

Closer cooperation between China and Africa



This year's summit of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) will be held in Beijing from 4-6 September. The aim of the meeting is to intensify economic cooperation between China and Africa.

A LONG STORY

The extensive relations between China and Africa have a long history. Unlike many Western countries, China was never a colonial power in Africa. On the contrary, it was itself a victim of European hegemonic ambitions. As early as 1949, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, it fought for political independence and, despite setbacks during the 'Cultural Revolution', made rapid economic progress towards becoming a world power. So it was natural that China offered itself as a model to the young African states, which for their part had the ambition to catch up with the rest of the world after decades of colonial exploitation. China was one of the few countries that had actively supported independence movements in African countries since the 1950s.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF FOCAC?

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is an official forum between the People's Republic of China and all African countries except the Kingdom of Eswatini. It is the main multilateral coordination mechanism between African countries and China and has led to close co-operation at many levels. The forum was officially launched in 2000 and has since been held every three years, alternating between China and African countries. The last meeting was held in 2021, but online due to COVID-19.

China offers support to African countries in the form of debt relief, grants, low-interest loans and interest-free loans. China has taken a critical stance towards the dominant global model of development aid. In contrast to Western development aid, which often makes the respect for human rights a condition, China emphasises the importance of partnership and mutual benefit.

An important step in the development of relations between China and Africa was Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang's trip to Africa in 1980, where he presented the principles of economic and technical co-operation between China and Africa.

MANY DIFFERENT AREAS OF COOPERATION

There are many different levels of cooperation between People's Republic of China and various African countries and China is flexible to adapt their projects to the needs of each country.

Economy and trade

China is one of the most important trading partners and mainly imports raw materials and exports consumer goods.

Infrastructure

China is investing in the expansion of road and railway networks. A pioneering project was the construction of the TAZARA railway from Kapiri Mposhi in Zambia to Dar-es-Salaam in 1970-75.

Technology and agriculture

China offers African countries access to modern technologies, especially in the fields of telecommunications, renewable energies and agriculture.

Education

Before the pandemic, there were 80,000 African students in Chinese educational institutions.

Healthcare

China is helping to build hospitals and provides medical equipment and combat epidemics.

Culture

There is a lively cultural exchange in many fields which help to strengthen mutual understanding and cooperation.

FOCUS ON DIGITALISATION

A good example is the *Action Plan for China-Africa Digital Cooperation and Development*, which was jointly published by China and 26 African countries at the end of July and is intended to promote cooperation and development in the digital sector. Digital cooperation affects several sectors, from the expansion of digital infrastructure to the intensification of e-commerce. New technologies open up further opportunities, which were discussed by government and business representatives at the China-Africa Digital Cooperation Forum. At the FOCAC summit in September, even closer cooperation in the digital sector will be at the centre of negotiations.

The motives for sovereign lending to African countries differed considerably between China and Western countries during the last two decades... While Chinese lending mainly served its own economic or geopolitical objectives, which is well-known from the existing literature, Western countries' lending also pursued objectives that appear to be at odds with their self-interests but whose precise nature is not yet well-understood.

Motives for Chinese and Western Countries' Sovereign Lending to Africa, Kiel Institut für Weltwirtschaft