

Integrating Next-Generation Voices in FOCAC Implementation



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What will the future of Africa-China relations look like without the active participation of the youth? How can a continent where over 60% of the population is under 25 years old thrive without the voices, ideas, and innovations of its young people?

We must address these critical questions in the evolving partnership between Africa and China under the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). With FOCAC serving as a major platform for cooperation, it is time for young Africans to play a more central role in shaping the policies and projects that will define their future.

Africa is a continent with youthful energy and untapped potential, boasting the world's youngest population, with more than [60% of the continent's population under the age of 25](#). This growing youth population is projected to grow even further, as Africa's population is expected to reach [2.5 billion by 2050](#), up from 1.4 billion currently. Such a high number of young people is an opportunity for the continent's growth, but only if these new generations are fully empowered and their voices heard by meaningful integration into decision-making processes.

FOCAC has grown to become one of the most significant platforms for collaboration between China and Africa. Since its launch in 2000, FOCAC has facilitated numerous developmental projects in infrastructure, trade, health, and education. While the partnership has been vital in fostering growth across the African continent, a key aspect that has received less attention is the role of the youth in shaping and implementing FOCAC's objectives.

FOCAC has increasingly recognized the importance of youth in Africa's development, but youth opinions and perspectives have not always been fully integrated into the core processes of the forum. Historically, FOCAC has focused on high-level government and business cooperation. However, the integration of youth voices in policy formulation and implementation has been somewhat limited. It is high time we integrated the voices of Africa's youth population in decision-making and implementation for the youth are not just the leaders of tomorrow but the change-makers of today.

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The youth of Africa, representing the youngest continent in the world, is an important asset that can fuel economic growth and social transformation. Excluding youth from decision-making would mean overlooking the majority of Africa's population, whose needs, ideas, and aspirations are central to the continent's future. Involving young people in decision-making processes expands citizen engagement and fosters more inclusive, resilient communities. Youth participation is essential for developing active citizenship, as it aligns their social rights with their responsibilities.

By including youth in shaping FOCAC policies, the forum can ensure that its strategies are aligned with the interests and priorities of the vibrant population, creating a more inclusive and forward-looking partnership. The next generation are the future leaders who will determine the success of Africa-China cooperation in the long term. Engaging young leaders in FOCAC discussions helps break down stereotypes, build diplomatic bridges, and

foster a sense of shared purpose, ensuring that the partnership remains strong and mutually beneficial in the future.

Also, youth inclusion is essential for building more inclusive and resilient societies in Africa. Young people often bring fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to longstanding challenges, from governance to social justice. Involving them in shaping FOCAC policies helps ensure that the partnership addresses the root causes of issues like inequality, marginalization, and poverty, which disproportionately affect the youth. Giving youth a voice in FOCAC decision-making, will ensure that FOCAC support the creation of more equitable policies that reflect the diversity of Africa's population. This not only strengthens the social fabric of African societies but also helps prevent the exclusion and let-down of a generation that is eager to contribute.

The Way Forward

Create space for young people's involvement

One of the main ways to integrate the voice of the youth into FOCAC's framework is by giving them a seat at the table, ensuring their participation in key FOCAC-related discussions, forums, and decision-making processes.

While traditional top-down approaches have dominated FOCAC policy formulation, a bottom-up approach that actively incorporates youth perspectives will lead to more general and inclusive outcomes. Workshops, forums, roundtable discussions, and advisory councils dedicated to youth engagement in FOCAC will provide a structured way for young Africans to contribute.

These platforms could be both in-person and virtual, encouraging participation from a different range of young people across the continent. Youth representation in high-level meetings and advisory roles will ensure that FOCAC projects not only reflect the needs of young people but also capitalize on their innovative ideas and insights. In recent years, there has been a growing trend of involving young leaders in multilateral forums and FOCAC should seize this momentum.

Training and Education:

During this year's FOCAC, President Xi Jinping encouraged African scholars to bolster Africa-China cooperation and Global South development. Empowering young people with the necessary skills to contribute meaningfully is vital. Offering education and training can prepare the next generation to actively engage in FOCAC's complex discussions. These programs can be offered through workshops, online platforms, or partnerships with African and Chinese universities.

By providing platforms for policy research, study, and debates, young scholars can produce cutting-edge policies that will shape various global discourses that advance the common interest of Africa.

Building Stronger China-Africa People-to-People Ties

People-to-people exchanges are an essential aspect of the China-Africa partnership. Through cultural exchange programs, internships, and educational scholarships, FOCAC can enhance mutual understanding between Chinese and African youth. These exchanges not only foster cooperation but also help to debunk stereotypes and build bridges for future diplomatic, economic, and cultural partnerships.

Initiatives like the Chinese Government Scholarship Program have already enabled many African students to study in China. Expanding such programs will not only foster long-lasting ties but also create a cohort of young African leaders with an in-depth understanding of China and its development trajectory.

Encouraging Businesses and Institutions:

Collaboration between governments, businesses, and NGOs is key to expanding youth participation. Encouraging public and private sector entities to include young people in Africa-China development projects will help shape policies that are inclusive and forward-looking. Business mentorship programs and institutional partnerships can serve as platforms for practical learning and policy influence, allowing the younger generation to understand and contribute to Africa-China relations.

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