

II. International

FOCAC: China's Massive Role in Transforming Africa

by William Jones and EIR Staff

Dec. 9—While most of the world is doing whatever it can to self-isolate from the countries of southern Africa due to the report of a new and possibly more virulent variant of the COVID virus, China is revving up to increase its support for the beleaguered continent.

The two-day meeting in Senegal of the triennial Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) on November 29 and 30 was attended by all 55 members (53 African countries plus the African Union and China). Chinese President Xi Jinping presented the keynote by video. While the FOCAC meetings in the past focused primarily on Chinese cooperation in the building of major infrastructure projects as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), in this year of the pandemic, with the advanced western nations largely hoarding their vaccines from the African nations, China has emphasized the “Health Silk Road.”

In his speech, President Xi's reported:

To help the AU [African Union] achieve its goal of vaccinating 60% of the African population by 2022, I announce that China will provide another one billion doses of vaccines to Africa, including 600 million doses as a donation and 400 million doses to be provided through such means as joint production by Chinese companies and relevant African countries.... In addition, China will undertake 10 medical and health projects for African coun-

tries and send 1,500 medical personnel and public health experts to Africa.

Justin Yifu Lin, the former chief economist at the World Bank, in a Dec. 6 commentary posted on Project Syndicate's website, co-authored by Dr. Yan Wang of Boston University, took note of President Xi's focus



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China's was the first government to insist on the export of COVID-19 vaccine to African countries. Here, one of many aid shipments arrives from China.

on the vaccines and health care as the most urgent necessity in Africa. The authors added that

[M]any low- and lower-middle-income countries continue to suffer more fundamental deficiencies, such as a lack of health-care personnel and resources, from hospital beds to ventilators. For some, it is the inability to deliver clean water, electricity, and sanitation that is choking the



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Addressing the triennial FOCAC meeting Nov. 29, 2021, President Xi Jinping pledged to continue China's massive program of helping African nations with infrastructure and healthcare to alleviate poverty and disease.

economy. After 70 years of development aid and cooperation, how is it possible that many countries remain stuck in low- or lower-middle-income traps without sufficient capacity to meet their citizens' basic needs? Both market and government failures—rooted not least in the long-standing neoliberal orthodoxy—can be blamed.

Lin continued:

A core problem is that all that aid did not adequately address infrastructure bottlenecks. This partly explains why African countries have often welcomed Chinese investment.

Xi Jinping on the Belt and Road

In his address at the FOCAC forum, Xi said,

Over the past three years and more, China and Africa have worked together to fully implement the eight major initiatives and other outcomes of the Beijing Summit [FOCAC 2018], and completed a large number of priority cooperation projects. China-Africa trade and China's investment in Africa have been on a steady rise.



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Dr. Justin Yifu Lin, Dean of the Institute of New Structural Economics and Dean of the Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development at Peking University.

Almost all African members of FOCAC have joined the big family of Belt and Road cooperation. All these have injected strong impetus into the China-Africa comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership.

Dr. Lin, now the Dean of the Institute of New Structural Economics and Dean of the Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development at Peking University, quantified this development in the Project Syndicate article:

China financed, constructed, and completed thousands of hard and soft infrastructure projects in Africa in the first two decades of this century [since the first ministerial conference of FOCAC in Beijing in 2000]. This includes over 6,000 kilometers (3,728 miles) of railways in Africa, and roads covering roughly the same distance. China has also constructed nearly 20 ports, over 80 large-scale power plants, more than 130 medical facilities, 45 stadiums, and 170 schools.

In preparation for the 2021 FOCAC, China released a [White Paper](#) Nov. 26 on “China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals”:

Over the past 58 years, China has sent a total of 23,000 medical team members to Africa, who have treated 230 million patients. At present, there are nearly 1,000 Chinese medical workers in 45 African countries.... Chinese medical teams carried out 34 free clinical programs under the Brightness Action initiative, restoring the eyesight of almost 10,000 African cataract patients.

China was also the first country to insist on the export of vaccines to the African countries and took the lead in exporting its own vaccines. By November 2021, China had provided 1.7 billion doses of COVID vaccine to more than 110 countries and organizations,

including 50 African countries.

But the ability to deal with an outbreak like COVID also depends on the underlying infrastructure, the availability of hospitals, of doctors, of lines of transportation and communication, of food supply, power generation and all those things that make up the basis for life in the modern world. In Africa, most of these things are lacking or are in short supply, making it more difficult for the African nations to deal effectively with such a pandemic as COVID-19. Chinese aid to Africa encompasses all of these requirements.

The Real ‘Green Revolution’

As Africa is still primarily an agricultural producer, promoting the development of agriculture and raising the level of agricultural productivity is also a primary goal of the Chinese Africa policy. In his speech to FOCAC, Xi pledged that China would undertake 10 poverty-reduction and agricultural projects for Africa and send 500 agricultural experts to Africa.

In addition, he said:

China will set up a number of China-Africa joint centers for modern agrotechnology exchange, demonstration, and training in China, encourage Chinese institutions and companies to build in Africa demonstration villages for China-Africa cooperation on agricultural development and poverty reduction.

The great success of China’s own poverty reduction program, successfully lifting over 800 million people out of abject poverty by the end of 2020, has been viewed with great interest in Africa where poverty still remains the major hurdle for the continent to overcome, and China is more than willing to share their experiences and their technologies to help Africa accomplish their own goals in poverty reduction. Central to this is China’s discovery, in the process of its own economic rise, that the lack of basic infrastructure is the primary roadblock to escaping poverty and becoming a modern industrial nation.

The White Paper reports that over 7,000 African trainees have received agricultural training in China, while Chinese agricultural experts in Africa have trained more than 50,000 Africans and built 23 agricultural demonstration centers. By the end of 2020, more than 200 Chinese companies had an investment stock of \$1.11 billion in the agricultural sector in 35 African countries, covering areas such as planting, breeding and processing.

While Lester Brown, the founder of the zero-growth promoting Worldwatch Institute, forecast in the 1970s that China would soon be facing a famine due to population growth outstripping food production,



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The Republic of the Congo’s No. 1 National Highway, constructed by the China State Construction Engineering Corporation and completed March 1, 2016, connects the deep-water port of Pointe-Noire to the inland capital city, Brazzaville. Here, an asphalt paver at work on a section of that road.

Chinese agronomist Yuan Longping was developing his new and more productive hybrid rice varieties, a veritable “green revolution,” which threw a monkey wrench into the attempt to convince the world that there are “limits to growth”—ideas which have again gained steam under the rubric of the lie that carbon dioxide, the chemical of plant life, is causing climate change. The advanced methods of Yuan Longping, who passed away this year, are now greatly aiding African farmers in producing food for the world. President Xi also said that China would purchase \$300 billion worth of African food products over the next three years, further expanding the scope of zero-tariff products from the least-developed countries in order to achieve this goal.

The Industrialization of Africa

The big hurdle in Africa will be putting it on the path to industrialization. In addition to the infrastructure projects noted above, China has also established industrial capacity cooperation mechanisms with 15 countries in Africa and built economic and trade cooperation zones, special economic zones, industrial parks, and science parks. Chinese projects implemented by Chinese companies accounted for 31.4% of all infrastructure projects on the African continent.

President Xi pledged to invest \$40 billion in African countries over the coming three years. This is a significant figure, but is down one-third from the \$60 billion China pledged at the last two triennial summits, held in 2018 and 2015. However, Xi also said he will encourage Chinese businesses to invest no less than \$10 billion in Africa in the next three years, and will establish a platform for China-Africa private investment promotion, focused particularly on small-and medium-sized enterprises. And in spite of all the sound and fury about a “debt trap,” China is again prepared to exempt Africa’s least developed countries from paying debt incurred in the form of interest-free Chinese government loans due by the end of 2021, which they have done in previous years. While all African countries have a debt burden, that debt is primarily debt incurred to the Western companies or to the World Bank and the IMF. Chinese funds go almost exclusively to expanding infrastructure and the physical economy, which directly expands the recipient country’s economic power.

China is also focused on implementing the Digital Economy, and will undertake 10 digital economy projects for Africa, set up centers for China-Africa cooperation on a satellite remote-sensing application, and support the development of China-Africa joint laboratories, partner institutes, and scientific and technological innovation cooperation bases, said Xi. China will work with African countries to expand Silk Road e-commerce cooperation, hold online shopping festivals featuring quality African products and tourism e-commerce promotion activities, and launch a campaign to market 100 African stores and 1,000



The future headquarters of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, under construction by the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation, Nov. 29, 2021.

African products on e-commerce platforms.

As has been the case in the rural areas of China, the links to e-commerce have substantially increased the access to markets for farmers’ products, giving the rural farmers a much more substantial income. The same could happen with Africa in tapping the enormous African and Chinese markets through e-commerce. Chinese companies have built more than half of the continent’s wireless sites and high-speed mobile broadband networks. In total, more than 200,000 km of optical fiber have been laid, giving broadband access to 6 million African households, and serving more than 900 million people.

China is also playing a major role in educating the future scientific cadre of Africa. China and African countries have set up high-level joint laboratories, including the Sino-Africa Joint Research Center at the Jomo Kenyatta University in Juja, Kenya. China has assisted Africa in cultivating a large number of scientific and technological talents through projects such as the Alliance of International Science Organizations in the Belt and Road Region Scholarship, Chinese government scholarships, the Talented Young Scientist Program, and the Innovative Talent Exchange Project. The two sides also collaborate in developing China’s remote sensing data, cooperating in the fields of disaster

prevention and mitigation, radio astronomy, satellite navigation and positioning, and precision agriculture. Both China and African nations are participating in the Square Kilometer Array Project, which is building a global radio telescope, the world's largest, based primarily in South Africa and Australia.

The Feeble Western ‘Answer’ to the Belt and Road

In the weeks preceding the FOCAC, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Africa, stopping in Kenya and Nigeria before concluding his tour in Senegal, just one week before the FOCAC meeting which was to be held in that country. He lectured the Africans that working with China would cause problems, and that working with “liberal democracies” in the West would be more beneficial.

What was he offering? The “Build Back Better World” (3BW) proposed by the G7 nations is more of the same, “encouraging private sector investments,” which hardly ever materialize, and come with “value-driven” conditionalities.

Just as useless was the plan put forward by the European Commission announced Dec. 1 called Global Gateway, which claims to be mobilizing up to €300 billion by 2027 for global infrastructure. “Global Gateway has the potential to turn the EU into a more effective geopolitical player,” said German Ambassador to the EU Michael Clauss. “For many partner countries, the offer of a rules- and values-based cooperation at eye level will be an attractive alternative to the Chinese Belt and Road initiative.”

But, like 3BW, it is mostly an effort to leverage already existing funds to draw in private sector funds, and the only “infrastructure” it is acknowledging is for renewable energy.

Africans Prefer Chinese Investment

Dr. Justin Lin’s statement quoted above, that African nations often prefer Chinese investment, was confirmed by the many positive reports from leading Africans following the FOCAC.

Dr. Ibrahim Mayaki, CEO of the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa’s Development (AUDA-NEPAD), said:

The pledge of additional vaccine doses by China comes as a welcome move to show solidarity with Africa in its fight against the new variant of the coronavirus, known as Omicron.



DoS/Ron Przysucha

In a vain attempt to derail Africa's growing preference for Chinese investment, Antony J. Blinken, U.S. Secretary of State, offered only hopes of “private sector investments,” many of which, if they materialize at all, come with conditionalities.

I have no doubt that the China-Africa relation is genuine. What we now need after some 20 plus years of FOCAC, is significant and quantum amounts of mass-scale investments that will transform all productivity sectors of African economies, effectively making Africa a significant global player just like China.

Guinean Foreign Minister, Dr. Morissanda Kouyaté said that the mutually beneficial cooperation with China in fields including infrastructure, resources and telecommunications is full of vitality, and China’s success in poverty reduction provides a valuable reference for Africa.

Gabon’s Foreign Minister, Pacôme Moubelet-Boubeya said that Gabon looks forward to deepening cooperation in agriculture, forestry, and other fields with China to achieve green development and win-win results. He also noted that China was the first country to provide Gabon with anti-pandemic supplies and vaccines.

Under the title, “Upholding the Brotherhood of Sino-Africa relations,” the World Bank’s Lead Specialist in the Africa Region, Stephen Ndegwa, said the FOCAC conference, “once again proved the unbreakable bond between the two [Africa and China], and huge potential that is still untapped in the win-win partnership.” Frederick Shava, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Zimbabwe, which is under sanctions from the U.S. wrote: “The [FOCAC] is paying attention to the industrialization of African countries to ensure every country achieves sustainable economic development through exports of primary commodities.”