



China through Focac 2018 hosted the largest gathering of African leaders outside the continent.
Image: (PresidencyZA)

2024 FOCAC SUMMIT TAKEAWAYS: MEANING FOR THE FUTURE OF SINO- AFRICA RELATIONS

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The recently concluded Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summit, held in Beijing on September 4-6, 2024, is the largest-ever China-Africa gathering and, potentially, the most impactful. The gathering was attended by 53 out of 54 African states, including a record 51 heads of State, representatives of two heads of State, China, the Chairman of the African Union Commission (AUC) and the UN Secretary-General. It is also the most successful of over a

dozen summits organized by global powers jostling to expand their diplomatic footprints in Africa, including the United States-Africa Leaders' Summit (2022) and the Russia-Africa Summit (2023). Moreover, bringing together the continent with the largest concentration of developing countries and China (the fastest growing and most powerful developing nation) representing a third of the world's population and land area of nearly 40 million km,² FOCAC

has emerged as the largest multilateral platform in the global South and the largest market. In addition to the ten partnership actions by Chinese President Xi Jinping, the summit issued the “Beijing Declaration on Jointly Building an All-Weather China-Africa Community with a Shared Future for the New Era” and FOCAC Beijing Action Plan (2025-2027), which collectively will profoundly and irreversibly shape the future of diplomacy and development in Africa. The summit raises the question why China and Africa mutually attract each other.

From the outset, the 2024 FOCAC summit owes its success to the power of a shared narrative in diplomacy. The 2024 summit was described as a “reunion of family and friends.” Its main aim is to hew “a high-level China-Africa community with a shared future” from a rich tapestry of shared history by the two civilizations. In his speech, President Xi hailed the founding of FOCAC in 2000 as “a milestone in the history of China-Africa relations” going back to the enchanted ancient Silk Roads many centuries ago. Further, FOCAC emerges as an odyssey of two “old friends” rising from the ashes of external occupation and humiliation and now jointly advancing home-grown styles of modernization to empower and lift their people from a legacy of poverty and underdevelopment. FOCAC is a quest for a co-prosperity of civilizations, challenging the ‘Clash of Civilizations’ thesis by Western scholars. Anchored on the principles of equality, mutual respect and non-interference in internal affairs of other states, FOCAC is a stark contrast to the hegemony and conditionalities of the West. In the light of this, Xi elevated China’s bilateral relations with all African countries—minus Eswatini as the lone African country with diplomatic ties with Taiwan—to the level of strategic relations and raising the overall positioning of China-Africa relations to “an all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future in the new era”.

Second, the triumph of Chinese diplomacy also reveals the power of example from Chinese-style modernization, which is inspiring Africa’s own independent path to modernity. By 1980, only two African countries were poorer—or had a lower GDP per capita—than China: Guinea-Bissau and Uganda. Through FOCAC, China is sharing the lessons of its own modernization, traced to 1978 when it adopted the Reforms and Opening up policy. Today, China is the world’s second largest economy with a world class military. Its success in lifting over 850 million people out of poverty has rekindled hope in Africa, dispelling the myths that poverty is a curse of any civilization and that modernization equals Westernization.

Third, FOCAC is unique as one of the summits that come up with a political declaration, a comprehensive and mutually agreed upon action plan as well as a mechanism to monitor and evaluate partnership actions and programs. The FOCAC 2024 Action Plan will drive Sino-Africa joined efforts to advance modernization over the 2025-2027 period, focusing on civilization exchanges, trade, industrialization, connectivity, medicine and health, agriculture, green development, and security.

Fourth, China has always backed FOCAC action plans with huge resources. In this regard, Beijing is supporting the 2025-2027 Action Plan with RMB360 billion (over \$50.7 billion). This brings the total of Chinese support to Africa in the 2000 to 2004 period to \$250.7 billion! This includes \$80 billion for Action Plans adopted in the 2000-2015 period, \$60 billion as support to the 2015-2018 Johannesburg Action plan and another \$60 billion to fund the 2018-2021 Beijing Action Plan. This colossal figure is way more than the total of \$13.6 billion (equivalent to \$169.7 in 2024) that America spent on its most successful aid program to Europe (the Marshall Plan).

The impact of this support is clear. Over the last 24 years, FOCAC has transformed Africa's development landscape, contributing to lifting the continent from what Western investors dubbed "a hopeless Continent" to a hopeful "Africa rising". More concretely, between 2000 and 2022, China has built and upgraded 100,000 kilometers of highways; over 10,000 kilometers of railways; 200,000 kilometers of fiber-optic cables, nearly 200 ports, 200 schools, 130 hospitals and 50 stadiums. This excludes support in response to Ebola, COVID 19 and other epidemics and humanitarian emergencies. FOCAC continues to galvanize continental development and regional integration. Moreover, China is supporting the implementation of the African Union's Agenda 2063, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

On the road to 2027, Sino-Africa cooperation will pivot towards sustainable investments (completing existing large-scale infrastructure projects and support for "small and beautiful" livelihood projects), increasing private sector investments, green energy, debt management and debt relief to poorer nations.

Globally, China will require Africa's support for its efforts to dispense global public goods to avoid the collapse of the international system.

As a rising and responsible superpower, China is expected to provide global public goods to stabilize an increasingly unpredictable international order characterized by Cold War-era geopolitics, slow post-COVID recovery, conflicts (Ukraine and the Israeli-Palestine) and the perils of climate change.

China needs Africa's backing for four initiatives it has proposed as frameworks to dispense global public goods to foster a stable, non-hegemonic peaceful, equitable and prosperous multipolar world: the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and the Global Civilizational Initiative (GCI). As a useful platform that combines all these initiatives, the Proposal on the "Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa", unveiled in Kenya in January 2022, could be deepened and rolled out in all parts of Africa.

An abridged version of this Africa Research Note was published by the Sunday Nation, September 15, 2024.

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