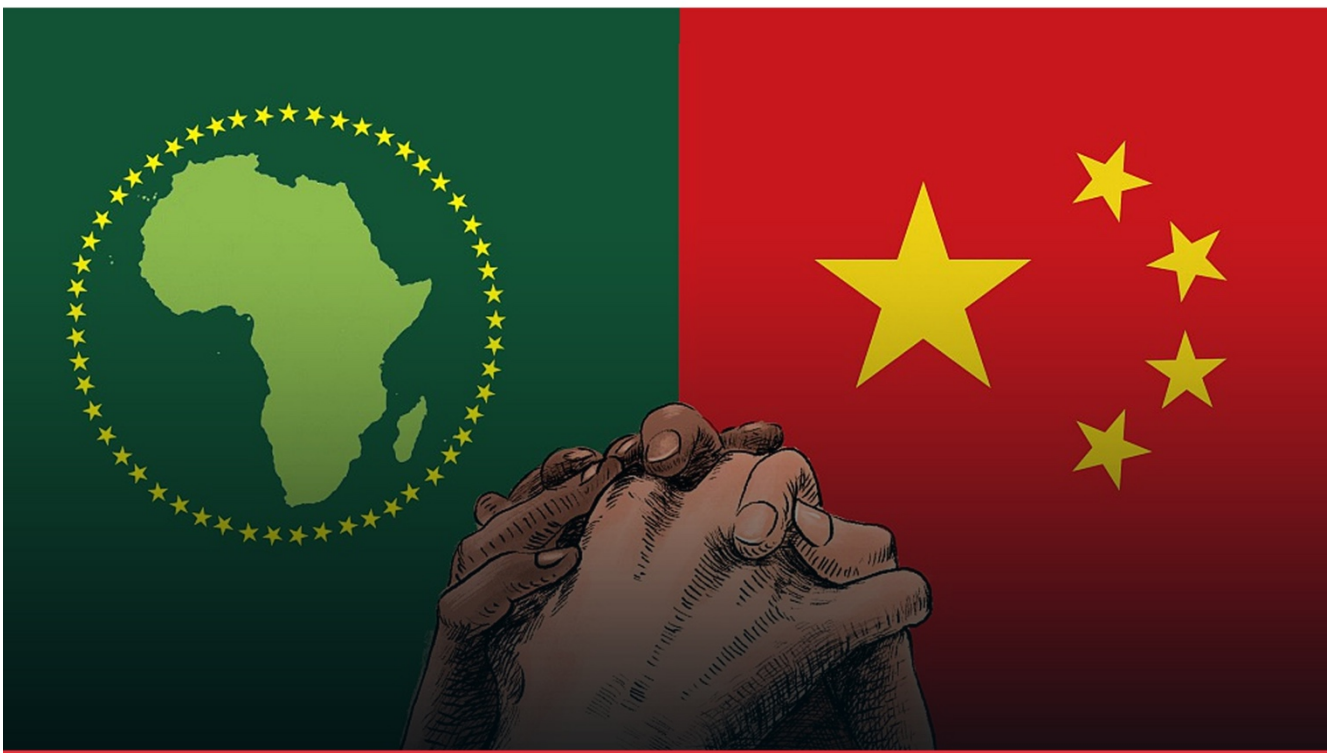


# African Agency & Strategies for Effective Engagement with China.





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# African Agency & Strategies for Effective Engagement with China.



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African agency in the context of Sino-Africa relations refers to the proactive stance taken by African nations and organizations to assert their interests and shape the dynamics of their engagement with China. African agency involves having a clear vision and strategic approach to maximize the benefits derived from the relationship. This proactive stance includes negotiating favourable terms in trade agreements, attracting Chinese investment that aligns with national development priorities, and advocating for fair treatment in diplomatic interactions<sup>1</sup>.

Central to African agency is the concept of collective strength through regional cooperation and coordination. This involves African countries working together through the African Union (AU) to enhance their bargaining power with China<sup>2</sup>. African nations can negotiate from a position of strength by presenting a unified front and leveraging their collective resources and influence, ensuring that their interests are taken into account in bilateral and multilateral engagements with China<sup>3</sup>.

Additionally, the African agency involves internal capacity building within African countries to effectively navigate and manage their relationship with China. This includes investing in expertise in China, understanding Chinese negotiation tactics, and improving policy formulation and implementation processes. African governments would better advocate for their interests and ensure that engagements with China are mutually beneficial and contribute to sustainable development and economic growth across the continent, should they expand their understanding of Chinese interests and strategies.

## Strategies for Effective Engagement

### **Prioritization**

African countries must define their interests and development priorities clearly, ensuring that negotiations with China are aligned with these objectives. This should equip African nations to assert their agency and advocate for partnerships that contribute meaningfully to their socio-economic advancement.

Sectoral focus is essential to maximize the impact of Chinese expertise and resources. African countries should identify strategic sectors where collaboration with China would result in significant development outcomes<sup>4</sup>. Focusing on specific sectors allows for targeted investment and the effective utilization of resources, whether it's in infrastructure, agriculture, healthcare, or technology.

Adopting a long-term vision is vital for ensuring sustainable benefits from engagements with China. Rather than pursuing short-term gains, African nations must prioritize initiatives and partnerships that yield lasting impacts on economic growth, job creation, and social development<sup>5</sup>. This approach fosters resilience against potential economic fluctuations, in

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<sup>1</sup> Gaukrodger, D. (2021), "The future of investment treaties - possible directions", *OECD Working Papers on International Investment*, No. 2021/03, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/946c3970-en>.

<sup>2</sup> Leshoele, M., 2023. AfCFTA and regional integration in Africa: Is African Union government a dream deferred or denied?. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 41(4), pp.393-407.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid pp.6

<sup>4</sup> Tawiah, V.K., Zakari, A. and Khan, I., 2021. The environmental footprint of China-Africa engagement: an analysis of the effect of China–Africa partnership on carbon emissions. *Science of the Total Environment*, 756, p.143603.

<sup>5</sup> Ali, E.B., Anufriev, V.P. and Amfo, B., 2021. Green economy implementation in Ghana as a road map for a sustainable development drive: A review. *Scientific African*, 12, p.e00756.

addition to laying the foundation for enduring cooperation between Africa and China, rooted in mutual respect and shared prosperity.

### **Maximizing Leverage**

This action for effective engagement requires African nations to employ strategic approaches aimed at enhancing negotiation capabilities, fostering transparency, and diversifying partnerships<sup>6</sup>. Investing in negotiation skills is sacrosanct. African negotiators should undergo training to equip them with the knowledge and strategies necessary to secure favourable agreements with their Chinese counterparts. This includes understanding cultural nuances, and legal frameworks, and leveraging comparative advantages to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes<sup>7</sup>.

Transparency and accountability play crucial roles in mitigating imbalances and reducing the risk of corruption in deals between African governments and Chinese entities. African nations can ensure that agreements are made in the best interest of their citizens and that resources are utilized effectively for development purposes. Transparency also fosters trust and confidence, both domestically and internationally, which are essential for sustaining partnerships over the long term<sup>8</sup>.

Diversification of partnerships beyond China is essential for maximizing leverage. African countries should actively seek relationships with other global players to create alternative options and strengthen their bargaining positions. Engagement of a diverse range of partners, including emerging economies, and regional actors, African nations would reduce dependency on any single partner and increase their ability to negotiate terms that align with their development priorities and values.

### **Managing Risks**

Effectively managing risks in engagements with China involves implementing strategies to safeguard against potential pitfalls while maximizing the benefits of cooperation. African nations must promote responsible borrowing practices and transparent debt management to avoid falling into debt traps.

African countries ought to mitigate the risk of over-indebtedness and ensure that borrowed funds are used efficiently for sustainable development projects through careful assessment of the terms and conditions of loans from China and other creditors<sup>9</sup>.

Most importantly, upholding social and environmental safeguards is essential to mitigate negative impacts on local communities and ecosystems. African governments should insist that Chinese projects adhere to established labour, social, and environmental standards. African nations can protect the well-being of their citizens and preserve natural resources for future generations by holding Chinese companies accountable for their actions and ensuring compliance with regulations.

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<sup>6</sup> Black, D., 2020. Development co- operation and the partnership–ownership nexus: Lessons from the Canada–Ghana experience. *Development Policy Review*, 38, pp.O112-O132.

<sup>7</sup> Cenamor, J., 2021. Complementor competitive advantage: A framework for strategic decisions. *Journal of business research*, 122, pp.335-343.

<sup>8</sup> Gil-Garcia, J.R., Gasco-Hernandez, M. and Pardo, T.A., 2020. Beyond transparency, participation, and collaboration? A reflection on the dimensions of open government. *Public Performance & Management Review*, 43(3), pp.483-502.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, K.J., 2023. Why hide? Africa's unreported debt to China. *The Review of International Organizations*, pp.1-32.

Furthermore, negotiating for meaningful technology transfer and local skills development is critical for promoting African industrialization and economic diversification. African countries should seek partnerships with China that facilitate the transfer of knowledge, expertise, and technology to local industries<sup>10</sup>. African nations can reduce dependence on imported goods and services, stimulate economic growth, and create employment opportunities for their citizens by building domestic capacity and fostering innovation.

### ***Knowledge Management***

Promoting knowledge and understanding is essential for fostering effective engagement between Africa and China. It is necessary to keep supporting Africa-based think tanks and research institutes that specialize in China-Africa relations. African governments can encourage the generation of nuanced perspectives and insights into the complexities of the relationship through sustainable funding of these institutions. This enables policymakers to make evidence-based decisions and develop strategies that are grounded in local contexts and priorities.

Facilitating people-to-people exchanges is another key strategy for promoting mutual understanding. Organizing cultural and educational exchange programs is key for African nations to create opportunities for individuals from both regions to interact, learn from each other, and build meaningful connections. These exchanges help break down stereotypes, foster empathy, and cultivate mutual respect, laying the foundation for deeper cooperation and collaboration<sup>11</sup>.

Implementing media monitoring mechanisms is important for ensuring a balanced discourse on China-Africa relations within African media<sup>12</sup>. Through monitoring and assessing perceptions, narratives, and representations of the relationship, African governments could identify and address any biases or misrepresentations that may exist. This promotes transparency, accountability, and accuracy in media reporting, facilitating a more informed public discourse and enhancing understanding among citizens about the opportunities and challenges associated with engagement with China.

## ***Conclusion***

It's vital to recognize that there's no one-size-fits-all approach to effective engagement between Africa and China. Each African nation has its distinct context, challenges, and priorities, which necessitates tailored strategies. What works for one country may not necessarily work for another. Therefore, it's essential to take into account the specific circumstances and needs of each African nation when designing and implementing engagement strategies with China. This requires flexibility, adaptability, and a willingness to customize approaches to fit the local context.

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<sup>10</sup> Lema, R., Bhamidipati, P.L., Gregersen, C., Hansen, U.E. and Kirchherr, J., 2021. China's investments in renewable energy in Africa: Creating co-benefits or just cashing-in?. *World Development*, 141, p.105365.

<sup>11</sup> Atta, M. and Siddiq, S., 2023. Bridging Divides: The Trans-Formative Power of Inclusive Cultural Diplomacy in Shaping Global Relations. *Journal of Quranic and Social Studies*, 3(2), pp.106-118.

<sup>12</sup> Leder, L., 2020. China and the Power of Attraction-A Critical Discourse Analysis of Soft-Power in Sino-African Diplomacy.

Finally, the success of engagement efforts hinges on strong ownership and domestic support within African nations. Political will at the highest levels of government is crucial for driving forward effective engagement strategies and ensuring that they are implemented effectively. Engaging the civil society, including grassroots organizations, community leaders, and other stakeholders, is equally important. Without the support and participation of the population, engagement efforts may lack legitimacy and sustainability. Therefore, fostering a sense of ownership and mobilizing domestic support is essential for building partnerships with China that genuinely benefit African nations and their people.



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