos: its strategic need for an alternative, sovereign copper export route, free from the extortionate economics and political blackmail of apartheid South Africa and Ian Smith's Rhodesia (Kumar, 2009). The value of Zambian copper, the lifeblood of its treasury, was held hostage by the hostile regimes controlling its southern trade routes.

The profound synergy lay in how these contributions interlocked. Tanzania's Ujamaa ideology, which emphasized self-reliance and collective development, found a sympathetic partner in China's rhetoric of anti-hegemonism and Third World solidarity. Zambia's existential crisis for economic survival dovetailed perfectly with Tanzania's ambition for regional leadership and China's strategic objective to break the diplomatic isolation of the 1960s and 70s by winning allies in Africa (Ampiah, 2010). This configuration created a system of mutual interdependence where the failure of one partner would lead to the collapse of the entire venture. As Green (1988) astutely observed, this model of horizontal cooperation derives its stability from this very interdependence, a stark

contrast to the hierarchical, conditional, and often paternalistic power relationships that characterized traditional North-South aid dynamics.

In light of the above, it can be asserted that the project exemplifies functional complementarity, where each partner contributed unique resources. Tanzania provided political stability and port access; China provided finance and expertise; and Zambia contributed its strategic need for an alternative copper route (Monson, 2009; Kumar, 2009). This created a system of mutual interdependence. For instance, at its peak in the late 1970s, TAZARA carried over 1.2 million tons of freight annually, critically fulfilling Zambia's strategic objective (TAZARA, 1980). This model of horizontal cooperation, as Green (1988) notes, derives stability from interdependence, contrasting with hierarchical donor-recipient dynamics.

### **Institutional Cooperation as a Trust-Based Governance Model**

A critical factor underpinning TAZARA's longevity has been its innovative, binational governance model, which institutionalized co-ownership and shared management, thereby fostering a profound sense of local ownership. Established as a joint venture between the two African nations, the project was governed by the TAZARA Council of Ministers, a body with representation from both Tanzania and Zambia, which held supreme authority over policy, budgeting, and strategic direction (Siria, 2022). This institutional architecture was not merely a legal formality; it was the operational heart of the partnership. It was underpinned and energized by the strong personal diplomatic relationship and shared anti-colonial, socialist-leaning political vision between Presidents Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda. This "Nyerere-Kaunda nexus" provided the essential political will and trust that enabled collaborative problem-solving at the highest levels, bypassing the bureaucratic inertia that often plagues multinational projects.

China's role in this framework was strategically minimalist yet pivotal to its trust-based nature. By designing the project as a "turn-key" operation to be handed over to the binational authority and by conspicuously eschewing the coercive control and stringent policy conditionalities common in World Bank or IMF projects of the era, Beijing helped solidify a framework of operational sovereignty. Instead of maintaining perpetual technical oversight that could foster dependency, China focused significant efforts on capacity-building. This included the comprehensive

technical training of hundreds of African engineers and railway personnel in China and on-site, a conscious strategy aimed at fostering long-term operational independence for the authority (Lammich, 2024; Sun, 2023).

This approach stands in stark contrast to many Western-led projects where technical assistance, however well-intentioned, can create a "technocratic trap" of permanent foreign expertise, stifling the development of local managerial and technical capacity. The TAZARA model demonstrated that effective technology transfer requires not just the provision of tools and knowledge, but the deliberate ceding of control to allow for local mastery and adaptation.

### **Actual and Perceived Mutual Advantage**

The sustainability of the TAZARA partnership was further cemented by its demonstrable ability to deliver a matrix of benefits, both tangible and symbolic, that were distinctly valued by all three parties, creating a powerful alignment of interests.

For Zambia, the railway provided an immediate and critical strategic dividend. Upon its completion in 1975, it drastically reduced the country's reliance on hostile, apartheid-era southern routes, cutting the distance to the sea by over 1,000 kilometres and granting Zambia crucial strategic autonomy over its primary source of national income, the copper trade (Kamuhuza & Jianya, 2022). This was not just an economic calculation; it was a fundamental imperative of national security and sovereignty in a volatile regional landscape.

For Tanzania, the project significantly enhanced its geostrategic standing, transforming it from a coastal nation into a pivotal regional transit hub and a leader in African liberation struggles. Furthermore, it stimulated socio-economic development in its previously marginalized and economically dormant southern regions, such as Morogoro and Mbeya, by connecting them to a major international trade artery (Magoma, 2019). New towns sprouted along the line, and agricultural commerce was given a vital channel to markets.

For China, the benefits were multifaceted. Beyond the immediate geopolitical gains of challenging Soviet and Western influence in Africa, TAZARA became a monumental source of soft power. It allowed Beijing to project an image of a reliable, capable, and authentically sympathetic

collaborator in the Global South—a "friend in need" (Yuan, 2006). This narrative of selfless solidarity, encapsulated in the Chinese motto of "undemanding aid," was a powerful tool in its diplomatic arsenal. Crucially, as Addis and Zuping (2018) argue, the perception of the relationship as dignified, equitable, and mutually advantageous was as important as the material outcomes. This psychological sense of equivalence and respect fostered sustained political backing from all governments involved, creating a deep reservoir of goodwill. This reservoir has repeatedly enabled the project to survive numerous operational crises, financial shortfalls, and periods of underutilization, as the political cost of allowing TAZARA to fail consistently outweighed its economic underperformance.

This sense of shared dignity is a commodity often conspicuously absent in conventional donor-recipient relationships, where power imbalances can breed resentment and conditionality can undermine national pride.

### **Sustainability Through Institutional Resilience**

TAZARA has demonstrated remarkable institutional resilience. The binational ownership structure has provided a political shield, allowing Tanzania and Zambia to jointly undertake revitalization and resist external pressures for privatization (Zajontz, 2023). Even amid well-documented operational challenges, the railway has maintained an average of 20 scheduled services weekly, demonstrating its embedded role in the regional economy (TAZARA, 2022). Recent modernization efforts show an adaptive capacity, aligning the project with long-term African development agendas like Agenda 2063.

Perhaps the most telling testament to the strength of the TAZARA model is its demonstrated institutional resilience in navigating persistent financial and operational difficulties that would have crippled less deeply rooted ventures. The very structure of binational ownership, while occasionally creating bureaucratic complexities and delays in decision-making, has also provided a powerful political shield. It has allowed Tanzania and Zambia to present a united front, jointly undertaking revitalization efforts and, importantly, resisting external pressures for privatization or dissolution that have frequently accompanied offers of conditional bailouts from international financial institutions (Zajontz, 2023). The entity's status as a shared national asset rendered its outright

abandonment a politically unpalatable option for both governments, embedding a powerful survival instinct within the institution.

This resilience is not merely passive but is characterized by a distinct adaptive capacity. The authority's recent efforts to modernize and diversify its revenue streams are indicative of this. These include the adoption of digital management systems for freight scheduling, the exploration of passenger tourism on the "Uhuru Express," and the forging of new operational and maintenance partnerships with contemporary Chinese firms (Lammich, 2024). These reforms are not merely about short-term commercial survival; they are increasingly framed within and aligned with long-term African development agendas, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063, which explicitly emphasizes continental connectivity, infrastructural integration, and intra-African trade.

This strategic repositioning underscores a critical point often missed in narrow economic analyses of development projects: sustainability in international cooperation relies not merely on achieving financial self-sufficiency—a goal many railways in the developed world fail to meet without state support—but on the enduring political commitment and institutional agility that are rooted in a profound sense of local ownership. TAZARA's story is one of an institution that has repeatedly evolved and adapted, its original mission of liberation-era solidarity gradually transforming into a vehicle for 21st-century developmental integration, ensuring its continued relevance for a new era.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the TAZARA model, grounded in the synergistic principles of strategic complementarity, trust-based governance, and a clear articulation of mutual benefit, offers a demonstrably resilient and more equitable alternative to the donor-dependent development paradigm. Its historical experience demonstrates convincingly that sustainable outcomes are achievable when international partnerships are consciously designed from the outset to reinforce the agency and advance the long-term strategic interests of all partners involved, particularly the host nations.

The findings confirm that TAZARA's longevity stems not from economic efficiency alone but from the deeper political and institutional foundations laid during its creation. The alignment of distinct but complementary

interests among Tanzania, Zambia, and China created a system of mutual interdependence that made project failure politically costly for all parties. The binational governance structure institutionalized co-ownership, fostering a sense of local agency often absent in donor-funded projects. The perception of a dignified, equitable partnership has sustained political backing across decades.

For African nations seeking to break free from cycles of aid dependency, the TAZARA experience offers valuable lessons. Sustainable partnerships are built on the careful articulation of shared interests, the institutionalization of genuine co-ownership, and the cultivation of mutual advantage that is both tangible and symbolic. While TAZARA's specific historical context—the Cold War, the liberation struggles, the personal leadership of Nyerere and Kaunda—cannot be replicated, the principles it embodied remain relevant for contemporary development cooperation.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the analytical findings of this study, the following priority actions are recommended for policymakers:

**Institutionalize Co-ownership:** African governments and their development partners should establish joint governance structures with equal decision-making power from a project's inception. This includes creating binational or multilateral oversight bodies, ensuring balanced representation, and embedding mechanisms for shared accountability. Co-ownership must be substantive, not merely symbolic.

**Articulate Mutual Strategic Interests:** Partnerships should be preceded by a formal charter or memorandum of understanding that explicitly maps and aligns the strategic interests of all parties. This document should articulate not only the shared objectives but also the distinct benefits each partner expects to derive, ensuring transparency and a clear foundation for mutual commitment.

**Shift from Conditional Aid to Aligned Partnerships:** International financial institutions and bilateral donors should move away from prescriptive policy conditionalities toward aligning their support with nationally owned development plans. Respect for local agency and policy sovereignty is not merely a matter of principle but a prerequisite for building the trust and ownership essential for long-term sustainability.

**Invest in Capacity-Building with Intentional Handover:** Development partnerships should include explicit strategies for transferring technical and managerial capacity to local institutions, with clear timelines for reducing external technical assistance. The goal should be local mastery, not perpetual dependency.

**7.5 Recognize and Uphold Symbolic Value:** The symbolic dimensions of partnership—dignity, respect, shared identity—matter as much as material benefits. Development cooperation should be designed to affirm the agency and sovereignty of partner nations, recognizing that perceptions of equitable partnership generate political will, which is essential for sustainability.

## **STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study, while providing valuable insights, is necessarily limited by its exclusive reliance on documentary sources. The absence of primary data from interviews with key stakeholders—such as former TAZARA managers, engineers, local community members, and government officials—means that certain lived experiences, internal governance dynamics, and contemporary perspectives remain unexplored. Future research could fruitfully employ mixed-methods approaches, combining documentary analysis with in-depth interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, to provide richer, more textured insights into the governance challenges and adaptive strategies of such cooperative models.

Furthermore, rigorously designed quantitative studies are needed to measure and compare the long-term socioeconomic impacts of cooperative models such as TAZARA with those of conventional aid projects. Such studies could examine employment outcomes, regional trade flows, and community development indicators across comparable infrastructure projects. Emerging and critical sectors—such as digital infrastructure, renewable energy, and pharmaceutical manufacturing—where new South-South partnerships are rapidly forming would be particularly valuable sites for such comparative research.

Finally, the case selection for this study TAZARA as a "deviant case" necessitates comparison with cases that did not survive. Future research could examine infrastructure partnerships in Africa that failed or collapsed, identifying the conditions that distinguish resilient from fragile partnerships. Such a comparative analysis would strengthen the

generalizability of the findings and provide clearer guidance for policymakers.

## REFERENCES

- Addis, A. K., & Zuping, Z. (2018). *Sustainability in South-South Development Partnerships: Lessons from TAZARA*. Routledge.
- Alden, C., & Wu, Y. (2021). China-Africa relations: The political economy of a new partnership. In *The Oxford Handbook of the Political Economy of Africa*.
- Ampiah, K. (2010). The dynamics of China's relations with Africa. In C. Alden, D. Large, & R. Soares de Oliveira (Eds.), *China Returns to Africa: A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace* (pp. 31–49). Hurst.
- Berger, M. T. (2016). *The Battle for Asia: From Decolonization to Globalization*. Routledge.
- Brautigam, D. (2009). *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa*. Oxford University Press.
- Enuka, C., & Uchechukwuigwe, O. (2012). South-South Cooperation: A Veritable Tool for African Development. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 3(8), 99-106.
- Green, R. H. (1988). Post-colonial development and African planning. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 26(1), 1–23.
- Horner, R. (2020). *Global South: A Critical Guide to the Concept*. Routledge.
- Kamuhuza, J., & Jianya, L. (2022). Geopolitics of infrastructure: Zambia's copper and the TAZARA railway. *African Geographical Review*, 41(2), 150-167.
- Kumar, A. (2009). *The History of TAZARA*. Longman.
- Lammich, L. (2024). *Institutional Resilience in Transnational Infrastructure Projects: The Case of TAZARA*. Springer.
- Lampert, B., et al. (2014). Conceptualising South–South relations. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 52(4), 677-702.
- Magoma, J. (2019). Tanzania's strategic position in East African geopolitics. *Tanzania Journal of Development Studies*, 17(1), 45-62.
- Mkandawire, T. (2015). *Beyond the Resource Curse: Rents and Development in Africa*. UNU-WIDER.
- Monson, J. (2009). *Africa's Freedom Railway: How a Chinese Development Project Changed Lives and Livelihoods in Tanzania*. Indiana University Press.

- Morgan, P. (2018). *The Idea of a Southern-Driven Development*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Moyo, D. (2009). *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Nurdun, R. (2024a). China's evolving South-South cooperation strategy in Africa: The case of TAZARA. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 29(1), 55–77.
- Nurdun, R. (2024b). The evolution of China's foreign aid perspective towards Africa: TAZARA from the Cold War to present. *Perceptions*, 29(1), 55–70.
- Rapanyane, M. B. (2020a). China's infrastructural development strategy in Africa: A TAZARA perspective. *Africa Review*, 12(1), 52–68.
- Shaw, T. M. (1987). Julius Nyerere: Development as liberation. In C. C. Mojekwu (Ed.), *Contemporary Africa: Challenges and Opportunities* (pp. 49–65). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Siria, M. (2022). Strategic development cooperation in East Africa: Beyond transactional frameworks. *African Development Perspectives Yearbook*, 24, 215–237.
- Sun, Y. (2023). *The Belt and Road in Africa: Progress, Problems, and Prospects*. Brookings Institution.
- Tanzania-Zambia Railway Authority (TAZARA). (n.d.). Our administrative structure. Retrieved May 23, 2025, from <https://tazr.duxte.net/our-administrative-structure>
- TAZARA. (1980). “Annual Report and Accounts 1979-1980”. Tanzania-Zambia Railway Authority.
- TAZARA. (2022). “Annual Report and Accounts 2021-2022”. Tanzania-Zambia Railway Authority.
- Tint, L. L. (2020). Effective development cooperation and the Myanmar experience. UNSWorks.
- Tull, D. M. (2021). China's engagement with Africa: Scope, significance, and consequences. In *China-Africa Science, Technology and Innovation Cooperation* (pp. 567–589). OAPEN Library.
- UNCTAD. (2023). *World Investment Report 2023: Investing in Sustainable Energy for All*. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.
- Warmerdam, W. (2014). The impact of foreign aid on policy sovereignty. *Development in Practice*, 24(5–6), 638–648.
- Yuan, J. D. (2006). China's African policy: Driving forces, features and future. *Asian Affairs*, 37(2), 91–117.

Zajontz, T. (2023). Divergent state agency: Zambia's debt impasse and TAZARA's restructuring. In *The Political Economy of China's Infrastructure Development in Africa*. Springer.