

FOCAC: IN PERSPECTIVE

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is the most comprehensive platform that promotes the China-Africa relationship. Since its inception in 2000, FOCAC has aimed to facilitate collective dialogue and practical cooperation between China and Africa. To date, there have been five ministerial conferences, including a leaders' summit in 2006. The upcoming sixth FOCAC, which will be held in Johannesburg, South Africa on 4-5 December 2015, will see heads of state and government from China and African countries gather for the second time since the 2006 summit. This will also be the first FOCAC summit hosted in the African continent.

Overview of FOCAC's history

The creation of FOCAC 15 years ago was in fact a response to African countries' request, who were seeking more coordination in their bilateral relationships.ⁱ Ministerial conferences of the FOCAC take place every three years and are held in China and Africa alternately. The FOCAC not only focuses on economic cooperation but covers diplomacy, peace and security, development cooperation and cultural exchange.

➤ Major commitments consistently rising

China has been consistently increasing its commitments to African countries at FOCAC meetings, especially those pledged in numeric or output terms. For example, China's investment commitment increased from US\$5 billion in 2006 to US\$10 billion in 2009 and US\$20 billion in 2012.ⁱⁱ China committed to training 10,000 African personnel in various fields in 2003, 15,000 in 2006, 20,000 in 2009 and 30,000 in 2012. At the 2003 FOCAC, China announced its decision to grant zero-tariff treatment to exports from least developed countries (LDCs) in Africa; at the 2006 FOCAC, the number of such eligible export items was increased from 190 to 440; in 2009, it promised to gradually grant tariff-free treatment to 95 percent of all exports from African LDCs and further increased this number to 97 percent in 2012. Similarly, in 2006 China announced it would set up 10 agricultural demonstration centres across Africa, and increased this to 30 in 2009, in partnership with the United Nations' (UN) Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). A final example is the US\$5 billion China-Africa Development Fund announced at the 2006 FOCAC summit, which has since supported Chinese investment in Africa, including six special economic zones in five African countries: Zambia, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Mauritius and Egypt. The pattern of making gradual commitments and piloting and expanding specific goals is typical practice in China. Given this, China is likely to announce more financing and new initiatives during the upcoming FOCAC.

That said, while increasing commitments are welcomed by African countries, the information on their allocation to specific countries remains unclear. It is also sometimes unclear whether commitments are cumulative or have deadlines. For example,

commitments to build hospitals and malaria treatment centres in 2006 and 2009 were barely indistinguishable.

➤ Shifting priorities

Overall, 12 areas of cooperation under FOCAC have emerged over time: agriculture; investment and enterprise cooperation; infrastructure; trade; finance; development assistance and debt relief; energy and natural resources; climate change; poverty reduction; public health; education; academia and think tanks.

Within these, priorities have changed over time. For example, climate change and think tank exchange received more emphasis from 2009 onwards. Poverty reduction was also mentioned for the first time in 2009, and lesser attention has been devoted to energy and natural resources recently.

Focus areas are likely to shift further at the upcoming FOCAC. For example, industrialization, including the degree to which local jobs are created and technology is transferred, and training are now major priorities for many African countries. Peace and stability has recently been emphasized by both China and African countries.ⁱⁱⁱ Many civil society organizations are calling for environmental issues^{iv} including wildlife protection and renewable energy to be a higher priority in the FOCAC discussions.^v There are also other new global changes, such as the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the BRICS New Development Bank and the recent adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which should also be incorporated in the discussions and outcomes, especially for advancing regional integration and other priority goals for African countries.

➤ A multi-level consultative process

In order to coordinate, come up with and track feasible commitments, the Chinese side has established a FOCAC Follow-up Committee consisting of 28 Chinese departments and agencies led by the State Council. The three core ministries for FOCAC implementation are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Finance. The African side is less centralized, involving actors in Beijing and in African capitals. To coordinate FOCAC-related issues, a few countries have specific offices for FOCAC follow-up, such as South Africa and Ethiopia, while other countries may only have a specific desk to organize China-related affairs.^{vi}

In order to prepare, Chinese and African senior officials meet one year before the next ministerial meeting and also a few days before the ministerial meeting. In Beijing, the African diplomatic corps are expected to meet with China's Follow-up Committee every two or three months to discuss specific issues related to China-Africa relations and the FOCAC, and then consult with relevant departments in their capitals. Chinese ambassadors and economic and commercial counsellors in African countries also engage directly with African local communities and report back to the Follow-up Committee. Finally, FOCAC has a number of sub-forums in fields such as agriculture, education, culture, technology, youth and

entrepreneurship. For example, an annual China-Africa Poverty Reduction and Development Conference usually co-hosted by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Poverty Reduction Centre of China (IPRCC) will be upgraded to a FOCAC sub-forum for the first time this year. These sub-forums often involve interactions with NGOs, businesses and academics, especially from China.

In perspective: FOCAC is not unique for China or Africa

Africa is not China's only partner. Based on FOCAC's success to date, China is also seeking strategic partnerships with other regions via similar mechanisms. For example, the China-Pacific Island Countries Economic Development and Cooperation Forum was initiated in 2006. In January 2015, the first ministerial meeting of the Forum of China and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) was held in Beijing. China is also an important partner of Southeast Asia and actively participating in the ASEAN+3 dialogue that involves all ASEAN countries, Japan and South Korea.

Similarly, China is not Africa's only partner. African countries have collectively institutionalized partnerships with other individual countries outlined in the table below:

Increasing need for international organizations?

While consultation and dialogue should lie at the heart of the FOCAC process and other cooperation processes, there have been concerns that the African voice can be strengthened, and information clarified, for instance, on the allocation and implementation of commitments. Hence, with regard to FOCAC, China has gradually engaged international organizations in providing active support.

In particular, previously an observer, the African Union (AU) Commission became a full member of the FOCAC in October 2011 at the Senior Officials' meeting in China. In January 2015, China signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the AU with a view to improving transportation networks and accelerating industrialization across the continent. In May 2015, China became the first country to set up a "fully dedicated permanent mission" to the AU,^{vii} and plans remain for an AU mission to be set up in Beijing.^{viii} The UN has been increasingly participating in the FOCAC as an observer, with the Secretary-General delivering a speech at the 2012 ministerial conference. However, UN agencies have not yet been fully engaged in supporting the coordination or directly tracking commitments. This could be possible if requested.

Africa's partnerships	Year of creation and frequency	Highest number of participation at head of state level from Africa	Major announcements at the most recent event (click hyperlink in brackets for information source)
Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)	2000. Triennial	42 heads of state and government (2006)	US\$20 billion credit line for infrastructure, agriculture, manufacturing and SMEs; 18,000 scholarships; 30,000 training opportunities; 1,500 medical personnel. (FOCAC website)
Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD)	1993. Every 5 years	41 heads of state (2008)	Contribute to the growth of Africa with private and public means of up to US\$32 billion in the next five years. (Japan's Assistance Package for Africa at TICAD V)
US-Africa Leaders' Summit	2014	45 heads of state and government (2014)	US\$7 billion financing to promote American exports to and investment in Africa; US\$14 billion private sector investment in clean energy, aviation, banking and construction; US\$12 billion Power Africa Initiative. (White House press release)
France-Africa Summit	1973. Annual until 1990, now biennial	Around 40 heads of state and government (2013)	Double trade with African in the next five years; donations and projects to reach 20 billion euros (approx. US\$21 billion) in the next five years. (French President's opening speech)
India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS)	2008, 2011, 2015	41 heads of state and government (2015)	US\$10 billion concessional credit over the next five years; US\$600 million grant assistance including US\$100 million India-Africa Development Fund and US\$100 million India-Africa Health Fund; 50,000 scholarships over the next five years. (Indian Prime Minister's opening speech)
Africa-Turkey Cooperation Summit	2008, 2014	7 presidents (2014)	Tariff-preferences and duty-free privileges to expand trade and investment from US\$30 billion in 2013 to US\$50 billion by 2019. (Joint Implementation Plan 2015-2019)
Korea-Africa Forum Korea-Africa Forum on Economic Cooperation (KOAFEC) Korea-Africa Forum on Industry Cooperation (KOFIC)	Korea-Africa Forum: 2006, triennial KOAFEC: 2006, biennial KOFIC: 2008, annual	5 heads of state (2006)	Increase official development assistance to Africa; expand scholarship programmes for African students. (Action Plan 2013-2015)

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ⁱ Anshan Li et al., FOCAC Twelve Years Later: Achievements, Challenges and the Way Forward, Discussion Paper 74 (2012). Available from: <http://osf.org.za/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/FOCAC-twelve-years-later-achievements-challenges-and-the-way-forward.pdf>

ⁱⁱ This includes both preferential loans and preferential export buyer's credit.

ⁱⁱⁱ Yun Sun, "The Sixth Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: New Agenda and New Approach?" in *Foresight Africa: Top Priorities for the Continent in 2015*, Brookings Institution (January, 2015). Available from: <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2015/01/foresight-africa/china-africa-cooperation-sun.pdf?la=en>

^{iv} May Tan-Mullins, "Policy Meets Practice: Chinese Environmental Protection in Africa in the Wake of FOCAC VI", China Monitor, Center for Chinese Studies at Stellenbosch University (August, 2015). Available from: http://www.ccs.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/CCS_China_Monitor_FOCAC_July-2015_02.pdf

^v Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, "Regimes of Truth, Localisation of Chinese Enterprises, and African Agency", China Monitor, Center for Chinese Studies at Stellenbosch University (August, 2015). Same link as in note iv.

^{vi} Haifang Liu, "FOCAC VI: African Initiatives towards a Sustainable Chinese Relationship" in *FOCAC VI – African Initiatives towards a Sustainable Chinese Relationship*, China Monitor, Center for Chinese Studies at Stellenbosch University (July 2015). Same link as in note iv.

^{vii} Other countries such as the US have representative offices.

^{viii} "China Opens Permanent Mission to AU", Xinhua (May 8, 2015). Available from: <http://english.cri.cn/12394/2015/05/08/3745s877793.htm>