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Unpacking the communique of FOCAC 2024

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The 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

Sommet 2024 du Forum sur la Coopération Sino-Africaine

2024年9月4-6日，北京

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Introduction

The Ninth Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) held in Beijing from September 4 to 6, was the largest diplomatic event hosted by China since reopening its borders following the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond that, it was the largest gathering of the FOCAC to be ever held. The event was attended by 51 African heads of state, highlighting the significance of China-Africa relations.¹ The Summit, which attracted more African leaders than the United Nations General Assembly, coincided with China's growing opposition to a Euro-American countries alliance and important Asian economies like India, Japan, and South Korea. In his opening speech, President Xi underlined the significance of the “shared past” between China and Africa, expressing the view that the Western [development] approach to Africa “has inflicted immense sufferings on developing countries,”² explicitly positioning China's [development] approach to cooperation with Africa as an alternative to that of the West. The primary focus of FOCAC 2024 was to promote China's model of modernisation as a potential alternative path for African countries. Consequently, the term “modernisation” became a recurring theme throughout the FOCAC Beijing Action Plan and Xi's speech.

President Xi's stinging rebuke of Western imperialism and a careful reading of the speech signalled continuity of China's relationship with Africa. It also revealed that China views FOCAC as an avenue through which it can advance its quest for Great power status³. President Xi's keynote speech not only introduced a more confrontational framing of FOCAC in the context of great power competition with the United States but made the case for a much more expansive, more assertive foreign policy. The summit reflects how much the geopolitical situation has evolved since the last FOCAC, held in 2021. The polarising global challenges, including the security crisis in Ukraine and Gaza, climate imperialism, debt colonialism, and the global health crisis, increasingly highlighting the North-South divide in international affairs.⁴ Given the foregoing, this policy brief is set to analyse the key resolutions of FOCAC 2024 and assess the potential benefits of FOCAC 2024 for Africa, evaluate the potential benefits of FOCAC 2024 for China, and analyse the implications of FOCAC 2024 on democracy and development. In addressing these objectives, policy documents from the FOCAC 2024, China, the African Union, and African countries were analysed. The study also benefited from key informants drawn from academia, media, and civil society. The consulted individuals have profound and intimate knowledge of the Africa-China engagement. Secondary data obtained from the web-based sources was also extensively deployed in this analysis.

The policy brief is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the context of China-Africa relations; section 3 discusses the overview of the aims and objectives of FOCAC; section 4 analyses the dynamics of FOCAC 2024; section 5 presents the key resolutions of FOCAC 2024; sections 6 and 7 question whether there are any benefits for Africa and China from FOCAC 2024, respectively; Sections 8 and 9 present the implications of FOCAC 2024 on democracy and development in Africa and recommendations; and the last section concludes the discussion.

¹ Moore W. G. (2024). At FOCAC, China Renewed Commitments to Africa. Here's What Needs to Happen Next. At FOCAC, China Renewed Commitments to Africa. Here's What Needs to Happen Next. | Center For Global Development (cgdev.org)

² Xinhua. (2024, September 5). (FOCAC) Full text: Keynote address by Chinese President Xi Jinping at opening ceremony of 2024 FOCAC summit. (FOCAC) Full text: Keynote address by Chinese President Xi Jinping at opening ceremony of 2024 FOCAC summit-Xinhua (news.cn)

³ Nantulya P. (2024). FOCAC 2024: Elevating African Interests Beyond the Africa-China Summit. FOCAC 2024: Elevating African Interests Beyond the Africa-China Summit – Africa Center for Strategic Studies

China-Africa Relations

Sino-Africa relations have historically been characterised by China's support for African anti-colonial movements in the 1950s, which helped establish bilateral trade relations and build goodwill among many African nations.⁵ In 1971, the votes of African countries were instrumental in winning China's seat in the UN General Assembly and Security Council.⁶ In 1999, China created its 'Going Out' strategy, which encouraged Chinese companies to invest beyond China. The strategy was a statement of China's growing economic might and created a new wave of Chinese engagement in Africa. It was also an important source of employment for Chinese citizens working on new infrastructure projects.⁷ In 2000, China and Africa established FOCAC to improve cooperation between China and African states and signalled China's growing strategic initiative in Africa. In 2013, China launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which spawned a huge number of signature infrastructure projects built across Africa, funded by Chinese loans whose size, nature, and origin were often opaque. Some African countries including Kenya, Ghana, Zambia among others became badly exposed to Chinese lending during this period.⁸

Furthermore, China has been increasing its footprint on the continent, also in the defence and security sector.⁹ In Djibouti, it opened its first military facility outside China.¹⁰ China has also expanded its network of defence attachés in Africa (see figure 1) and increased defence sales in the continent. With the increasing Chinese activity on the continent, the quintessential question is, who is benefiting from this relationship? As will be argued anon, China has provided Africa with infrastructure financing totalling more than US\$690 billion in investments since the first FOCAC meeting in 2000.¹¹ However this has piled up Africa's debt. There is also emerging evidence suggesting that the Chinese presence, which is preceded by the diminishing presence of the Euro-American countries in the continent, is undermining the long efforts of promoting good governance and democracy.¹² China has always framed its relationship with Africa as the south-south relationship anchored on the Bandung conference's five principles of coexistence.¹³ China exploited these principles with an understanding that these issues were important to African nations that had been colonised and sidelined in global affairs for the long time. However, this policy brief privileges the assertion that there are underlying attached conditionalities—asymmetric, extra-contractual agreements, and arm-twisting requirements—that one of the parties in a relationship demands from other parties¹⁴ on China's development assistance. For example, countries that seek China-Africa relations have to support one-China principle, that is, Taiwan is an indispensable part of China and support China in the UN General Assembly and other multilateral institutions. This explains the absence of Eswatini in Chinese-led institutions like FOCAC.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Moyo, G., Nhliziyo, M., & Fayayo, R. (2020). The Entanglement of Zimbabwe in the US-China Goeconomic Frictions: Defining Winners and Losers. *iBusiness*, 12, 81-102. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ib.2020.123006>

⁶ Martinez, R. (2015). Chinese Soft Power, Africa, and the United Nations General Assembly. <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3491&context=thesedissertations>

⁷ Cabestan, J. P. (2020). Beijing's 'Going Out' Strategy and Belt and Road Initiative in the Sahel: The case of China's growing presence in Niger. In *China's Global Reach* (pp. 131-152). Routledge.

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Moyo, G. (2022). Piercing the Veil of Non-Interference Doctrine: China's Expanding Military Footprint in Africa. *The Palgrave Handbook of Africa and the Changing Global Order*, 805-823.

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Moore W. G. (2024). At FOCAC, China Renewed Commitments to Africa. Here's What Needs to Happen Next. At FOCAC, China Renewed Commitments to Africa. Here's What Needs to Happen Next. | Center For Global Development (cgdev.org)

¹² Moyo, G. (2020). China's development finance to Africa and the spectre of debt distress. *The Palgrave handbook of African political economy*, 557-572.

¹³ In April 1955, representatives of governments of Asian and African nations gathered in Bandung, Indonesia, to discuss peace and the role of the developing countries in the Cold War, economic development, and decolonization. The gathering was part of the wave of fighting against European imperialism. The core principles of the Bandung Conference were political self-determination, mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, and equality. These issues were of central importance to all participants in the conference, most of which had recently emerged from colonial rule. China has been committed to forging ahead with other countries by seeking common ground while shelving differences.

(see Fakhri, M., & Reynolds, K. (2017). *The Bandung Conference*, https://law.uoregon.edu/sites/default/files/fakhri_the_bandung_conference_international_law_oxford_bibliographies.pdf)

Overview of the aims and objectives of FOCAC

FOCAC was established in 2000 as a uni-multilateral partnership platform between China and 53 African states. Its objectives are to foster equal consultation, enhance understanding, expand consensus, strengthen friendship, and promote cooperation. Since its formation, FOCAC has achieved significant results in various areas, including infrastructure development, trade, investment and human resource development.¹⁵ Each summit is an opportunity for China to outline its Africa programmes for the succeeding three years, including the announcement of a resource package that would accompany each programme. Of the many partnership platforms Africa has today with a single external actor, FOCAC remains one of the most strategically intertwined and far-reaching in its depth, scope and level of cooperation. The official FOCAC documents define it as “a platform established by China and friendly African countries for collective consultation and dialogue and a cooperation mechanism between the developing countries, which falls into the category of south-south cooperation.”¹⁶

Dynamics of FOCAC 2024

The 2024 FOCAC aimed to revitalize the China-Africa partnership by focusing on key areas that would strengthen economic and strategic ties while promoting mutual benefits and long-term development. Preceded by reports of declining Chinese project financing in Africa in 2022, the total amount of Chinese loans to Africa fell below US\$1 billion, a two-decade low. The ninth FOCAC aimed to reaffirm China’s commitment to the continent and present a more pragmatic and lean approach to engagement. As such, President Xi’s announcement of a resource package of US\$50.7 billion, US\$10 billion more than the 2021 proclamation (see also Figure 1), came as a relief to the continent’s governments, businesses, and regional lending institutions.¹⁷

The 2024 FOCAC Summit yielded significant outcomes that reflect the evolving nature of China-Africa relations. These outcomes span key areas, including economic support, infrastructure development, employment generation, and a notable shift toward green energy. Each of these outcomes highlights China’s strategic interest in maintaining and deepening its role as Africa’s premier development partner while addressing both global economic pressures and local African needs.¹⁸

Instructively, African governments have become more assertive in promoting their interests within the FOCAC framework, and openly criticize, for instance, the trade imbalance. Concerns over trade imbalances, the terms of Chinese loans, and the environmental and social impacts of Chinese projects were voiced by several African nations.¹⁹ As a result, The FOCAC Beijing Action Plan (2025–2027)²⁰ resolved that China will open its market to African countries and encourage Chinese businesses to increase their direct investment in Africa. Thus, the 2024 FOCAC Summit represented both a moment of reckoning and a potential turning point in the Africa-China relationship.

¹⁴ Bodomo, A. (2019). Africa-China-Europe relations: conditions and conditionalities. *Journal of International Studies*, 12(4), 115-129.

¹⁵ Ministry of Commerce of China. (2021). China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035. China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035 (focac.org)

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ Beijing Declaration on Jointly Building an All-Weather China-Africa Community with a Shared Future for the New Era. Beijing Declaration on Jointly Building an All-Weather China-Africa Community with a Shared Future for the New Era_Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (mfa.gov.cn)

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ Nantulya P. (2024). FOCAC 2024: Elevating African Interests Beyond the Africa-China Summit. FOCAC 2024: Elevating African Interests Beyond the Africa-China Summit – Africa Center for Strategic Studies

²⁰ *ibid*

Key resolutions of FOCAC 2024

To African leaders' relief, FOCAC 2024 signalled China's (re)newed commitments to Africa. Coming into this year's summit, African leaders had noted with growing concern, a decline in Chinese lending to the cash-strapped continent since 2016.²¹ These recent declines reflect the global trend effects of COVID-19, coupled with China's slowing economy and Africa's debt defaults, as Chinese policy banks adopt a cautious approach and shift their focus toward domestic economic priorities.²² The summit adopted²³ the Beijing Action Plan (2025-2027) which features a corresponding section on the key measures to support Africa in the next three years and the following:

- President Xi announced a resource package of US\$50.7 billion to ensure the implementation of the proposed partnership actions (see figure 1).²⁴

FOCAC 2024 pledges	Number breakdown
Credit lines	US\$ 30 billion
Assistance in various forms	US\$ 11.27 billion
Investment in Africa	US\$ 9.9 billion
Training in security sector	6000 for military personnel, 1000 for police, and invite 500 young African military personnel to China
Training in education	60000 scholarships and training
Training in the medical sector	2000 medical personnel
Centres	25 centres of China-Africa studies, 20 health programmes and malaria centres, 30 joint laboratories for clean energy research
Political Party elites	Invite 1000 Africans
Agriculture sector	Send 500 experts, launch 500 programmes

Figure 1: FOCAC 2024 Pledges (Compiled by Mbongeni Nhliziyo)

- Adoption of Global Development Initiatives (GDI), Global Security Initiatives (GSI), and Global Civilisation Initiatives (GCI). This is significant to multilateralism and global governance reform and amplifies the African push for representation in key multilateral bodies such as the UN Security Council.²⁵
- Jointly building a high-level China-Africa community with a shared future
- Fostering synergy between high-quality Belt and Road Cooperation and the goals of Agenda 2063 of the African Union.

²¹ Moore W. G. (2024). At FOCAC, China Renewed Commitments to Africa. Here's What Needs to Happen Next. At FOCAC, China Renewed Commitments to Africa. Here's What Needs to Happen Next. | Center For Global Development (cgdev.org)

²² ibid

²³ Beijing Declaration on Jointly Building an All-Weather China-Africa Community with a Shared Future for the New Era. Beijing Declaration on Jointly Building an All-Weather China-Africa Community with a Shared Future for the New Era_Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (mfa.gov.cn)

²⁴ ibid

²⁵ Nantulya P. (2024). Reimagining African Agency in Africa-China Relations—Lessons from FOCAC 2024. Africa Center for Strategic Studies. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/reimagining-african-agency-in-africa-china-relations-lessons-from-focac-2024/>

- Building a strategic framework for the joint action of China and Africa for development
- Providing a strong impetus for the joint action of China and Africa for maintaining international peace and security, and injecting vitality into the joint action of China and Africa for deepening dialogue among cultures and civilisations.

Are there any benefits for Africa from FOCAC 2024?

Africa has been grappling with a series of external shocks, including the economic fallout from COVID-19, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the combined impact of high inflation.²⁶ These factors have created a period of economic stress for African economies, making the need for sustainable financing a critical necessity. In this context, China's financing has emerged as a crucial lifeline. The FOCAC 2024 Beijing Action Plan (2025-2027), coupled with the accompanying resource package and President Xi's speech, underscores China's commitment to partnering with African countries on an equal footing. The following were significant benefits for Africa from FOCAC 2024:

- The term “modernization” became a recurring theme throughout the FOCAC's Beijing Action Plan and Xi's speech. It is in this context that China committed to supporting Africa's modernisation and industrialisation ambitions. Consequently, the FOCAC Beijing Action Plan (2025-2027) incorporated the African Union's Agenda 2063, the African Development Bank's Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa, and the African Continental Free Trade Area. China also pledged to support the “construction of local value chains, manufacturing development, and deep processing of key minerals in Africa.” These reflect direct African input into FOCAC planning and will require corresponding participation from the African policymakers.²⁷
- The repeated use of the word “jointly” in President Xi's speech reflects China's sense of equality and partnership with Africa in their shared pursuit of development. This perspective not only frames China's cooperation with Africa as a joint South-South effort to rectify ‘historical wrongs’ but echoes the continuity of China-Africa relations.²⁸
- Responding to international criticism on debt sustainability, FOCAC shifted away from large-scale infrastructure deals towards “small yet beautiful” projects. The FOCAC Beijing Action Plan (2025-2027) announced that China will deliver 1,000 such “small yet beautiful” projects to improve people's livelihoods, which focus on vocational education and the training of professionals and technicians, developing sustainable solutions, such as the cultivation of edible and medicinal mushrooms and the planting of a high-yield, drought-resistant grass suitable for feeding livestock. These commitments align with the summit's overarching theme of modernisation and should be considered in the context of narrowing training opportunities for Africans in other countries and the need to build climate resilience.
- President Xi's ten-point plan, which places greater emphasis on issues like industrialisation, agriculture, health, trade, and energy infrastructure, reflect Africa's evolving concerns. It also reflects African negotiators assertiveness. As such, African countries have not only secured a “seat at the table,” but have also gained the agency to influence and even shape the FOCAC agenda.²⁹ In this context, FOCAC plays a key role in increasing Africa's influence on the international stage and altering global power dynamics.

²⁶ Nantulya P. (2024). FOCAC 2024: Elevating African Interests Beyond the Africa-China Summit. FOCAC 2024: Elevating African Interests Beyond the Africa-China Summit – Africa Center for Strategic Studies

²⁷ Beijing Declaration on Jointly Building an All-Weather China-Africa Community with a Shared Future for the New Era. Beijing Declaration on Jointly Building an All-Weather China-Africa Community with a Shared Future for the New Era_Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (mfa.gov.cn)

²⁸ ibid

²⁹ Staden V. S. (2023, December 2019).The Incredible Shrinking Africa-China Relationship. <https://chinaglobalsouth.com/analysis/the-incredible-shrinking-africa-china-relationship/>

Are there any benefits for China from FOCAC 2024?

FOCAC grouping highlights China's quest to establish alternative global governance structures that better align with its priorities and are less centred on Western powers. In this context, the 2024 FOCAC summit provided a prominent platform for promoting China's diplomatic trio—GSI, GDI, and GCI as alternative models of modernity that avoid the colonial roots of Western modernity. This bolsters China's drive to establish a global order centred on its values and interests.³⁰

FOCAC 2024 benefits China by:

- The adoption of China's GSI, GDI, and GCI marks a significant victory for Beijing. This validation of China's initiatives underscores its reliance on African countries, which are not only rich in natural resources but also wield considerable influence in the international arena with 54 votes at the United Nations General Assembly.
- FOCAC serves as a space to emphasize and showcase the stability and durability of China's partnerships with developing countries.³¹ As China faces increasing global pressure, particularly from the U.S. and its allies, its relationship with the developing world, exemplified by FOCAC, has become even more critical.
- FOCAC has emerged as a strategic avenue for China to advance its global ambitions—and it is winning. China produced its China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035 shortly after the Dakar Summit, at the preceding FOCAC meeting held in 2021, in Senegal. Notably, this Vision was developed with significant input from African countries, ensuring its alignment with the priorities of the African Union's Agenda 2063, especially in areas such as development partnerships, trade and investment, green growth, human resource development, and industrialization. The China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035 is closely aligned with China's own Vision 2035, which seeks to consolidate China's status as a Great Power.³² The growing influence and success of FOCAC in fostering economic cooperation and development in Africa, as exemplified by the concluded FOCAC 2024, further reinforce this perspective.

Implications of FOCAC 2024 on democracy and development in Africa

China's engagement with Africa is driven by its desire to challenge the rules-based international order and advance its commercial and geopolitical interests.³³ Statistics shown in figure 1 have far-reaching consequences, given China's history of supporting authoritarian regimes through financial aid, constructing surveillance states, and providing military hardware—accusations that are backed by substantial evidence.³⁴ The experiences of countries like Zambia, Ghana, and Ethiopia, where unsustainable debt burdens have led to economic challenges, serve as cautionary tales. The generous funding provided by China through FOCAC has been a driving force behind these developments, but it has also raised questions about the long-term consequences. FOCAC 2024 presented challenges to democracy and development, including:

³⁰ Alexander G and Oliver S. (2024). The Battle for the BRICS: Why the Future of the Bloc Will Shape Global Order. Foreign Affairs. The Battle for the BRICS: Why the Future of the Bloc Will Shape Global Order (foreignaffairs.com)

³¹ Nantulya P. (2024). FOCAC 2024: Elevating African Interests Beyond the Africa-China Summit. FOCAC 2024: Elevating African Interests Beyond the Africa-China Summit – Africa Center for Strategic Studies

³² *ibid*

³³ *ibid*

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ Alexander G and Oliver S. (2024). The Battle for the BRICS: Why the Future of the Bloc Will Shape Global Order. Foreign Affairs. The Battle for the BRICS: Why the Future of the Bloc Will Shape Global Order (foreignaffairs.com)

³⁶ Tsang, S., & Cheung, O. (2023). The Political Thought of Xi Jinping. Oxford University Press.

³⁷ Mills, G., Obasanjo, O., Herbst, J. I., & Biti, T. (2019). Democracy works: turning politics to Africa's advantage. Hurst & Company.

³⁸ Biden, J. R. (2022). Biden-Harris White House National Security Strategy, October 2022. Collections, 2022, 10-12.

³⁹ Alexander G and Oliver S. (2024). The Battle for the BRICS: Why the Future of the Bloc Will Shape Global Order. Foreign Affairs. The Battle for the BRICS: Why the Future of the Bloc Will Shape Global Order (foreignaffairs.com)

⁴⁰ Fiala L. (2023). How Are We to Understand China's Ambitions to Reform Global Governance? China Global South Project. <https://chinaglobalsouth.com/analysis/how-are-we-to-understand-chinas-ambitions-to-reform-global-governance>

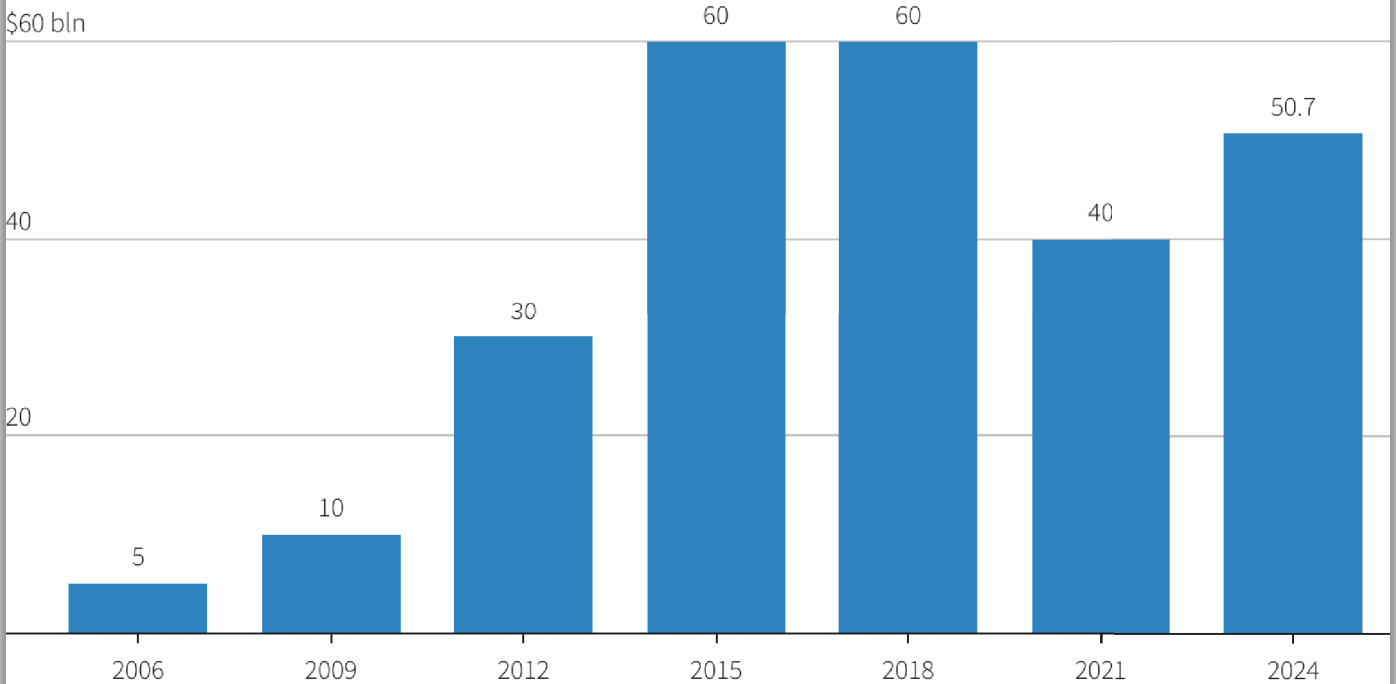
⁴¹ Lai, Y. H. (2023). Securitisation or autocratisation? Hong Kong's rule of law under the shadow of China's authoritarian governance. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 58(1), 8-25.

⁴² *ibid*

- The primary focus of FOCAC 2024 was to promote China’s model of modernisation as a potential alternative path for African countries. While modernisation is recognized as a universal goal, the overarching FOCAC discourse emphasizes Beijing’s authoritarian approach to modernisation as a potential model for Africa.³⁵ Additionally, China announced that it will share its “governance experiences,” a term that refers to Xi Jinping’s thoughts³⁶ on governance and China’s path to modernisation. While modernisation is recognized as a universal goal, the overarching FOCAC discourse emphasises Beijing’s authoritarian approach to modernisation as a potential model for Africa. For the African leaders leaning towards authoritarianism, the Chinese model is enticing—one of the economic growth without serious political competition. However, Africa has already attempted an authoritarian path, which has been overwhelmingly rejected by its citizens and failed to deliver developmental gains, as has been the case in Zimbabwe.³⁷
- Through various elite networks and exchanges, including party-to-party cooperation, media engagement, and training programmes, China seeks to promote its approach to ‘modernisation’ with Chinese characteristics. Given that the related announcements in the FOCAC 2024 action plan are not merely symbolic gestures, they pose a significant challenge to democracy advocates in Africa. Thus, Beijing is using its economic capacity to influence African countries to create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model and to privilege its interests and values.³⁸
- China is increasingly believing that the United States is galvanising the alliances and institutions that underpin the current global order to constrain its rise. In this context, the GSI, GDI, and GCI reflect not only China’s challenge to the West’s right to unilaterally define universal rules and seek to undermine the notion of universal values in areas such as democracy,³⁹ but China’s own promotion of the emerging alternative international governance architecture.
- The GSI aims to address international security issues through cooperation with other countries. GSI is viewed as a means of expanding China’s influence and challenging the United States-led security order. This development is worrying for democrats and human rights advocates. China’s policing model is not in sync with the democratic policing principles, as it prioritises authoritarian control over individual liberties. The enforcement of COVID-19 regulation measures, the human rights situation in Xinjiang province, and the export policing strategies to quell dissent in Hong Kong serve as stark examples.^{40 41} The police have effectively silenced opposition, illustrating the shortcomings of this policing approach.
- Chinese initiatives, including FOCAC, seek to create an alternative order and not challenge the reform of the existing world order. However, China’s development model offers a stark contrast to the Western narrative of a singular path to modernity. Traditionally, the West has promoted democracy, open markets, and institution-building based on universal humanist values.
- The FOCAC approach prioritises party-party relations over public engagement, hinders effective oversight and accountability. Many important African stakeholders are excluded from the decision-making process, limiting the initiative’s ability to deliver tangible benefits to ordinary citizens.⁴²
- While China stopped short of offering broad-based debt relief at FOCAC 2024, its focus on trade and investment partnerships may be a more sustainable approach. However, FOCAC Beijing Action Plan (2025-2027) does not offer clear solutions to reverse the US\$64-billion annual trade deficit between China and African countries.⁴³ Additionally, the plan does not lay out how China can work with African countries to reduce their debt burdens suggesting that, China did not prioritize an issues that are immediately affecting African countries. By prioritising the growth of African exports, China can support Africa’s economic development while also securing access to resources. This approach aligns the interests of both parties.⁴⁴
- The opacity surrounding FOCAC’s operations makes it difficult to quantify, monitor, and evaluate its outcomes. While China has pledged billions of dollars in support of Africa’s re-insurgency, how such funds reach countries and are used remains a mystery.

Rise in China's pledges to Africa

China will fund \$50.7 billion in various projects in Africa over the next three years, an increase of 27% from 2021.



Source: Tellimer | Reuters, Sep. 6, 2024 | By Sumanta Sen



A large banner for the 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. At the top center is the logo for the forum, which is a circular emblem with 'FORUM' at the top, 'CHINA' on the left, and 'AFRICA' on the right. Below the logo, the title is written in large blue Chinese characters: '2024年中非合作论坛峰会'. Underneath that, the title is repeated in English: 'The 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation' and in French: 'Sommet 2024 du Forum sur la Coopération Sino-Africaine'. The dates and location are listed in three columns: '2024年9月4-6日, 北京', '4-6 September 2024, Beijing', and '4-6 Septembre 2024, Beijing'. The bottom half of the banner features a row of many national flags from various countries, with a group of people seated at a long table in front of them.

Recommendations

The FOCAC Beijing Action Plan (2025-2027) ⁴⁵ outlines ambitious goals for China-Africa relations. To effectively implement these targets and ensure a sustainable future for Sino-Africa cooperation, African nations should consider the following key policy recommendations:

Craft Africa-China policy

While China has been proactive in outlining its strategic approach to Africa through official statements and papers, there remains a glaring gap in corresponding strategic documents from African countries, regional bodies, or the continent as a whole. This asymmetry often leaves Africa in a reactive position, scrambling to secure benefits rather than driving the agenda. To address this, Africa should learn from the successful models of the China-Latin America and Caribbean Forum and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, where countries coordinate their positions before engaging with China. This unified approach would strengthen Africa's collective bargaining power and enable it to negotiate more effectively with China. Currently, China capitalizes on this policy vacuum and Africa's fragmented approach. To counter this, African countries ought to promote the central role of the African Union in shaping the continent's relationship with China. The African Union, now a member of the G20, is well-positioned to coordinate African interests and ensure a more equitable partnership with China.⁴⁶

Enhancing African's interest at FOCAC

To amplify its voice, African policymakers should be more strategic by including civil society, the media, and nongovernmental voices. These voices will act as independent monitors between FOCAC summits to take stock of commitments, identify problems and areas for improvement, and ensure that benefits accrue to ordinary citizens, who rightly demand a greater say and accountability in how their governments engage foreign partners. As evidence has shown, particularly in the most publicised case of Zambia and Angola, there are pitfalls of unrestrained and unaccountable borrowing. Enhancing citizens interests at FOCAC will help in establishing more transparency of FOCAC agreements and ensure that African representatives place national interests ahead of personal ones.

Access to trade markets

China's commitment to opening its market wider to the least developed countries, including those in Africa, presents a significant opportunity for the continent. To maximize on this potential, Africa should actively encourage Chinese businesses to increase their direct investment. While individual nations like Kenya and Mauritius have taken steps, a coordinated continental approach, particularly within the framework of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area, is essential.

Value addition

African countries must leverage FOCAC to catalyse negotiations to transform their economies. For too long, they have been exporters of raw materials and importers of finished goods, limiting their benefits from international trade and leading to increased debt levels and underdevelopment. To reverse this dynamic, African countries need to focus on industrial development and moving up the value chain. While China cannot—and should not—be expected to develop Africa, it can play a crucial role in this transformation if the continent approaches the partnership strategically, particularly through the FOCAC framework.

African agency

African countries, through African Union should deploy their agency and transition from being passive recipients of Chinese initiatives to active architects of the proposed 'shared future.' the African Union should lead the negotiation processes, especially in the context that China views Africa as a country. African leaders must also remain accountable to their people for how external partners are engaged, respond to the popular demand for democracy, and create platforms for independent voices to comment on and shape their engagement strategies.

Conclusion

This policy brief arrives at a critical juncture when the global economic landscape is rapidly evolving, and Africa must strategically position itself for advantage. While the Africa-China relationship is significant, it should form one component of a diversified approach to international partnerships. As African leaders analyse the outcomes of FOCAC 2024, they must remember that the continent's future rests in the hands of its people. The potential for mutually beneficial cooperation between Africa and China is vast. However, realizing this potential necessitates a paradigm shift in their engagement. Looking beyond FOCAC, Africa should seize this opportunity to redefine its relationship with China. By prioritizing strategic market access, value addition, popular inclusion, and economic transformation, Africa can ensure that this partnership truly serves the interests of its people. The continent's future demands nothing less than a comprehensive, coordinated, and forward-thinking approach to its relations with China and the broader global community.

About PPRIZ

The Public Policy and Research Institute of Zimbabwe (PPRIZ) is an autonomous public policy and research institute established in the year 2013 by a Deed of Trust. PPRIZ is a non-profit making organisation based in Zimbabwe. PPRIZ endeavours to influence civic and public discourses in Zimbabwe on public policy driven by timely empirical research. PPRIZ will provide an open discussion platform for both aspiring and established Zimbabwean Scholars and Academics to research and engage with social, economic and political issues impacting the country.



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