

# FOCAC: China-Africa Cooperation Is Set To Rise to New Levels

by Dean Andromidas

Sept. 19—Under the theme, “Joining Hands To Advance Modernization and Build a Community with a Shared Future,” the Sept. 4-6 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) mapped out a new level of cooperation between the countries of Africa and China, underlining the unique role China is playing in the development of nations of the Global South.

Fifty-three African countries sent delegations to Beijing, led by either the head of state or head of government, with only the Kingdom of Eswatini not having attended as it has no diplomatic relations with China. The African Union Summit is the only other event able to muster such a broad representation of African nations, testifying to the high esteem China has engendered since the founding of the Forum in October of 2000. FOCAC has met every three years since.

FOCAC shows that China has developed a different type of relationship with partner nations than is common among the so-called West. China has insisted on a no-strings-attached foundation for its relationships, instead emphasizing the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence from the 1955 Non-Aligned Movement. These include: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence. In contrast, the United States currently has 13 African countries under sanctions, and it’s widely believed that Western countries deliver lectures while China delivers concrete project financing.



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*President Xi Jinping met with African heads of state and government at the ninth Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Sept. 4 to 6 in Beijing, to work out a new level of cooperation between the countries of Africa and China.*

China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, announced at FOCAC that China now has strategic relations at various levels with 53 of the 54 nations of Africa. On the sidelines of the forum, the presidents or heads of state of Libya, Mali, Comoros, Togo, Djibouti, the Seychelles, Chad, Malawi and Mauritania signed agreements to upgrade their diplomatic relations with China to the level of strategic partnership. Other countries, such as Nigeria and Cameroon, have agreed to Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships, while South African President Cyril

Ramaphosa signed a “New Era Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership,” the highest relationship China has among African countries. South Africa, as well as Egypt and Ethiopia, are also members of the BRICS alongside China.

### **Bilateral Summits, New Credit Lines**

In his speech to the forum, Chinese President Xi Jinping compared this year’s forum to how “blossoms in Spring turn into fruits in Autumn,” and how “a bumper harvest is the reward of hard work.” Over the last two decades, China has helped to set the stage for the development of Africa. This has included the launching of its Belt and Road Initiative, replete with numerous infrastructure projects which have now created an infrastructure-driven economic development policy—the same policy that transformed China into the largest industrial economy on Earth.

Many of the African delegations came days ahead of the opening of the FOCAC, or stayed on afterwards to hold meetings and maximize their visit. Over the course of the week, Xi Jinping held bilateral meetings with 25 African heads of state and government.

In his [keynote address given on Sept. 6](#), Xi announced that, over the next three years until the next FOCAC Forum, China is committed to disburse the equivalent of \$50 billion in credit lines, assistance in various forms, direct investments by Chinese companies, and access to Panda bonds to assist in Africa’s development. These investments, Xi said, are aimed at supporting—

China and Africa’s joint pursuit of modernization.... [A] modernization that puts the people first [for] free and full development of human beings. China and Africa account for one-third of the world population. Without our modernization, there will be no global modernization.

A key part of the announcements made by President Xi at the forum included ten “Partnership Action” programs, which were codified in a document produced at the end of the summit under the title Beijing Action Plan (2025-2027) of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. These included:

“Partnership Action for Mutual Learning among Civilizations,” which aims to share experience in governance, build 25 centers for China-African Studies, aid in developing Africa’s leadership academies, and

invite 1,000 members of African political parties to China;

“Partnership Action for Trade Prosperity,” where China will unilaterally open its market wider to give 33 of Africa’s least developed countries a zero-tariff treatment for 100% of tariff lines;

“Partnership Action for Industrial Chain Cooperation,” where China will push forward a “pilot zone” for trade cooperation, and launch an “African SMEs empowerment program”;

“Partnership Action for Connectivity,” which aims to carry out 30 infrastructure connectivity projects, including land-sea links and coordinated development, as well as assist in the development of the African Continental Free Trade Area;

“Partnership Action for Health,” which aims to create an alliance of hospitals and joint medical centers and which will send 2,000 Chinese medical personnel to Africa. It also includes launching 20 programs for health facilities and malaria treatment;

“Partnership Action for Agriculture and Livelihoods,” which includes emergency food assistance, 100,000 mu (about 6,670 hectares) of standardized agriculture demonstration areas, sending 500 agricultural experts to Africa, and a China-Africa agricultural science and technology innovation alliance;

“Partnership Action for Common Security,” which includes grants in military assistance under China’s Global Security Initiative, training for 6,000 military personnel and 1,000 police and law enforcement officers, and visits to China by 500 young African military officers.

China’s partnerships include full support for the African Union’s “Agenda 2063,” Africa’s blueprint for becoming a global powerhouse in the future.

### **Toward the Industrial Development of Africa**

Previous FOCAC events have showcased some of the many of China’s large infrastructure projects across Africa. This has included elements of the Belt and Road Initiative, rail projects such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) and Kenya’s Mombasa-Nairobi SGR, as well as other rail projects in Angola and Nigeria. They have also highlighted hydroelectric dam projects such as those in Ghana, Sudan, Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, and Cameroon—all of which together total 25 gigawatts of power. In addition, there have been the deep sea ports China has built in East and West Africa, as well as numer-



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*The Addis Ababa-Djibouti standard gauge railway, one of the many China-Africa projects highlighted at FOCAC meetings.*

ous other bridges and highways. China-Africa trade reached \$282.5 billion in 2023, of which \$100 billion is the export of African goods to China—a five-fold increase over the past 18 years.

Xi's ten partnerships promise to bring the China-African relationship to a new level, even beyond building flagship mega projects, using China's experience to assist in the industrialization of Africa in the broadest sense. This includes the transformation of Africa from being a mere exporter of raw materials to a full-scale industrial and manufacturing continent where the ongoing oppressive poverty becomes a thing of the past.

This includes the creation of supply chains that go beyond the mere extraction of raw materials and agricultural products. New industries will be required which are capable of transforming these into finished products, such as turning iron ore into steel products, copper ore into wire for the electrification of Africa, and uranium ore into fuel for nuclear reactors. This process is already happening. In Zimbabwe, a country rich in iron ore, coal and limestone, Chinese investors

have built an integrated steel plant that promises to become the largest in Africa. China will not only continue to build railways, but promises to carry out technology transfers to ultimately allow African nations to build their own railways.

Beyond hard infrastructure, China will also share its unique approach toward issues of governance, capacity building, and its successful experience in poverty reduction—a necessary accomplishment in building a stable political base to carry out this type of rapid industrial and technological transformation.

Many of the agreements signed on the sidelines of FOCAC already reflect this approach. For example, during his bilateral meeting with Nigerian President Bola Tinubu, the head of Africa's largest economy and most populous nation with 234 million people, Xi Jinping signed an agreement elevating relations with Nigeria to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, as well as an agreement to support Nigeria's nuclear energy program. Tinubu also visited the China Rail and Construction Corporation to discuss the completion

of another high-speed rail line linking Ibadan in the southwest to the capital, Abuja. Additionally, Tinubu met with ten Chinese corporate CEOs in IT, oil and gas, aluminum production, seaport and harbor construction, financial services, and satellite technology development.

In his meeting with Xi, Kenyan President William Ruto discussed further Chinese investment and cooperation in railways, energy, and youth development, while also securing a credit facility for 15 national road projects from the China Development Bank.

President Xi and Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan signed a memorandum of understanding for the renovation of the Tanzanian-Zambian railway. Originally built by China in the 1970s, it is the longest railway in Africa and is in need of rejuvenation.

The decrease in tariffs and opening up of China's market to more African agricultural products has gone along with Chinese companies building much-needed processing facilities, including canneries, packaging facilities, and storage facilities—all of which will support the expansion of Africa's agricultural production. On the sidelines of the forum, Tanzania's delegation secured an agreement with the Chinese Mainland Group for a \$28 million vegetable oil processing plant.

In terms of capacity building, the Tanzanian President cited China's assistance in building the Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School, founded on the model of the Chinese Communist Party's leadership school. It was jointly established by the Former Liberation Movements of Southern Africa including the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM, Tanzania); African National Congress (ANC, South Africa); Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO); Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA); South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO, Namibia); and Zimbabwe's African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF).

These are only a small sample of concluded agreements, and, as with previous FOCAC summits, the discussions and agreements signed during this year's Forum are expected to reap a bountiful harvest in time for the next one in 2027.

### Future Spacefaring and Productive Powers

Extending its partnerships to spacefaring, China convened the 2nd International Deep Space Exploration Conference on Sept. 5-8, parallel to the FOCAC forum. It was attended by many African delegations, a number of which joined the China-led International

Lunar Research Station (ILRS) program.

Maram Kaire, head of the Senegalese Space Study Agency, signed a cooperation agreement on Sept. 5 with the Lunar program, joining South Africa, Egypt, and many other countries from around the world as a partner. The Foundation for Space Development Africa and Africa Business Alliance also signed agreements. Senegal had recently joined the elite group of countries with space programs at the Aug. 16 launch of its first satellite, the Gaindesat-1A nanosatellite, on a Falcon 9 rocket from Vandenberg Space Force Base.

China intends to complete its robotic ILRS by 2035. By 2045, China intends to complete a Lunar station capable of conducting comprehensive scientific research on the moon and scientific experiments related to a manned mission to Mars, as well as long-term human habitation.

Extending China's growing cooperation with Africa to outer space truly demonstrates their commitment to the broadest possible partnership with Africa, and outlines a perspective of joint scientific and technological advancement for decades to come.



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