



In Focus: The 2023 LSE China-Africa Conference

With Xi Jinping attending the 15th BRICS Summit held in South Africa and the African Union's ascension to the G20, 2023 marked a pivotal year for China-Africa relations. Despite fluctuations in trade and investment numbers, a renewed sense of purpose permeated the air as diplomats, researchers, and innovators convened for the highly anticipated 2023 China-Africa Conference.

Hosted by the LSE Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa and the China-Africa Initiative, the conference brought together a diverse array of stakeholders under the theme: "China in the African Century: Growth, Green, Governance, and Globalization." This annual gathering served as a platform for open and honest dialogue, fostering socio-economic transformation across the African continent.

What has been discussed in the 2023 LSE China-Africa Conference?

Nkosana Moyo, former Minister of Industry and International Trade for Zimbabwe, set the tone by emphasizing the importance of forging sustainable, long-term relationships that uplift the lives of African people. The first panel, joined by Hannah Ryder, CEO of Development Reimagined, delved into the intricacies of leveraging global partnerships for Africa's development, while

questioning how to maximize this developmental partnership for the true benefit of African nations and their citizens.

Dr. Mo Ibrahim, Founder of Mo Ibrahim Foundation, echoed the need for amplifying African civil society voices, asserting that good governance is paramount, and Chinese investments must align with the interests of local communities. Huiyao Wang, Founder and President of the Centre for China and Globalization, offered a unique perspective, drawing parallels between China's own developmental journey and the challenges facing Africa today.

A common thread emerged: the urgency of fostering green energy transitions and economic diversification across the continent. Shirley Ze Yu, Director of LSE's China-Africa Initiative, saw immense potential in Sino-African collaboration on trade, technology, and renewable energy, prompting Africa's industrialization to carve out unique pathways that harmonize economic growth with environmental sustainability.

The innovation panel was particularly energizing, with Robert Ochola, CEO of AfricaNanda, championing the cultivation of digital talents and entrepreneurs, casting a vision of a digitally transformed, prosperous continent driven by its youth. Ali Kooli, former Tunisian Minister of Economy, Finance and Trade, left attendees with a poignant reminder that electricity, food security, health, and education are the keystones upon which Africa's development must be built.

China-Africa Partnership: Key Takeaways from the Conference

Moving forward, a partnership that is mutually beneficial to both Africa and China, driven by shared interests and a supportive plan, is vital. Sustainable development should be the cornerstone of this collaboration, steering clear of the pitfalls of Western colonization. A people-centered approach, transparency, and accountability are paramount, as sustainability is only attainable when the well-being of people, the protection of the planet, and the pursuit of shared prosperity are placed at the center.

Resilience, independence, and the strengthening of governance capacity should be long-term oriented goals. African nations must enhance negotiations to foster better outcomes and hold investors accountable for responsible investments. This empowerment will pave the way for a more equitable partnership, dismantling dependencies inherited from colonial-era economic structures.

Furthermore, the sharing of knowledge, technology, and resources between Africa and China must be facilitated, fostering mutual understanding and collectively addressing the challenges of development. Africa's diversity must be celebrated, and investments must be contextualized to effectively engage with the various cultures present on the continent. By recognizing Africa's agency and autonomy, and understanding the historical context and intrinsic dynamics of different developing countries, a truly mutually beneficial shared future can be achieved.

Conference Highlight: Youth Leaders' Debate

The Conference ignited a spark of intellectual fervor, as African and Chinese youth leaders fearlessly engaged in a thought-provoking debate: "Helping or Harming? China's Impact on Africa's Jobs, Youth, and Sustainability."

Heyuan (Angela) Li, president of the LSE China Society, set the stage, her words resonating like a clarion call for open and nuanced discourse. Tumusiime Aloysious of the Program for African Leadership (PFAL) acknowledged the polarized narratives surrounding China's role in Africa, skillfully navigating the complexities with a pragmatic lens. From the Chinese perspective, Zixuan Wang underscored the importance of fostering deeper connections between the youth of both nations, a bridge to mutual understanding. Omar Djabi, a Tunisian student, shared his personal journey, illuminating the magnitude of Sino-African relations and the promise of such debates. As perspectives clashed and insights emerged, the audience was captivated by the passion and intellect on display. No clear consensus was reached, but the true victory lay in the open exchange of ideas, the willingness to engage with complexity, and the recognition that the future of China-Africa relations rests on the shoulders of the youth.

Student Reflections

Student reflections further enriched the discourse. Nyashadzashe Mandivenga emphasized Africa's need for self-investment and intra-African solidarity, while Haja Isatu Bah highlighted the importance of robust institutions to negotiate better deals. Malaika Newsome-Magadza appreciated the direct engagement on issues of power, sovereignty, and industry, motivating her to seek similar interactions. Yuke Zhao challenged Western-centric thinking, recognizing the agency and autonomy of African nations. Dr. Oluronbi Olubunmi Ifeolu contemplated the advantages of competition in empowering negotiations, posing thought-provoking questions about enhancing bargaining power and responsible investment.

On the whole, the China-Africa Conference was a tapestry of diverse perspectives, woven together by the shared commitment to unlocking Africa's vast potential. As the echoes of these impassioned debates reverberate, they serve as a reminder that the future is not solely shaped by diplomats and leaders but by the youth, whose voices rang loud and clear, heralding a new era of collaboration and progress. The event has ignited a renewed commitment to advocate for a liberated and empowered Africa, grounded in decolonial principles and driven by intra-African solidarity. Through collective action, self-determination, and strategic partnerships, the path to sustainable prosperity can be paved, leaving an indelible mark on the global development landscape.