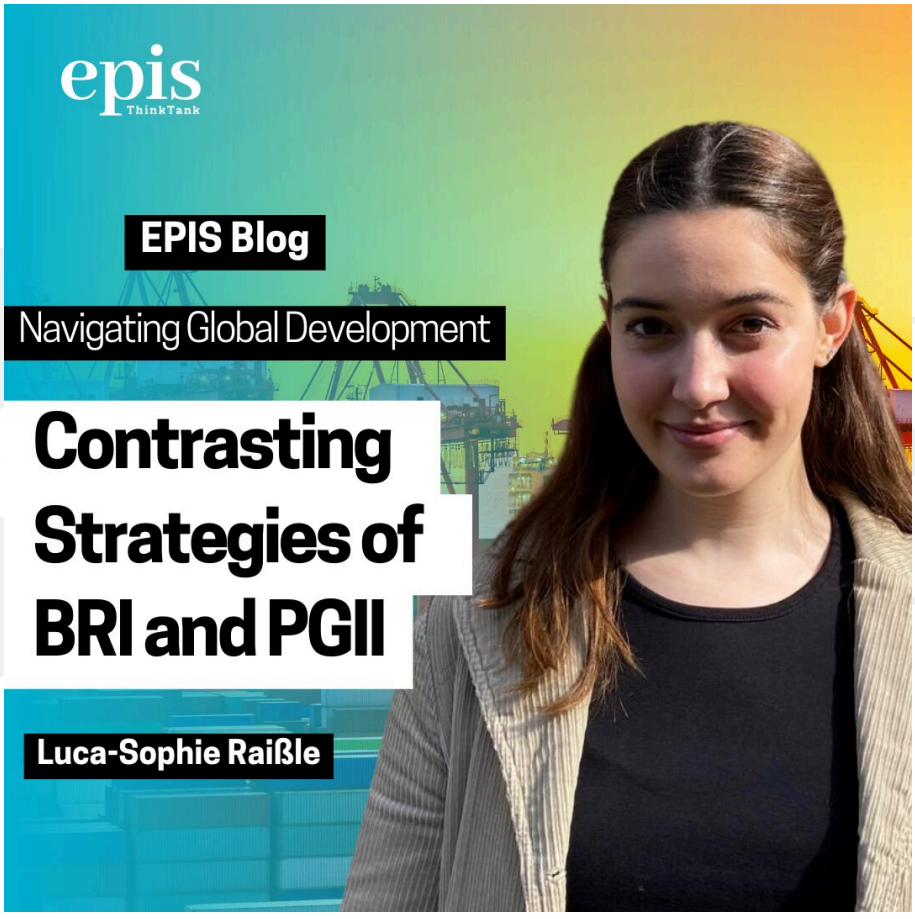
Navigating Global Development

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The China-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aims to expand global influence through large-scale infrastructure projects, with the G7-backed Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) as its counterpart. The BRI's hands-off approach to the internal affairs of recipient countries, coupled with concerns over debt sustainability and local impacts, highlights a power struggle between the West and China. The PGII should prioritise long-term, sustainable projects tailored to the needs of recipient countries to differentiate itself from the BRI and address global inequalities, leveraging its credibility as a responsible development partner.

Introduction of the BRI and PGII

The contrasting strategies of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) offer a fascinating glimpse into the evolving landscape of global geopolitics and economics in development assistance. Spearheaded by China, the BRI is a colossal undertaking aimed at expanding Chinese influence and connectivity around the world. Drawing on the historical imagery of the Silk Road, China is ambitiously positioning itself as a central player in global trade and infrastructure development. By leveraging its economic power, China seeks to deepen its ties with developing countries, gain access to their resources and markets, and increase its geopolitical influence.

The PGII, as promoted by the G7, takes a values-based approach, prioritising principles such as transparency, sustainability and local empowerment. This contrasts with China's often-criticised record of non-transparency and concerns about the debt sustainability of BRI projects. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the PGII has geopolitical and economic interests. These are not precluded by the fact that it is promoting the initiative on the basis of values. Some of these criticisms include the insincerity that the PGII is using the cover of these values to counter China. Development assistance driven by the aim of competing with China does not serve the real intention of improving people's livelihoods and feels insincere. Criticism from neo-colonialist scholars in particular is that the West is once again exploiting the global South for its own benefit.

It is therefore questionable whether development projects are intended to benefit recipient countries, or whether this sector is being exploited to serve the geopolitical interests of donor countries, demonstrating a power struggle between the West and China.

China's Impact and the PGII Dilemma

In the realm of global infrastructure development, China's initiatives wield significant influence, driven by a complex interplay of strategic interests and a desire to expand its geopolitical reach. While the motives behind China's investments often prioritise strategic advantage and maximising influence, it is important to analyse how these initiatives intersect with the broader landscape of international relations, e.g. the PGII.

At the core of China's approach is its ability to exert influence through development assistance, which is often characterised by a hands-off approach to the internal affairs of recipient countries. Unlike more traditional assistance programmes, such as those under the PGII umbrella, Chinese capital flows with fewer strings attached, making it a compelling option for nations seeking investment. This appeal stems from the perceived flexibility and efficiency of Chinese support, which contrasts with the more meticulous and regulated nature of PGII assistance.

A striking example is Zambia's construction of the Lusaka-Ndola dual carriageway, financed by Chinese loans. While the project initially promises to revolutionise transport infrastructure, concerns have been raised about the exorbitant debt burden and lack of local employment opportunities. In addition, the terms of the loans often favour Chinese companies, exacerbating Zambia's economic dependence.

As Zambia's debt to China grows, so does Beijing's influence over the country's domestic and foreign policies. This dependence not only compromises Zambia's sovereignty but also raises questions about the sustainability of its development model. In the long run, such reliance on Chinese investment could undermine Zambia's ability to chart its own course and address the needs of its citizens, who are increasingly showing anti-China sentiments.

In essence, Zambia's experience illustrates the challenges of "growth by pump" in Africa. While Chinese infrastructure investment may offer short-term gains, the long-term implications for economic sovereignty and sustainable development are profound.

In this context, the question arises as to how the PGII should position itself between the poles of genuine development assistance aimed at strengthening infrastructure, or whether it should avoid becoming a player in China's chess game of exploiting the purpose of sustainable and effective development assistance.

Personal Conclusions and Recommendations

In my view, a deliberate shift towards long-term projects that prioritise the sustainable development of recipient countries is crucial. The PGII needs to refocus to ensure that its initiatives serve the best interests of the communities they are intended to benefit.

It's important to clarify that advocating for long-term sustainability and especially asserting itself as a counterpart of the BRI; does not mean replicating the Chinese model, which often fosters economic dependency through its 'no questions asked' approach to assistance. Instead, the PGII must reaffirm its commitment to principles of transparency, accountability and local ownership, and stand out as a beacon of responsible development. the PGII's main asset appears to be its credibility, which is increasingly being questioned in the Chinese context.

By leveraging its reputation for sustainable and long-term engagement, the PGII can capitalise on the growing dissatisfaction with Chinese aid, as evidenced in countries such as Zambia. By offering a viable alternative to the status quo, the PGII has the opportunity to emerge as a leading force in international development, countering the BRI while ensuring sustainable development.