

What's FOCAC and *Why* does it matter in Africa–China relations?





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INSIGHTS

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There is no doubt about China's ambitious plans for Africa. The continent has become a key driver of China's growth and success story for the past three to four decades, and this is not changing anytime soon as momentum keeps building in creating more mutually beneficial and win-win synergies.

Africa has been a key market and source of primary materials for China's manufacturing drive and also an export market.

The reverse is also true. Multiple countries across the continent have also benefited tremendously from the relations with China.

The volume of bilateral trade between China and Africa increased from US\$12.14 million in 1950 to US\$100 million in 1960 to US\$1 billion in 1980.

After crossing the US\$10 billion threshold in 2000, trade between China and Africa has continued to rise quickly ever since.

China and Africa conducted more than \$100 billion worth of bilateral trade in 2008, with China exporting \$50.8 billion to the continent and importing \$56 billion from it.

According to the most recent data from China's General Administration of Customs, total bilateral trade between China and Africa in 2021 reached USD 254.3 billion, a 35.3 percent increase over the previous year.

China has made more investments in Africa than the next eight largest lenders combined.

According to research by the Center for Global Development, a US think tank, China's two major foreign development banks invested \$23 billion in infrastructure projects on the continent between 2007 and 2020.

That amounts to \$8 billion more than the combined contributions of the other top eight lenders, which include the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and the US and European development banks.

The FOCAC journey

If you are a key follower of the Africa-China relations in any form or shape, then you will probably be familiar with the term FOCAC-Forum on China-Africa Cooperation.

FOCAC as has become known was established and first held in October 2000 in Beijing as a triennial platform to build cooperation between Africa and China across key areas of interest.

Twenty-Two years later, FOCAC continuous to serve it purpose as a platform for collective discourse for cooperation between Africa and China.

The forum is scheduled to be held every three years and over the twenty-years of its existence, has taken many shapes and forms to ensure it stays relevant in deepening the ties between Africa-China.

Beijing (China) is the architect behind the FOCAC, rallying African countries behind this ambitious platform in order to foster more effective collaborations.

41 Heads of State and other top government representatives from 48 African nations participated in the historic conference in Beijing.

In his opening remarks, President Hu Jintao pledged to double China's aid to Africa by 2009, including the creation of a \$5 billion fund to promote Chinese investment in Africa, the provision of \$3 billion in preferential loans, \$2 billion in preferential buyers' credits, and the cancellation of a portion of the heavily indebted poor countries' debts to China. That's a combined \$10 billion.

FOCAC continues to be the most strategically entwined and extensive in its depth, scope, and level of collaboration among the numerous partnership platforms Africa has with a single external player today.

9th FOCAC to be held in 2024

The FOCAC has been held successfully for eight times from the 2000 edition, the last edition was held in 2021 in Dakar, the capital of Senegal.

The different FOCAC pronouncements set the stage for future fruitful dialogue and offer policy frameworks for developing Sino-African relations.

Through high-level dialogue and diplomatic interaction, Africa now has the chance to influence Sino-African ties.

- 2000 – FOCAC I, Beijing, China
- 2003 – FOCAC II, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- 2006 – FOCAC III, Beijing, China
- 2009 – FOCAC IV, Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt
- 2012 – FOCAC V, Beijing, China
- 2015 – FOCAC VI, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- 2018 – FOCAC VII, Beijing, China
- 2021 – FOCAC VIII, Dakar, Senegal

Based on China's commitment to equality, peaceful coexistence, and respect for sovereign independence, FOCAC has developed a process of mutually beneficial interdependence between China and Africa.

Through continued dialogue and diplomatic exchanges, Africa has benefited greatly from this and will continue to do so.

Relevance of FOCAC

A thorough circumspection is required when dealing with information flows regarding Africa and China.

Analysis and comprehension of China's strategy toward Africa and the unique diplomatic structure it created (FOCAC) to promote communication, problem-solving, and mutual benefit have received little attention.



China's past support of Africa's liberation battles has influenced how Africa views China. The bond is supported by a strong sense of solidarity for liberation.

Africa, whose states are attempting to escape the poverty trap, finds great attraction in China's successful development model, which is based on strong state management of economic liberalisation and development.

The relevance of FOCAC in this context cannot be over emphasized. It has become relevant in serving as a key pillar in strengthening China-Africa ties and serves as the setting for fruitful diplomatic exchange. It offers the basis for creating a long-lasting, "win-win" cooperation between China and Africa.

To advance the China-Africa research agenda, a clear understanding of FOCAC as a framework for fostering such a win-win relationship between China and Africa and for creating fruitful South-South interactions is necessary.

The global system is constantly being altered, disrupting the international systems. In the midst of these constant twists, the Forum on China Africa Cooperation continue to be a very important platform for fostering Sino-African collaboration and problem-solving and to module a shared development agenda.

It has helped African and Chinese leaders to develop a shared vision for policy cooperation, increased commercial interaction, and shared prosperity as a result, and this has improved significantly, the commitment towards cooperation across multiple issues beyond economics.

The South–South Agenda

The continent's traditional reliance on the US and former colonial Western contributors has been radically shifted, it is widely acknowledged, as a result of China's extremely major participation in Africa during the past several years.

The West's constrictive, patronizing, and unrealistic conditional involvement with Africa has been replaced by an alternate source of aid, commerce, and investment from China.



The continent broadly applauds China's resolve to forge partnerships based on equality and respect and its commitment to refraining from meddling in domestic issues in Africa.

Aside from the shared economic interests, China and Africa are connected by their shared desire to advance the South-South agenda.

In this environment, China and Africa are working to increase the voice of the developing world in international organizations including the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO), and United Nations.

China is viewed as Africa's ally in the fight to democratize international fora and change the course of the world's development agendas.



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