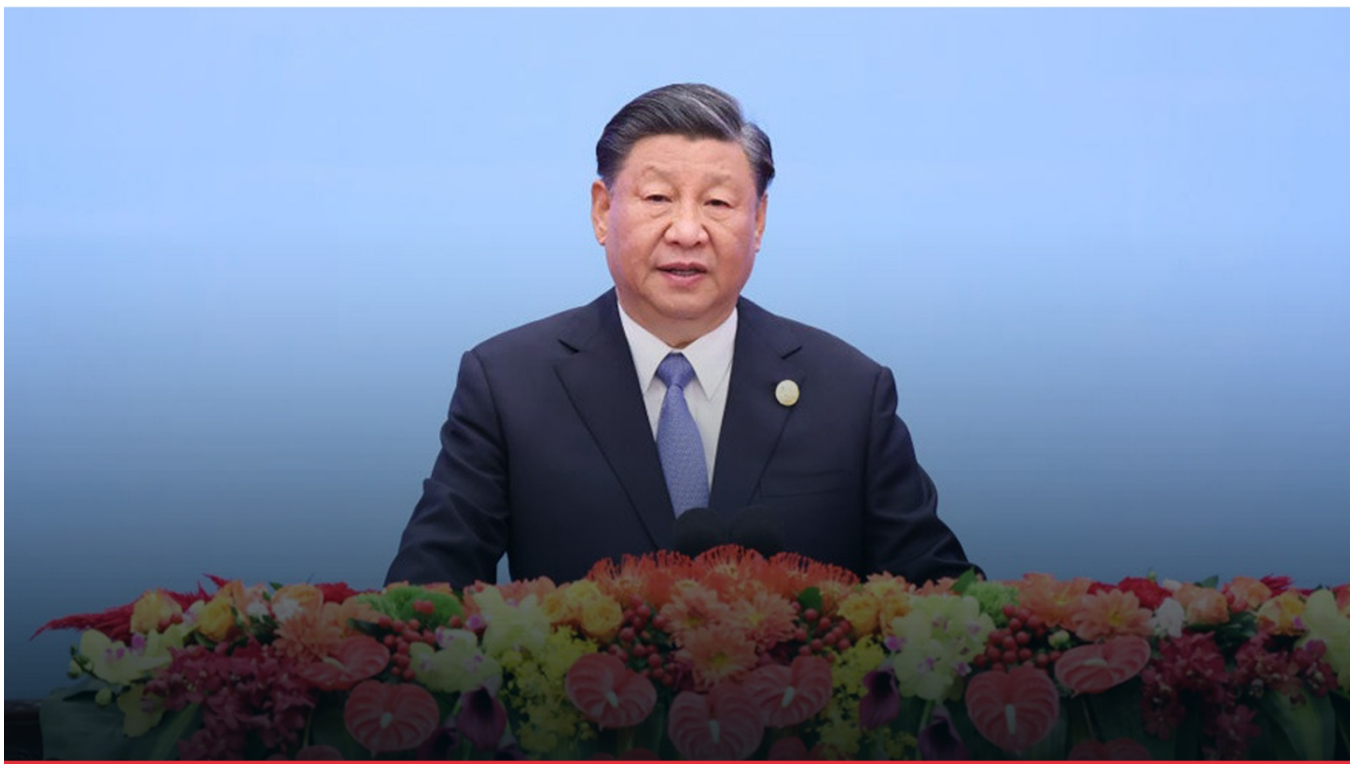


# A Decade of China's BRI: Assessing its Impact & Implications for Africa's Agenda 2063.



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# **A Decade of China's BRI:** Assessing its Impact & Implications for Africa's Agenda 2063.



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On October 10, 2023, China marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the launch of its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with the unveiling of a [White paper](#) on the BRI. This document, titled "The Belt and Road Initiative: A Key Pillar of the Global Community of Shared Future," represents a comprehensive review and reaffirmation of the BRI's global role and impact since its conception and launch in 2013. The publication preceded the hosting of the third Belt and Road Forum in Beijing from October 17 to 18, 2023.

The forum brought together leaders and high-ranking officials from over 140 nations and international organizations, underscoring the international prominence of the BRI. Prominent figures in attendance included Vladimir Putin of Russia, Viktor Orbán of Hungary, Joko Widodo of Indonesia, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and the presidents of Egypt, Kenya, Zambia, among other dignities. This diverse gathering further underscored the broad and diverse participation in this global initiative.

The forum yielded two noteworthy [outcomes](#). Firstly, a substantial cooperation agreement valued at approximately USD97.2 billion was reached for infrastructure projects. Secondly, President Xi Jinping pledged an additional commitment of about USD100 billion to support BRI infrastructure projects on a global scale. Given Africa's active and significant role in the BRI, what opportunities does the commitment present to Africa? This brief analysis delves into a decade of the BRI and the opportunities it offers for Africa's Agenda 2063 and its ambitious Continental Free Trade Agreement.

## ***A Decade of the BRI: Milestones and Key Developments***

The BRI traces [its roots to 2013](#) when President Xi Jinping introduced this ambitious vision during visit to Kazakhstan. As a signature Chinese foreign policy strategy on global infrastructure development, the BRI initially took the form of the "One Belt, One Road initiative," encompassing the overland Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road. These two components envisioned an interconnected network of trade routes spanning continents. In 2016, a significant change occurred when the initiative's name shifted to the Belt and Road Initiative, better representing its broad scope and global outlook. In the following year, the BRI was incorporated into the Chinese Constitution. This constitutional recognition elevated the BRI to a national vision and strategy, emphasizing its pivotal role in China's long-term development and global engagement.

Although the BRI was initially conceived to enhance connectivity between East Asia and Europe (the Eurasian continent) through a comprehensive network of road and maritime infrastructure, it has since expanded beyond the Eurasian continent and reached Africa and Latin America. As a result, it has evolved into a far-reaching global initiative, with over 150 countries and 30 international organizations participating through joining or signing cooperation agreements with the BRI.

On its core infrastructure agenda, Chinese enterprises have been instrumental in [financing and constructing](#) a wide array of critical infrastructure, ranging from power plants and railways to highways and ports and the development of smart cities on a global scale. As of June 2023, the China-Europe Railway Express has achieved an extensive network, encompassing over 200 cities in 25 European countries. This network spans 86 routes that traverse vital regions within the Eurasian hinterlands. This expansion signifies the remarkable reach and impact of the BRI on

intercontinental trade and connectivity. Other substantial infrastructure projects under the umbrella of the BRI include, among others, the China-Laos Railway, the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, the Belgrade-Novı Sad section of the Hungary-Serbia Railway, the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Highway, the China-Central Asia Gas Pipeline, and the development of the Port of Piraeus in Greece. These initiatives collectively underscore the BRI's role in fostering infrastructural development, regional cooperation, and economic integration on an unprecedented scale.

The impact of the BRI on international trade has also been substantial. Notably, China's trade with the countries engaged in the BRI has [exhibited steady growth](#), expanding at an annual rate of 6.4 percent between 2013 and 2022. This growth has culminated in a total trade value of USD19.1 trillion, reflecting the initiative's role in fostering economic collaboration and connectivity among participating nations.

## ***The BRI and Africa's Agenda 2063***

The [BRI White Paper](#) outlines a significant connection between the BRI and regional and global development initiatives. Specifically, the BRI aligns with plans such as the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This alignment implies that the implementation of the BRI complements the development objectives of Africa, which has emerged as a significant participant in the BRI, with a remarkable 53 African countries and the AU entering into cooperative agreements with China.

Adopted by the AU in 2015, [Agenda 2063](#) is a comprehensive, long-term development framework to transform the continent into a global powerhouse. This vision entails a peaceful, prosperous, and integrated continent, emphasizing innovative and flagship projects to foster integration among African nations. The projects include the development of a modernized and integrative infrastructure network to facilitate the free movement of goods and people and the establishment of an African Free Trade Area to promote intra-regional trade. The latter objective has been successfully realized by establishing the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), the world's largest free trade area. AfCFTA is mandated to create a single continental market for the African people.

The BRI offers a significant opportunity for Africa to achieve its developmental goal of establishing a world-class infrastructure network, which, in turn, will facilitate the continent's accelerated integration and growth by 2063. Indeed, proactive steps have been taken by Africa to benefit from the opportunities presented by the BRI. During the 2018 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summit in Beijing, which marked the [largest-ever](#) meeting between Chinese and African leaders, a significant [declaration](#) was made. China and African nations agreed to deepen their cooperation by aligning Africa's Agenda 2063 development strategies with the BRI. This envisioned synergy aimed to enhance connectivity in various areas, including policy, infrastructure, trade, finance, and industrial capacity under the BRI. It also sought to foster increased collaboration in planning African infrastructure and industrial development.

African leaders enthusiastically embraced the declaration, recognizing its significance for Africa's enduring development goals. As [remarked](#) by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni during the 2018 FOCAC summit, the BRI is critical to fast-track Africa's economic development by opening up the

continent for more trade within and outside it. The tangible benefits of the BRI to Africa's vision are already evident. Over the past decade, Chinese enterprises have [substantially contributed](#) to newly contracted projects. These ventures have garnered immense value, surpassing the impressive benchmark of USD700 billion. Notably, the completed turnover resulting from these projects has exceeded USD400 billion.

These contributions encompass the [construction](#) of an extensive network of over 12,000 kilometres of railways and roads, the expansion of nearly 20 ports, and the establishment of more than 80 substantial power facilities throughout the continent. Notable examples of these projects include the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway in Kenya, the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway in Ethiopia, the Port of Doraleh in Djibouti, the Maputo-Katembe Bridge in Mozambique, the Lagos-Kano Railway in Nigeria, the Entebbe-Kampala Expressway in Uganda, the Cherchell Ring Expressway and Port in Algeria, among others. These endeavours exemplify the tangible impact of the BRI on Africa's journey towards realizing its development goals and Agenda 2063.

Beyond infrastructure, the BRI has had a profound influence on economic and trade relations between the two regions. This influence is evident in the remarkable [surge in trade volumes](#) between China and Africa, surpassing the USD 2 trillion mark over the past decade. Additionally, China has solidified its position as one of Africa's foremost investors, with investments exceeding USD 30 billion during the same period.

## ***The Way Forward***

As examined above, the global footprint of China's BRI has expanded significantly, reaching various nations and regions promoting infrastructural development, economic cooperation, and trade growth. This initiative not only extends China's infrastructural influence but also exerts a profound impact on the global economic landscape. For Africa, which has emerged as a significant participant in the BRI, this impact of the BRI over the past decade is evident in the proliferation of mega projects across the continent, spanning crucial sectors such as transportation, energy, telecommunications, and maritime infrastructure.

Notwithstanding the positive impact, there are concerns surrounding its implementation that must be addressed. Notably, rising debt burdens and environmental issues are of concern. Countries like Kenya, Ethiopia, Zambia, and Uganda have, at a point, found it challenging to manage their escalating debt obligations. To secure the BRI's long-term success, it is crucial to tackle these issues, ultimately fostering economic development and enhancing regional connectivity.

As rightly highlighted by [David Dollar](#), the BRI enjoys considerable popularity in the developing world, where infrastructure deficiencies are prevalent and resources to address them are scarce. By providing substantial funding to participating countries, the BRI holds the potential to deliver substantial benefits, bridging their infrastructure gaps and driving economic growth. For Africa, the BRI, if implemented sustainably and responsibly, has the potential to meet the continent's long-term development needs.



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