

# China and Africa Move into New Era of Cooperation

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Global Research, November 30, 2021

Region: [Asia](#), [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#)

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*Despite its large population of 1.5 billion which many have considered as an impediment, China’s domestic economic reforms and collaborative strategic diplomacy with external countries have made it attain superpower status over the United States. While United States’ influence is rapidly fading away, China has indeed taken up both the challenges and unique opportunities to strengthen its global position, especially its trade, investment and economic muscles.*

*Undoubtedly, China has attained its superpower status by working consistently on practical multifaceted sustainable development and simultaneously maintaining appreciably positive relations with countries around the world.*

China is visible with its economic footprints in the United States, Latin America, Europe, Asia and Africa. China is the largest developing country in the world, and Africa is the continent with the largest number of developing countries. Shared past experiences and similar aims and goals have brought China and Africa close together. China and Africa will always be a community of shared future. Developing solidarity and cooperation with African countries has been the cornerstone of China’s foreign policy, as well as a firm and longstanding strategy.

Entering the new era, Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward the principles of China’s Africa policy – sincerity, real results, amity and good faith, and pursuing the greater good and shared interests, charting the course for China’s cooperation with Africa, and providing the fundamental guidelines. President Xi Jinping and African leaders unanimously decided at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Beijing Summit that the two sides would work to build an even stronger China-Africa community of shared future, advance cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, establishing a new milestone in China-Africa relations.

Over the years, China has worked and always desirous to show real and tangible results from its undertakings in Africa. It is a champion of win-win cooperation and works to put the principle into action. China is committed to integrating its own development closely with Africa’s development, and the Chinese people’s interests with those of African peoples. By so doing, China sincerely hopes that African countries will grow stronger and that African life

will get better. While pursuing its own development, China has extended support and assistance to its African friends to the limits of its capacity.

Particularly in recent years, China has scaled up its assistance and cooperation with Africa. Whenever it makes a commitment, China will always try to deliver promptly. It will continue to expand cooperation in investment and financing with Africa and strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation in agricultural and manufacturing sectors. By so doing, China will help African countries translate their strengths in resources into advantages in development and realize independent and sustainable development.

China's approach involves upholding four principles:

- Upholding sincerity, friendship and equality. The Chinese people have worked together with African people in pursuit of a shared future. China respects, appreciates and supports Africa.
- Upholding shared interests and the greater good, with greater emphasis on the latter. In its cooperation with Africa, China applies the principles of giving more and taking less, giving before taking, and giving without asking for something in return. It welcomes African countries aboard the express train of China's development with open arms.
- Upholding a people-oriented approach in pursuing practical cooperation with efficiency. In its cooperation with Africa, China gives top priority to the interests and wellbeing of the peoples of China and Africa, and works to their benefit. China is committed to fully honoring the promises it has made to its African friends.
- Upholding openness and inclusiveness. China stands ready to work with other international partners to support Africa in pursuing peace and development. It welcomes and supports all initiatives that further Africa's interests.

In developing relations with Africa, there are five lines that China will not cross: no interference in African countries' choice of a development path that fits their national conditions; no interference in African countries' internal affairs; no imposition of its will on African countries; no attachment of political strings to assistance to Africa; and no pursuit of selfish political gains through investment and financing cooperation with Africa.

### Building Political Trust

At Beijing Summit in 2018, China and Africa the FOCAC reached a strategic agreement to build a China-Africa community of shared future characterized by joint responsibility, win-win cooperation, happiness for all, cultural prosperity, common security, and harmony between humanity and nature.

China sees Africa as a broad stage for international cooperation rather than an arena for competition among major countries. China-Africa cooperation has never been a case of talk and no action. It is a case of bringing tangible benefits to people in China and Africa, and creating more favorable conditions for others in the international community to conduct cooperation with Africa.

In 2006, the FOCAC Beijing Summit decided to establish a new type of China-Africa strategic partnership. In 2015, the FOCAC Johannesburg Summit decided to build a China-Africa comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership. In the 2018 FOCAC Beijing Summit,

the two sides agreed to build an even stronger China-Africa community of shared future, raising China-Africa relations to a new level.

High-level exchanges play an important role in developing China-Africa relations. State leaders of the two sides value communication and coordination on bilateral relations. In March 2013, President Xi Jinping visited Africa, his first official overseas visit after assuming the office of president. To date he has made four visits to different locations across the continent.

During the 2018 FOCAC Beijing Summit, President Xi had one-on-one meetings with more than 50 African leaders, renewing friendships, exploring cooperation, and discussing the future. He also attended close to 70 bilateral and multilateral events.

After the FOCAC Beijing Summit in 2018, 17 African leaders came to China for state visits or meetings. Following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, state leaders of the two sides have maintained contacts and communication via video and phone calls. In June 2020, President Xi Jinping presided over the Extraordinary China-Africa Summit on Solidarity Against Covid-19 via video link. Thirteen African leaders and chairperson of the AU Commission attended the summit.

China-Africa cooperation at the local level is flourishing. The two sides have held four cooperation forums between local governments since 2012. There are currently 160 pairings of sister provinces/cities between China and African countries, 48 of which have been established since 2013. China and African countries conduct close exchanges between political parties, legislative bodies and consultative bodies, building multi-level, multi-channel, multi-form and multi-dimensional friendly cooperation.

#### China, African Union and Regional Organizations

China has been active in developing cooperation with the AU and African sub-regional organizations. The AU Conference Center, which was built with Chinese assistance, was inaugurated in January 2012. It was the second-largest project in Africa to be built with China's assistance after the Tanzania-Zambia Railway. In 2014, China sent a mission to the AU, marking a new stage of China-AU relations. China values the AU's leading role in advancing African integration and building a stronger African continent through unity, and supports its dominant role in safeguarding peace and security in Africa. China also supports the AU in playing a bigger role in regional and international affairs, adopting Agenda 2063, and executing the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan.

In a capacity of observer, China has attended the summit of many African sub-regional organizations including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the East African Community (EAC), and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the Economic Community of Central African States. China has sent ambassadors to the ECOWAS, SADC and EAC.

#### China's Economic Achievements

China and Africa have seen economic and trade cooperation expanding rapidly in scale and extent. The 10 major cooperation plans and the eight major initiatives adopted at the 2015 FOCAC Johannesburg Summit and the 2018 FOCAC Beijing Summit raised China-Africa economic and trade cooperation to a new level.

- Increasing development assistance. While pursuing its own growth, China supports African countries in seeking development and improving their people's lives. In the new era, China has scaled up assistance to Africa. Foreign aid from 2013 to 2018 totaled RMB270 billion. Of this sum, 45 percent went to African countries in the form of grants, interest-free loans and concessional loans.

From 2000 to 2020, China helped African countries build more than 13,000 km of roads and railway and more than 80 large-scale power facilities, and funded over 130 medical facilities, 45 sports venues and over 170 schools. It also trained more than 160,000 personnel for Africa, and built a series of flagship projects including the AU Conference Center.

China's assistance extended to various aspects of the economy, society and people's lives, and was widely welcomed and supported by governments in Africa and the people. China has announced an exemption from debt incurred in the form of interest-free Chinese government loans due to mature by the end of 2018. It will apply to Africa's least developed countries, heavily indebted and poor countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing countries that have diplomatic relations with China. During the Covid-19 pandemic, China cancelled the outstanding debts of 15 African countries in the form of interest-free loans that matured at the end of 2020

- Booming trade relations. China has been Africa's largest trading partner for the 12 years since 2009. The proportion of Africa's trade with China in the continent's total external trade has continued to rise. In 2020, the figure exceeded 21 percent. The structure of China-Africa trade is improving. There has been a marked increase in technology in China's exports to Africa, with the export of mechanical and electrical products and high-tech products now accounting for more than 50 percent of the total.

China has increased its imports of non-resource products from Africa, and offered zero-tariff treatment to 97 percent of taxable items exported to China by the 33 least-developed countries in Africa, with the goal of helping more African agricultural and manufactured goods gain access to the Chinese market. China's imports in services from Africa have been growing at an average annual rate of 20 percent since 2017, creating close to 400,000 jobs for the continent every year.

In recent years, China's imports of agricultural products from Africa have also risen, and China has emerged as the second largest destination for Africa's agricultural exports. China and Africa have seen booming trade in new business models including cross-border e-commerce. Cooperation under the Silk Road E-commerce initiative has advanced. China has built a mechanism for e-commerce cooperation with Rwanda, and Chinese businesses have been active in investing in overseas order fulfillment centers. High-quality and special products from Africa are now directly available to the Chinese market via e-commerce platforms. The China-Mauritius free trade agreement (FTA), which became effective on January 1 2021, was the first FTA between China and an African country. It has injected new vitality into China-Africa economic and trade cooperation.

- Promoting cooperation in investment and financing. Cooperation in investment

and financing has been one of the success stories of China-Africa cooperation in recent years, bringing new vitality into Africa's economic and social development. Combining Africa's needs and China's strengths, China encourages its companies to increase and optimize investment in Africa, providing support in financing and export credit insurance for eligible projects. Thanks to the combined efforts of the Chinese government, financial institutions, and enterprises, China's investment in Africa has built up sound momentum. It covers a wide range of fields including mining, processing and smelting of ores, equipment manufacturing, agriculture, home appliance production, aviation services, medicine and health, and the digital economy. With this help, African countries have been able to upgrade their industrialization, improve their industries, and increase their capacity to earn foreign exchange through exports.

By the end of 2020, direct investment of Chinese companies in Africa had surpassed \$43 billion. China has established over 3,500 companies of various types across the continent. Private companies have gradually become the main investment force in Africa; more than 80 percent of their employees are locals, and they have directly and indirectly created millions of jobs.

- Facilitating agricultural development in Africa. China has always been willing to share agricultural development experience and technology with Africa, to support African countries in improving agricultural production and processing, and to help them in building their agricultural value chains and trade. Since 2012, 7,456 African trainees have received agricultural training in China. Through projects such as sending Chinese agricultural experts to Africa, more than 50,000 Africans have been trained and 23 agricultural demonstration centers have been built. To date, China has established agricultural cooperation mechanisms with 23 African countries and regional organizations, and signed 72 bilateral and multilateral agricultural cooperation agreements.

Since 2012, China has signed 31 agricultural cooperation agreements with 20 African countries and regional organizations. In 2019, the First China-Africa Agriculture Cooperation Forum was held, which announced the establishment of the China-AU Agriculture Cooperation Commission and the formulation of a program of action to promote China-Africa cooperation in agricultural modernization. By the end of 2020, more than 200 Chinese companies had an investment stock of \$1.11 billion in agricultural sector in 35 African countries. Their investments cover areas such as planting, breeding and processing. More than 350 types of African agricultural products can be traded with China. All this ensures steady growth in China-Africa agricultural trade.

- Contributing to industrialization in Africa. Industrialization is a prerequisite for the continent to achieve inclusive and sustainable development, and is also the key to creating jobs, eradicating poverty, and improving living standards. China supports African countries in improving their "soft" and "hard" environment for investment in accordance with their national conditions and development needs. Taking industrial alignment and capacity cooperation as the engine, China helps advance the process of Africa's industrialization and economic diversification. To date, China has established industrial capacity cooperation mechanisms with 15 countries in Africa.

China and African countries have worked together to build economic and trade cooperation zones, special economic zones, industrial parks and science parks, attracting enterprises from China and other countries to invest in Africa. They have built production and processing bases and localized their operations in Africa, contributing to an increase in local employment and tax revenues, and promoting industrial upgrading and technical cooperation. The China-Africa Fund for Production Capacity Cooperation has focused on the construction of highways, railways, and aviation networks, and industrialization in Africa.

As of March 2021, investments had been made in 21 projects, covering energy, resources and manufacturing and boosting industrial development in recipient countries. Dozens of Chinese-funded enterprises have cooperated with African counterparts to build photovoltaic power stations, with a cumulative installed capacity exceeding 1.5 GW, which has helped create photovoltaic industry chains from scratch in Africa, while effectively alleviating power shortages and reducing carbon emissions.

- Expanding cooperation in infrastructure. China supports Africa in making infrastructure development a priority for economic revitalization. It encourages and supports Chinese enterprises to adopt various models to participate in the construction, investment, operation and management of infrastructure projects in Africa. From 2016 to 2020, total investment in infrastructure projects in Africa reached almost \$200 billion. Projects implemented by Chinese companies accounted for 31.4 percent of all infrastructure projects on the African continent in 2020. Since the founding of FOCAC, Chinese companies have utilized various funds to help African countries build and upgrade more than 10,000 km of railways, nearly 100,000 km of highways, nearly 1,000 bridges and 100 ports, and 66,000 km of power transmission and distribution. They have also helped build an installed power-generating capacity of 120 million kW, a communications backbone network of 150,000 km and a network service covering nearly 700 million user terminals. Built and operated by Chinese companies, the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway was the first modern railway to be built in Kenya in 100 years.

Applying Chinese standards, technologies and equipment, the project has won praise as a road of friendship and cooperation, and a path towards win-win development between China and Africa in the new era. The railway has carried 5.4 million passengers and 1.3 million standard containers. It has contributed 1.5 percent to Kenya's economic growth, and created 46,000 direct and indirect jobs. China has guided its enterprises to explore multiple forms of cooperation, such as BOT (build-operate-transfer), BOO (build-own-operate) and PPP (public-private partnership). Such efforts aim to transform China-Africa infrastructure cooperation to a wholly integrated model covering investment, construction and operation, and push forward the sustainable development of infrastructure projects.

- Strengthening financial cooperation. Financial institutions from both sides have been exploring each other's markets. Their central banks have expanded the scale of local currency settlement and currency swap, leading to a steady improvement in China-Africa financial facilitation. As of October 2021, the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) had 42 indirect participants in Africa, covering 19 African countries. The People's Bank of China (PBOC), China's

central bank, has signed successive currency swap agreements with the central banks of South Africa, Morocco, Egypt and Nigeria, to a total amount of RMB73 billion.

China has signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in financial supervision with seven African countries including Egypt, South Africa and Nigeria, laying a solid foundation for steady and long-term bilateral financial cooperation. China has joined the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Eastern and Southern African Trade and Development Bank, the West African Development Bank and other multilateral development financial institutions. It has pledged to contribute a total of \$996 million to the African Development Fund under the AfDB.

- Expanding cooperation in the digital economy. China is helping African countries to eliminate the digital divide. Rapid development and fruitful results have been achieved in this field – building digital infrastructure, transition towards a digital society, and the application of new technologies such as the Internet of Things and mobile finance. Chinese companies have participated in a number of submarine cable projects connecting Africa and Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

They have cooperated with major African operators in achieving full basic coverage of telecommunications services in Africa. They have built more than half of the continent's wireless sites and high-speed mobile broadband networks. In total, more than 200,000 km of optical fiber has been laid, giving broadband Internet access to 6 million households, and serving more than 900 million local people. To date, more than 1,500 companies in 17 cities in 15 African countries have selected Chinese corporate partners on their digital transformation path. Twenty-nine countries have selected smart government service solutions provided by Chinese companies. China and Africa have jointly established a public cloud service in South Africa that covers the entire African region. The two sides also released the first 5G independent networking commercial network in the region. The level and content of China-Africa e-commerce cooperation continue to grow. The Silk Road E-Commerce Capacity Building Cloud Lectures have effectively improved the digital literacy of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in partner countries. Promotion activities have been held to help high-quality products from Africa to access the Chinese market.

Such activities include a government-initiated shopping festival that began in 2019, featuring Silk Road e-commerce, as well as the FOCAC African Products Online Promoting Season. Chinese companies actively participate in building platforms of public services in Africa such as electronic payment and smart logistics. All these efforts are designed to achieve win-win cooperation through promoting connectivity. At the China-Africa Internet Development and Cooperation Forum in August 2021, China announced its intention to formulate and implement a joint China-Africa Partnership Plan on Digital Innovation in Africa.

## Social Dimensions

China is promoting cooperation with Africa in social fields such as poverty reduction, health, education, science and technology, environmental protection, climate change and exchanges among young people and women. Through strengthening exchanges, providing assistance and sharing experience, China is helping African countries to improve their comprehensive social development, which then provides internal impetus for their economic growth.

- Sharing experience in poverty reduction. Poverty is a common challenge facing China and Africa. Ending poverty is the primary goal of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Since 2010, 10 Africa-China Poverty Reduction and Development conferences have been held in countries such as China, Ethiopia, South Africa and Uganda, with nearly 1,600 participants in total. From 2005 to 2021, China organized 160 poverty reduction and foreign aid training programs. Some 2,700 people from 53 African countries participated in the training, accounting for almost 60 percent of the total number of trainees.
- Enhancing medical and health cooperation. Through concrete actions, China has helped African countries respond to various epidemics and plagues and build a public health system, promoting a China-Africa community of health. One of the longest and most effective cooperation projects that involves the greatest number of African countries is the dispatch of Chinese medical teams. At present, there are nearly 1,000 Chinese medical workers in 45 African countries, working at 98 medical centers.

Chinese medical teams carried out 34 free clinical programs under the Brightness Action initiative, restoring the eyesight of almost 10,000 African cataract patients. China focuses on helping African countries strengthen medical specialties, training 20,000 African medical personnel. To date, it has helped 18 African countries establish 20 centers in different medical specialties, covering cardiology, critical care medicine, trauma and endoscopy. China supports African countries in improving their capacity in border health and quarantine inspection, and sends disease control experts to the Africa Center for Disease Control and Prevention to provide technical support.

- Expanding cooperation in education and human resources. China vigorously supports education in Africa. Based on the needs of African countries for economic and social development, it helps train much-needed professionals for African countries and encourages outstanding African youth to study in China through several scholarships. Starting from 2012, the two sides have implemented the 20+20 Cooperation Plan for Chinese and African Institutions of Higher Education as an exchange and cooperation platform among universities. China set up an educational trust fund under UNESCO to provide teacher training for more than 10,000 teachers in African countries. Since 2018, China has established Luban Workshops together with colleges and universities in countries including Egypt, South Africa, Djibouti and Kenya, sharing quality vocational education resources with Africa and training high-caliber technical personnel to meet the urgent needs of economic and social development on the continent.

China has helped more than 30 African universities set up Chinese language departments or Chinese language majors. In cooperation with China, 16 African countries have incorporated the Chinese language into their national education systems. The two sides have established 61 Confucius Institutes and 48 Confucius Classrooms in Africa. Since 2004, China has sent a total of 5,500 Chinese language teachers and volunteers to 48 African nations.

- Stepping up scientific and technological collaboration, and knowledge sharing. China actively strengthens communication and coordination with Africa in terms of technological innovation strategies. It shares experience and achievements, and promotes the exchange and training of professionals and technology



transfer, as well as innovation and entrepreneurship on both sides. China and African countries have set up high-level joint laboratories, the China-Africa Joint Research Center, and an innovation cooperation center.

In recent years, China has assisted Africa in cultivating a large number of scientific and technological talents through projects such as the Alliance of International Science Organizations in the Belt and Road Region Scholarship, Chinese government scholarships, the Talented Young Scientist Program, and the Innovative Talent Exchange Project.

### Moving Towards the Future

Over the past two decades, FOCAC has become an important platform for collective dialogue between China and Africa and an effective mechanism for pragmatic cooperation. It has turned into a pacesetter for international cooperation with Africa in the new era. It now has 55 members comprising China, the 53 African countries that have diplomatic relations with China, and the AU Commission. The Ministerial Conference is held once every three years, rotating between China and African countries and co-chaired by China and an African hosting country, with the co-chairs also taking the lead in implementing conference outcomes.

Based on mutual agreements, some of the ministerial conferences have been upgraded into summits. To date three summits (the Beijing Summit in November 2006, the Johannesburg Summit in December 2015, and the Beijing Summit in September 2018) and seven ministerial conferences have been convened. These have yielded rich fruits, releasing a series of important documents to guide cooperation, and promoting the implementation of a series of major measures to facilitate development in Africa and solidify China-Africa friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation.

Africa is experiencing a flowing tide of solidarity and self-strengthening, and the continent's influence in international affairs continues to grow. It is now forging ahead with the development of free trade zones, accelerating industrialization and modernization, and heading towards the bright future envisioned in the AU's Agenda 2063.

At the end of November 2021, FOCAC will meet in African co-chair country Senegal. The meeting will evaluate the implementation of the outcomes of the 2018 Beijing Summit, and make plans for friendly cooperation in the next phase. This will be an important diplomatic event for China and Africa to discuss cooperation plans and promote common development, and will be of great importance in promoting post-pandemic economic recovery and development in Africa, China and the world at large. China will work closely with Africa to align China's Second Centenary Goal of building a great modern socialist country by the middle of the century with the AU's Agenda 2063.

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*Kester Kenn Klomegah, who worked previously with Inter Press Service (IPS), is now a frequent and passionate contributor to Global Research. As a versatile researcher, he*

*believes that everyone deserves equal access to quality and trustworthy media reports.*

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