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Forum: Special, Political, and Decolonization Committee (GA4)

Issue: Addressing Chinese Neo-colonization on the African continent

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Introduction

Chinese neo-colonization in Africa has been one of the most recent and eye-catching cases of modern-day colonial interests of major countries as no other country has acted upon said interest at this scale. It has had many media outlets and governmental representatives from various nations raise inquiries on topics such as sovereignty, development, as well as the sustainable stability of the continent. The term broadly refers to China, a financial superpower, expanding political and economic influence in Africa, often achieved through large infrastructural projects, binding trade agreements and long-term loans to national governments. Supporters of these ties claim that such cooperation fosters growth, builds essential systems and strengthens South-South relations, whereas critics warn that an apparent growth in dependence on Chinese investments risks undermining local industries, increasing debt burdens and limiting the continent's political autonomy.[1]

Journalists frequently describe the relationship between China and African states as ambivalent, as it can be a revolutionary change of pace for the already struggling continent, expanding China's financial horizons but could also compromise African sovereignty. On one hand, African states benefit from infrastructural changes such as improved transport networks, new sources of energy, and access to global markets. On the other hand, any sort of reliance on an economically oriented China can trap governments in cycles of debt, which can later completely reset the benefits of the previous improvements. However, it is important to note African agency in these arrangements; many politicians across the continent often choose to engage with China as an alternative to Western institutions, seeing it as a chance to escape older colonial-era power structures. Unlike earlier European colonial domination, African governments today hold formal sovereignty and negotiate terms even though the balance of power remains uneven. Additionally, many questions arise over whether appropriate labor rights are offered in the region, how the nearby environment is

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[1] Mlambo, Catherine. "China in Africa: An Examination of the Impact." *Economies*, vol. 10, no. 7, 2022.

affected, and whether local populations truly benefit from such projects. This dual reality makes the issue highly complex and difficult to categorize in simple terms.

At the heart of the issue lies the fine line between bilateral benefit and exploitation. African states gain the much-needed capital and influence, yet this dynamic can very well turn into a case of China reaping its benefits. The future of these relations will significantly shape Africa's political, social and economic trajectory.

Definition of key terms

Neocolonialism

"Neocolonialism, the control of less-developed countries by developed countries through indirect means."[2]

Economic Imperialism

"A situation in which one country has a lot of economic power or influence over others."[3]

Cultural Hegemony

"In Marxist philosophy, cultural hegemony is the dominance of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class who shape the culture of that society."[4]

Semi-colony

"A country which is … officially independent but which in fact depends on or is dominated by another country."[5]

Françafrique

"France's sphere of influence … over former French and (also French-speaking) Belgian colonies in sub-Saharan Africa."[6]

[2] "Neocolonialism." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 22 June 2024, www.britannica.com/topic/neocolonialism. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.

[3] "Economic Imperialism." *Cambridge Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/economic-imperialism. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.

[4] "Cultural Hegemony." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 30 July 2024, www.britannica.com/topic/cultural-hegemony. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.

[5] "Semi-colony." *Oxford Reference*, Oxford University Press, www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100427677. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.

[6] "Françafrique." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14 Feb. 2020, www.britannica.com/topic/Françafrique. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.

Comprador Colonialism

"The compradors emerged as a new class that acted as intermediaries for colonial powers or foreign capital."[7]

Colonialism

"Colonialism is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another."[8]

Imperialism

"Imperialism is the state policy, practice, or advocacy of extending power and dominion … by direct territorial acquisition or by gaining political and economic control of other territories and peoples."[9]

Dependency Theory

"An approach to understanding economic underdevelopment that emphasizes the constraints imposed by the global political and economic order."[10]

Soft Power

"The ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment."[11]

Debt-Trap Diplomacy

"An international financial relationship where a creditor country or institution extends debt … to increase the lender's political leverage."[12]

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

"China proposed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 to improve connectivity and cooperation on a transcontinental scale."[13]

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[7] "Comprador." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1 Nov. 2018, www.britannica.com/topic/comprador. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.

[8] "Colonialism." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 20 July 1998, www.britannica.com/topic/colonialism. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.

[9] "Imperialism." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14 June 2024, www.britannica.com/topic/imperialism. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.

[10] "Dependency Theory." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15 Jan. 2024, www.britannica.com/topic/dependency-theory. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.

[11] Nye, Joseph S. "Soft Power." *Project Syndicate*, 10 Jan. 2003, www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/soft-power. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.

[12] "Debt-Trap Diplomacy." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 5 Dec. 2023, www.britannica.com/topic/debt-trap-diplomacy. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.

[13] "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)." *World Bank*, 2018, www.worldbank.org/en/topic/regional-integration/brief/belt-and-road-initiative. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.

Digital Neocolonialism

"I define digital neocolonialism as the use of information technology and the internet by hegemonic powers as a means of indirect control or influence."[14]

South-South Cooperation

"...occurs when countries in the Global South, along with institutions and civil society organizations – exchange knowledge, technology and resources to solve common problems."[15]

Military Presence

"The 'peacetime presence of a foreign military on the territory of another sovereign state' … with the consent of the host state."[16]

Indirect Control

"Spheres of influence … which is not a formal colony … as a result of its commercial, strategic or military interests."[17]

"Resources for infrastructure" deals

"Resource for infrastructure' deals refer to those in which loans for infrastructure development are repaid with natural resources." [18]

Timeline of events

Date	Description of event
December 9, 1961	China establishes diplomatic relations with Tanganyika (later Tanzania).

[14] Taffel, Sy. "Digital Neocolonialism." *First Monday*, vol. 21, no. 10, Oct. 2016, firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/7092. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.
[15] International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). *"Demystifying South-South and Triangular Cooperation."* IFAD, 27 Sept. 2018, www.ifad.org/en/w/explainers/demystifying-south-south-and-triangular-cooperation.
[16] "Military Presence." *Oxford Reference*, Oxford University Press, www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100251865. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.
[17] "Sphere of Influence." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 25 May 2018, www.britannica.com/topic/sphere-of-influence. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.
[18] Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment (CCSI). *"Resource-Backed Infrastructure Deals."* Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment, 2023, ccsi.columbia.edu/content/resource-infrastructure-deals.

March 1930	Nigeria’s central bank governor accuses China of contributing to “deindustrialisation and underdevelopment” in Africa.
December 11, 1963	China establishes diplomatic ties with Zanzibar.
April 26, 1964	Upon the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar into modern Tanzania, China extended its diplomatic relations to the new state.
September 5, 1967	Tanzania, Zambia, and China signed the agreement to build the TAZARA (Tanzania–Zambia Railway).
26 October 1970	China formally finances and begins construction of the TAZARA railway with a $401 million interest-free loan.
2013 (Date unspecified)	China announces the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a sweeping global infrastructure strategy.
December 4-5 2015	At the 6th FOCAC Summit in Johannesburg, China launches a $60 billion package of aid, loans, and investments for Africa and formally links the BRI with Africa’s development.
January 1, 2018	Construction is completed and commercial operations begin for the Addis Ababa–Djibouti Railway, built by Chinese firms.
August 1, 2017	China officially opens its first overseas military base in Djibouti. The base’s construction began earlier that year; live-fire exercises followed on September 22.
2018–Present	Rapid expansion of Huawei and ZTE digital infrastructure projects across Africa, raising concerns about digital dependency and data security.
13 November 2020	Zambia became the first African nation to default on its sovereign debt during the COVID-19 era; Chinese creditors play a central role in complex restructuring talks.

12–13 December 2022	Ghana secures a $3bn IMF bailout, with staff-level agreement (Dec 12) and approval (Dec 13); debt restructuring shaped heavily by Chinese lending exposure.
November 20, 2023	This date marks the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, commemorated with statements celebrating its infrastructure and trade expansion.
August 29, 2024	Chinese lending to Africa rose for the first time since 2016, totalling $4.61 billion, including major loans to Nigeria's Kaduna–Kano Railway and Egypt's central bank.

Background information

What is Chinese neocolonialism?

In the 1990s, China had the harsh realization that the relationship that they previously had with the African continent, which was based on political solidarity, had to be changed. The country has been reforming since Deng Xiaoping's policy in 1978, but by the 1990s, the country was fully industrializing at breakneck speed.[19] This meant that the country's factories required huge imports of copper, oil, timber, iron ore and cobalt. This led to the implementation of numerous bilateral trade agreements with African countries, building on ties that had already been forged when China provided political support for African liberation movements during the Cold War. This was a convenient decision on China's side, as Western economies were engaged in Africa at the time, but largely through different forms of involvement such as aid, resource extraction, and political influence rather than trade partnerships. Additionally, China was producing an oversupply of cheap manufactured goods (clothes, electronics, machinery) and needed new markets to sell them. Africa's growing urban populations were a perfect match. Yet while this engagement appeared mutually beneficial, it also revealed a pattern of China extending its influence over the states with which it traded. This influence has not only been economic, but increasingly digital: Chinese firms are heavily involved in building Africa's cyber infrastructure, including "smart city" projects, surveillance systems, and the backbone of telecommunications networks, raising concerns about digital dependency and data sovereignty. This was when the term "neocolonialism" was coined on an international scale by Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of independent Ghana.[20] The term describes resource extraction paired with infrastructure projects, heavy reliance on Chinese loans, and a growing economic imbalance that placed African nations in a position of dependency. At the same time, transparency issues remain pressing, many loan agreements are opaque, often negotiated without parliamentary oversight, and critics point to "elite capture," where benefits are concentrated in ruling circles while broader populations bear the long-term debt burden.

Addressing the Issue & the Challenges in Doing So…

Neocolonial dynamics between countries in the modern day can prove to be perilous for an already impoverished continent such as Africa. The over-reliance on Chinese loans and financial assistance can create a debt cycle which can later result in recession. Additionally, Africa has to avoid becoming locked into the role of a resource provider. If they failed to do so, they would be exporting raw materials at low value while importing high-cost finished products. This colonial pattern will stifle industrialization on the continent and fail to grant true growth. It is also important to consider the social impact of sustained neocolonialism.

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[19] *"Reform and Opening-up." Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, last edited May 23, 2001, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reform_and_opening_up. Accessed 7 Sept. 2025.

[20] "Neocolonialism." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, iep.utm.edu/neocolon/. Accessed 14 Sept. 2025.

African states value culture and tradition by integrating them into their daily civilian lives. The overabundance of influence of a polarized, market-oriented socialist country can perpetuate traditional practices and marginalize African culture in order to fuel China's economy.This manifests in the promotion of Chinese cultural institutions, language programs, and media outlets that often overshadow local traditions and narratives. Moreover, infrastructure and trade agreements tend to prioritise economic output over cultural preservation, leaving little space for indigenous practices to flourish in the face of imported norms and consumer products. However, while the issue is easy to detect, addressing it is not a small task for African states. Even though the current debt cycle is highly likely to push several African economies into recession, many countries remain heavily reliant on China's financial support and would struggle to function if such assistance were suddenly withdrawn, such as Zambia, Kenya, Angola, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. Many African politicians admit that it is a difficult commitment to make, as these countries are not economically or logistically prepared for such a withdrawal of funds. Domestic mismanagement and weak institutions only worsen this dependency, as corruption, poor fiscal oversight, and fragile governance often prevent loans from being used effectively, entrenching reliance on external actors.

Furthermore, alternatives in contrast to Chinese support (such as a Western institution like the IMF or World Bank) require a stricter set of conditions when it comes to labor rights and environmental legislation, which such states are unable to to comply with due to the economic and social struggles. Moreover, developing nations often lack leverage in negotiations, especially when isolated rather than acting collectively. The threat of reduced investment, sanctions, or cancelled loans discourages resistance, forcing many states to accept terms that deepen dependency. Stronger regional blocs such as ECOWAS in West Africa or SADC in Southern Africa could, in theory, provide more bargaining power by presenting a unified front to China, but coordination and political unity across diverse states remain difficult to achieve.

The effects of Chinese neocolonialism in China

China gains a significant amount of productive opportunities from the trade agreements. The policy guarantees the country long-term access to a supply of essential materials to manufacture products which boosts China's manufacturing capacity. China buys mainly oil, metals, timber, and agricultural products from African states, with oil from Angola and Nigeria, copper and cobalt from Zambia and the DRC, iron ore from South Africa, and timber from Gabon and Mozambique. These raw resources are then processed in China into high-value goods such as steel, electronics, vehicles, and batteries, or used to fuel its vast infrastructure and energy needs. Finished products are exported worldwide, which helps the country grow its GDP. However, even though on paper Africa seems to support Chinese mass production, the trade only contributes to 4.7% of China's total GDP which is not an overly contributing number considering the scale of China's global commerce.[21]

[21] "China's Trade with Africa." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 8 May 2024, carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/05/how-is-chinas-economic-transition-affecting-its-relations-with-africa?lang=en. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.

The apparent colonialism also grants China a large sphere of geopolitical influence. By the favourable acts of furthering African states in terms of infrastructure and economy, they create a large number of diplomatically biased allies in order to utilize their support in places such as the United Nations (UN) where the largest voting bloc has been made up of 54 African states behind China. Through soft power tools such as Confucius Institutes, scholarships, and media, China shapes African elites and public opinion in ways that promote Chinese values and narratives. Its military presence in Djibouti further demonstrates its intent to protect its interests and expand global influence, often positioning Africa as a reliable partner against Western dominance. Beyond diplomacy, the military power of 54 African states is not to be undermined. Countries such as Egypt, Algeria, and South Africa (all of which are allies of China due to infrastructural projects) bear a combined military power which can provide a significant advantage for the Chinese army in the case of a war by extending influence, easing transportation through the access of logistical networks and military bases and securing strategic regional leverage. On a technological standpoint Chinese companies have also been befitting from African land by deploying and testing 5G connection in many African states with projects such as MTN and Huawei's 5G-Advanced trial in Johannesburg in November of 2024 and Africa's largest 5G-enabled "smart mine" launched in South Africa in January of 2025.[22] These initiatives promise faster connectivity, industrial transformation, and opportunities for economic growth, especially in sectors like mining, healthcare, and education. However, they also raise concerns about digital dependency, data security, and the potential loss of sovereignty as critical infrastructure remains controlled by foreign firms. Overall, China tends to be the stakeholder which emerges with the most advantage compared to the rest of the world when it comes to neo-colonialism.

The effects of Chinese neocolonialism in the African States

African states, which China has engaged with most heavily, experience a similar set of shifts in the country. The general approach that China has had throughout the years has been to implement new and improved infrastructural systems in African cities, fostering closer partnerships that often translate into consistent support in areas such as diplomacy and trade. A few examples which illustrates the pattern are the Standard Gauge Railway in Nairobi, Kenya, where a \$4.7 billion railway was constructed by mainly Chinese loans and construction companies,[23] the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway which was a \$4 billion electric railway linking landlocked Ethiopia to Djibouti's port, expanding trade routes[24] and finally the financing of ports and military bases in Djibouti in 2017. These projects clearly display China's commitment to strengthening Sino-African relations and to improving the living standards in these nations. These were seen to be seriously beneficial for the bleeding economies of Africa, although as time passes, many realize that they have a large toll.

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[22] "MTN, China Telecom, and Huawei Launch Africa's Largest 5G-Enabled Smart Mine in South Africa." *Digital Watch*, 22 Jan. 2025, dig.watch/updates/mtn-china-telecom-and-huawei-launch-africas-largest-5g-

enabled-smart-mine-in-south-africa. Digital Watch Observatory

[23] "China in Africa: The Role of Infrastructure." *Council on Foreign Relations*, 12 Apr. 2021, www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-africa. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.

[24] "Ethiopia–Djibouti Railway." *Railway Technology*, 13 Jan. 2020, www.railway-technology.com/projects/ethiopia-djibouti-railway/. Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.

It is no secret that these initiatives offer short-term growth, but long-term costs can be crippling as China sets high interest rates and large repayment schedules, which are out of the national budget for many African nations. In order to pay the loans, governments will have to cut back on funds provided for essential humanitarian services such as healthcare, education and social welfare, resulting in an amplification of the already dire crises. This debt cycle ultimately risks undermining national sovereignty, as strategic assets may be used as collateral or handed over in the event of default. Moreover, the influx of Chinese labor and cheap imports weakens local industries, creating structural imbalances that resemble colonial trade patterns. While China presents its actions as mutually beneficial, the long-term effect is a deepening of dependency that restricts genuine economic independence.

The effects of Chinese neocolonialism on the Environment

As China shows little oversight concerning these issues and Africa does not have the facilities to regulate the processes that Chinese-backed companies carry out, the problem of unmonitored resource extraction and environmentally harmful practices seems to be left neglected. The overlooked nature of the topic can also result in long-term climate vulnerability in the region, as deforestation reduces carbon sinks, mining pollutes water sources, and oil drilling contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, all of which weaken ecosystems' resilience to climate change which will raise further struggles for African countries. The large-scale construction projects have other negative outcomes, other than structural imbalance and long-term debt cycles, destroying the African environment. Many of the processes which are required to take place in order to construct new infrastructure are overtly damaging, particularly to the Sub-Saharan environment. Mining ventures in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, logging in Gabon and Mozambique, and oil drilling in Angola are directly linked to deforestation, biodiversity loss and water pollution.

The effects of Chinese neocolonialism on the Workforce

The Chinese infrastructural projects frequently import a lot of their own workforce, which evidently reduces the number of jobs in the region (In Southern Africa, youth unemployment increased by 2.2 percentage points between 2019 and 2023[25]) , which is not beneficial for the already high employment rate of African states. In the rare case that an African worker is recruited, it has been recorded that they are provided a lower wage, longer work periods and harsher conditions compared to their Chinese counterparts.This happens because Chinese firms often prioritise cost-cutting and control over their projects, leading them to treat local labour as cheaper and more expendable than their imported workforce. The lack of equality creates tension and even the occasional uprising as workers go on protests and clash with their employers at project sites. This dynamic between employees and employers is familiar from previous cases of Western colonization throughout history, reinstituting a discriminatory attitude in a progressive world. Moreover, by relying so heavily on imported expertise, these projects limit skills transfer and capacity-building that could otherwise strengthen African labour markets in the long run. Due to the lack of training, African economies will struggle to sustain such projects when the educated workers from China leave the continent, once again leading to the idea that the positive aspects of these projects are only relevant for a slim time period.

Case study: Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), Kenya

The SGR was a large-scale project which aimed to connect Mombasa port to Nairobi, which is a 480-kilometre distance. The introduction of such a mode of transportation would mean freight transport costs would be significantly reduced, as cargo would be shifted from trucks to trains. Many companies theorised that it would also stimulate domestic trade within African states, which would be useful for neighbouring countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and South Sudan. The modernized railway cost $4.7 billion, which was mostly covered by the Chinese bank Exim, which paid 90% of the total amount.[26] The project was facilitated by the Chinese construction company China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) and was officially opened for use in 2017 as a part of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

The idea seems innovative at first; however, the demand for trade in a certain area was colossally overestimated. Cargo volume was low as many shippers resisted shifting to rail from trucks. Hence, since the construction of the railway, it has lost over $200 million annually, while it only generated an approximate of $90-110 million annually[27]. This led to a quickly binding debt cycle for Kenya, as loans for the SGR pushed the country's public debt past 60% of GDP. By 2020, Chinese loans accounted for roughly one-fifth of Kenya's external public debt, making China its largest bilateral creditor and tightening Nairobi's financial dependence.[28] To service it, Kenya has diverted funds away from healthcare, education, and local development projects, delayed civil servant pay, restrained public hiring, and raised taxes, all while facing fears of losing strategic assets like Mombasa Port as collateral. This amplified already present issues such as unemployment, rising living costs, and reduced access to essential services.

Overall, the project exemplified a recurring pattern in which China encouraged struggling governments to undertake large infrastructure projects financed by its loans, thereby deepening their debt obligations and reinforcing economic dependency.

Stakeholders

China

China, the initiator of the topic at hand, is the main investor and loan supplier for the BRI, allowing infrastructural changes in the African continent. Since the early 1960s, the country has been in diplomatic relations with certain African states, and has sustained said relations into the modern day, where an exchange of industrial goods and renewed framework projects[29]. As the BRI agreement has been signed by 52 of 54 African states by 2023, its impact and influence on the entire continent have been undeniable. As China claimed the title to be the world's largest manufacturing producer in 2010[30], the necessity for raw materials such as oil, copper, cobalt, and timber grew rapidly. The country has a stable source for all these resources with its allies in Africa, where it secures oil from Angola, Nigeria, and Sudan, copper and cobalt from the DRC and Zambia, iron ore from South Africa, and timber from Gabon and Mozambique. These materials have been deemed essential for China's industrial production and technological industries, such as electric vehicles.

Additionally, Africa's growing urban populations provide an expanding market for Chinese goods such as electronics, textiles, and machinery, while also creating opportunities for Chinese construction companies to secure and dominate major infrastructure contracts across the continent. The strongly established ties help China further in the political field, where the African states back resolutions rather consistently due to the geopolitically influential nature of the BRI. China's oversight over many major African projects, which eternally lead to significant struggle in African governments, is seen as a dangerous notion as it is reminiscent of previous colonial relations between the West and Africa. The debt-trap policy still remains the general leading reason for these opinions as it leads to regional unemployment, tight national budgets, lack of humanitarian efforts and environmental damage in African countries. While China presents the BRI as a partnership for development, in practice it reinforces neocolonial patterns. By fostering debt dependency, extracting

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[25] International Labour Organization. *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024: Sub-Saharan Africa.* ILO, Aug. 2024, www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Sub-Saharan%20Africa%20GET%20Youth%202024_0.pdf.

[26] "Kenya Standard Gauge Railway Project." *Railway Technology*, 13 Jan. 2020, www.railway-technology.com/projects/kenya-standard-gauge-railway/. Accessed 29 Aug. 2025.

[27] World Finance. *"End of the Line?" World Finance*, 16 July 2021, www.worldfinance.com/special-reports/end-of-the-line.

[28] Chatham House. *"Kenya's Debt Struggles Go Far Deeper than Chinese Loans." Chatham House*, 3 May 2023, www.chathamhouse.org/2023/05/kenyas-debt-struggles-go-far-deeper-chinese-loans.

[29] "China-Africa Relations (Briefing)." *Chatham House*, 18 Jan. 2023, www.chathamhouse.org/2023/01/china-africa-relations

[30] "China Tops U.S. in Manufacturing." *IndustryWeek*, 14 Mar. 2011.

resources, and securing political influence, China perpetuates unequal power relations rather than dismantling them.

Kenya

Kenya is a central stakeholder in China's engagement with Africa, acting as one of Beijing's most visible partners under the Belt and Road Initiative. As the host of the Standard Gauge Railway and other large-scale projects, Kenya illustrates both the opportunities of Chinese infrastructure financing and the risks of debt dependency and sovereignty concerns. While these investments have positioned the country as a regional hub in East Africa, they have also tied it closely to Beijing's strategic interests, leaving Kenya heavily indebted and vulnerable to economic strain. Kenya is not effectively solving the issues of neocolonialism. Although Chinese investments have improved infrastructure, the resulting debt dependency and strategic alignment with Beijing suggest that Kenya is becoming more entangled in neocolonial dynamics rather than overcoming them.

The African Union (AU)

The AU is the continental representative organization of all 55 African states, which actively aims to safeguard any and all collective partnerships with more economically developed countries, in this case, China. In 2013, the AU adopted "Agenda 2063",; a 50-year plan for "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens." It places emphasis on a new age of the continent, an age where industrialisation is widespread, with intra-African trade and genuine sustainable growth with infrastructural projects. China publicly supports this agenda as it has funded the cause time and time again with the BRI, providing a legitimately benevolent image, deepening its diplomatic foothold, and actively battling debt-trap allegations.

The AU attempts to balance the benefits of Chinese investments with the endangered sovereignty by pushing for sustainable financing standards and promoting collective bargaining to reduce risky bilateral deals. However, in practice, most agreements with China remain bilateral, limiting the AU's leverage as a continental bloc. Even so, the AU has often aligned with Beijing in multilateral forums, endorsing positions such as the One-China policy and resisting Western-led human rights resolutions, further consolidating China's influence on the continent.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF)

The IMF plays an important role in assuring debt surveillance, something that the African continent has been lacking. Each year, the IMF conducts a review of each UN member state's economy, where many factors are inspected, including the national debt and who the state owes it. Consequently, the over-exposure of Chinese debts is highlighted and regulated by the IMF. Despite the tight regulation, the IMF does not bear any sort of enforcement power to truly prevent China from going through with the debt schemes. While this diminishes the organisation's ability, it also acts as a contrast to unethical Chinese banks, where no political conditionalities are present, which can endanger African governments from getting pulled into a debt cycle. If African governments were willing to comply with Western work standards and environmental requirements, the organization would be considered a competing lender for infrastructural projects.

Furthermore, it is also a crisis management organization when African states are on the verge of recession due to debt distress. Some efficient examples of this are the IMF's intervention in Zambia following its 2020 default, its $3 billion bailout package to Ghana in 2022,[31] and its ongoing role in supporting Ethiopia's debt restructuring talks under the G20 Common Framework. In conclusion, while it lacks jurisdiction, the IMF sets the global ethical standard of how a loan distributor should act for special cases like African governments.

Relevant UN resolutions, treaties, and events (Previous attempts) …

The African Union's Agenda 2063 (2013–Present)

Agenda 2063 was launched by the AU as a long-term strategy to promote self-reliance, industrialisation, and sustainable growth. It was meant to provide a roadmap for Africa to build infrastructure on its own terms and strengthen intra-African trade, thereby reducing reliance on external powers like China. However, in practice, the initiative has been slow to materialise. Funding shortages, governance challenges, and the fact that many governments continued to favour Chinese-backed bilateral projects over regional integration meant that Agenda 2063 has not effectively countered the patterns of dependency it sought to end. Instead, China successfully aligned its Belt and Road Initiative with the language of Agenda 2063, using it to legitimise rather than limit its influence. Ultimately, Agenda 2063 has proven largely ineffective in achieving its core aims, as its weaknesses have allowed external powers to entrench rather than diminish their influence over Africa's development trajectory.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) (2018–Present)

The AfCFTA was introduced to create a single continental free-trade zone, reduce reliance on foreign markets, and promote African industrialisation. In theory, this would break the colonial-style model of exporting raw materials and importing manufactured goods, a cycle that Chinese trade has perpetuated. Yet the AfCFTA has so far struggled to make a tangible impact. Disagreements over tariffs, lack of infrastructure to support intra-African trade, and weak enforcement capacity have slowed its progress. Meanwhile, China continues to dominate African markets with cheap manufactured goods, meaning the AfCFTA has not

[31] "IMF Reaches Staff-Level Agreement on a $3 Billion, Three-Years Extended Credit Facility with Ghana." *International Monetary Fund*, 12 Dec. 2022, www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2022/12/12/pr22427-imf-reaches-staff-level-agreement-on-a-3-billion-three-years-ecf-with-ghana

yet fulfilled its role as a shield against Chinese economic dominance. Ultimately, the AfCFTA's limited implementation and inability to counteract Chinese market control demonstrate that it has, for now, fallen short of its intended purpose.

Possible solutions

1. Pan-African Sovereign Loan Rating Cooperative (SLRC)

All African states could participate in and form a continental financial body which regulates all foreign loans before governments individually approve them. Unlike the IMF or credit rating agencies, this cooperation would be staffed only by African economists and lawyers which ensures complete transparency and provides high level job opportunities in the continent. Every contract would be public and evaluated for repayment and feasibility to prevent debt trap cycles. This creates a unified front for African leaders to negotiate on. However, by publishing ratings and risk levels, citizens will also have insight on the financial processes which take place, which raise the stakes for leaders as they will be unable to sign away critical assets.

This system would reduce and ultimately eliminate "divide and rule" tactics applied by China in order to secure one sided deals with weak individual governments under monetary pressure. By focusing on pre-loan transparency rather than post-crisis bailouts, the SLRC would strike at the root of debt-dependency traps.

Localized Resource Processing Hubs

Instead of continuing to export raw materials to China, African governments can implement regional "recourse hubs" which process said raw materials to escape the inflated prices of later imported and processed Chinese goods. For example, cobalt which is extracted in the Democratic Republic of Congo could be refined in the continent before export to ensure the value chain stays within Africa. The hubs can be co-funded by investors in the African Union rather than a foreign lender, protecting and preserving financial sovereignty.

By doing this, African nations lessen their reliance on high-value imports and low-value exports, which is a "colonial" trend. Since African governments would be exporting completed or semi-finished commodities at higher costs, China, the only buyer and refiner, would no longer be able to impose conditions. In addition to increasing human capital and decreasing dependency on foreign contractors, this approach would provide skilled jobs.

Further reading

Chatham House. *"Kenya's Debt Struggles Go Far Deeper than Chinese Loans."* 3 May 2023.
Read here
Explains how Kenya's debt crisis is not solely a result of Chinese loans, but how China remains a major bilateral creditor. This is useful for understanding the nuance beyond "debt trap" narratives.

Brautigam, Deborah. *"A Critical Look at Chinese 'Debt-Trap Diplomacy.'"* Johns Hopkins SAIS, 2020.

An expert's testimony questioning whether Chinese lending really constitutes "debt-trap diplomacy." Delegates can use this to argue against oversimplified narratives.

The Diplomat. *"China in Africa: Is It Really Neo-Colonialism?"* 29 Jan. 2021.
Read here
Provides both sides of the debate on whether China's actions should be viewed as neo-colonialism or as mutually beneficial South-South cooperation.

Quartz Africa. *"Kenya's Chinese-Built Railway Racks Up Losses as Loan Payments Come Due."* 8 July 2020.
Read here
A journalistic account of the SGR's financial struggles that highlights the economic burden of Chinese-funded megaprojects.

African Arguments. *"Why Did China's Infrastructure-for-Resources Deal Fail in Nigeria?"* 2013.
Read here
A case study of a failed deal that shows how infrastructure-for-resources agreements can collapse when local conditions and governance are overlooked.

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"How Is China's Economic Transition Affecting Its Relations with Africa?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 8 May 2024, carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/05/how-is-chinas-economic-transition-affecting-its-relations-with-africa?lang=en. Accessed 29 Aug. 2025.

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Ubi, Paul, et al. "Effect of Chinese Foreign Direct Investment on Economic Growth in Africa." *Modern Economy*, vol. 8, no. 6, 2017, pp. 616–628. *Scientific Research Publishing*, doi:10.4236/me.2017.86044. Accessed 29 Aug. 2025.

"Why Strong Regional Value Chains Will Be Vital to the Next Chapter of China and Africa's Economic Relationship." *World Economic Forum*, 20 June 2024, www.weforum.org/stories/2024/06/why-strong-regional-value-chains-will-be-vital-to-the-next-chapter-of-china-and-africas-economic-relationship. Accessed 29 Aug. 2025.

"Why Substantial Chinese FDI Is Flowing into Africa." *LSE Blogs: Africa at LSE*, 2 Apr. 2021, blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2021/04/02/why-substantial-chinese-fdi-is-flowing-into-africa-foreign-direct-investment/. Accessed 29 Aug. 2025.

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