

# Africa and The Cooperation Forums With Extra-Continental Countries

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines Africa's role in cooperation forums. Despite the continent's strategic relevance to these platforms, it acknowledges Africa's peripheral role within them. Recent decades have revealed a more assertive Africa. It remains to be seen whether the AU will demonstrate a more pragmatic sense of agency and strategy within these forums. The study used liberal institutionalist theory to examine Africa's representation in these forums. A qualitative content analysis was used to analyze existing literature. The findings reveal the instrumental role of cooperation forums in driving the interests of its members. Thus, cooperation has become a crucial strategic platform, shedding light on the manifest and latent goals of extra-continental

countries. The study highlights the inherent challenges within cooperative forums, including navigating complex bilateral and multilateral relations, framing collective goals, resolving disputes, building mutual trust, and ensuring sustainability. For Africa, the findings reveal that the continent has made substantial gains from its participation in cooperation forums, notably in infrastructure growth, trade relations, economic aid, scholarship opportunities, military capacity building and security initiatives, the fight against diseases, promotion of human rights and strengthening of its democracies. The study also reveals AU's moderate agency in pursuing its continental agenda. However, the AU lacks an "African Strategy" that defines

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its participation in cooperation forums. The study recommends that the AU adopts an “African Strategy” to optimize its role in global cooperation forums.

**Keywords:** Africa; BRICS; FOCAC; EU; US; Cooperation Forums & Liberal Institutionalism.

## África y los foros de cooperación con países extracontinentales

### RESUMEN

El artículo examina el papel de África en los foros de cooperación. A pesar de la relevancia estratégica del continente para estas plataformas, se reconoce su papel periférico dentro de ellas. Las últimas décadas han mostrado un continente más asertivo; sin embargo, aún está por verse si la Unión Africana (UA) demostrará un sentido más pragmático de agencia y estrategia dentro de estos foros. El estudio empleó la teoría del institucionalismo liberal para analizar la representación de África en dichos espacios. Se utilizó un análisis cualitativo de contenido para examinar la literatura existente.

Los hallazgos revelan el papel instrumental que desempeñan los foros de cooperación en la promoción de los intereses de sus miembros. Así, la cooperación se ha convertido en una plataforma estratégica crucial que da luces sobre los objetivos manifiestos y latentes de los países extracontinentales. El estudio identifica los desafíos

inherentes a los foros de cooperación, entre ellos la gestión de relaciones bilaterales y multilaterales complejas, la formulación de metas colectivas, la resolución de conflictos, la construcción de confianza mutua y la garantía de sostenibilidad.

En el caso de África, los resultados muestran que el continente ha obtenido avances significativos gracias a su participación en los foros de cooperación. El estudio también evidencia una agencia moderada de la Unión Africana en la promoción de su agenda continental. No obstante, la UA carece de una “estrategia africana” que defina su participación en estos foros; por ello, el estudio recomienda que la UA adopte esta estrategia para optimizar su papel dentro de los foros globales de cooperación.

**Palabras clave:** África; BRIC; Focac; UE; EE. UU.; Foros de cooperación; institucionalismo liberal.

### INTRODUCTION

The history of Africa is inextricably linked to colonialism and slavery. The effects of Cold War-era proxy conflicts and subsequent neocolonial plans have trapped the continent in a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment. Despite these circumstances, several nations and international organizations have divided Africa into areas of interest, depicting the continent as strategically important (Atanasu, 2024). This is evident in several international policy agendas involving numerous players

from the international arena, such as the UN, the EU, the World Bank, the BRICS, the US, Russia, China, Japan, and the Arab Nations of the Middle East. It is important to note that Africa's role as a provider of resources and consumer of security is crucial to the strategic interests of these countries and continental groupings (Atanasiu, 2024). Until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the rivalry between the East and the West for influence over Africa robbed the continent of its strategic importance (Cilliers, 2024).

Despite a brief period when Africa's development priorities were prioritized, the slow pace of growth, poor governance, protracted conflicts and instability further stifled the continent's ability to achieve genuine independence. However, Africa's strategic location and oil exports to the United States and Europe during the early 21st century briefly boosted its standing (Cilliers, 2024). Furthermore, China's footprint and influence in Africa grew in importance dramatically after 2000. The EU, the US, Canada, Israel, and Japan competed for influence in Africa as China continued to establish its position on the continent. Due to the driving force of globalization and recent geopolitical shifts, numerous foreign players have emerged, further diversifying Africa's pool of partners. However, the EU continues to remain a crucial partner to Africa (European Union, 2024). Driven by specific national interests framed within foreign policy lenses, countries pursued strategic partnerships with

Africa which were dependent on its vast resource base.

Consequently, major international organizations such as the UN, the EU, and the BRICS, as well as great powers, and smaller countries saw Africa as strategically important due to its strengths. These strengths include the continent's vast natural resources, energy security, and potential new markets for trade and investment (Pavocat, 2023; Aljazeera, 2022). Africa as a continent continues to play important roles within the geopolitical landscape due to its geographical location (Pavocat, 2023). As geopolitical rivalry increased in Africa, particularly among major powers such as the USA, China, Russia, and the EU, it was anticipated that Africa's strategic importance would be a major factor in the formation, shaping and sustenance of global cooperation forums (IEP, 2024). Consequently, the emergence of cooperation forums such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the BRICS-Africa partnerships, and the AU-EU partnerships were motivated by a combination of strategic, economic, political, and developmental considerations (Anand, 2020). As strategic platforms, cooperation forums act as institutional levers in attaining specific objectives of its members.

One of the driving forces behind the BRICS alliance was advocating for a multipolar global order and competing with Western-dominated organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank (Nach, et al., 2024). Additionally, China's objectives of increasing its global

influence and securing resources for its growing economy, were among the motivators behind cooperation forums such as the FOCAC (Sarpong et al., 2024). Over time, extra-continental countries developed several strategic alliances and schemes in the form of partnership agreements centered on security, energy, business, commerce and trade and other essential sectors vital to the sustenance of their economies. As a result, cooperation summits and forums have grown in popularity largely due to the strategic significance of the African continent to the survival and hegemonic proclivities of these powers (Olivier et al., 2015). Thus, bilateral and multilateral cooperation forums have been leveraged by its members in strengthening its relations with other countries. Africa could enhance its role within cooperation forums by aligning its continental priorities with the numerous challenges the continent faces.

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research is based on liberal institutionalism, which historically has emphasized the importance of institutional frameworks for initiating and maintaining cooperation between nations (Nuruzzaman, 2008). Ten years prior, there was a conflict between realist and liberal theorists regarding the ability of institutions to promote and maintain cooperation between nations. John Mearsheimer fired the first shot when he published his popular piece “The False Promise of International

Institutions” in 1994/95. In this work, he attempted to expose the inherent flaws in institutionalist ideas, particularly liberal institutionalism. He contended that institutionalist theories are inadequate and have little impact on how states behave and asserted that the promise of liberal institutionalism to foster cooperation and stability in the post-Cold War era was mostly unfounded. Keohane and Martin (1995:40) argued that institutions are important in guiding state behavior, but that the challenge was to “discover how, and under what conditions” institutions might foster successful interstate cooperation. They accused Mearsheimer of favoring his own realist perspective and added that institutionalism might absorb realism by outlining the conditions for cooperation.

It is worth noting that liberal scholars emphasize the significance of international institutions in fostering international cooperation (Axelrod et al., 1985). They contend that institutions have the capacity to offer a forum for discourse, serving as a mediating force and fostering collaboration between states. Furthermore, liberal institutionalism espouses the notion that states are rational actors, prioritizing absolute gains through cooperation and paying less attention to the relative gains made by other states. According to liberal institutionalism, international institutions can use norms, rules, and shared interests to lessen anarchy and promote cooperation (Moravcsik, 1993). Scholars such as Nissen and Dreyer (2024),

contend that the EU exemplifies liberal institutionalism through its thorough integration and legalism. The recent trend towards “skeptical liberalism” is a sign of adaptive institutionalism in the face of emergencies (Nissen et al., 2024). According to Chekol (2020), the AU reflects liberal institutionalist goals, despite its structural flaws. Dijkhuizen et al., (2019) also argues that liberal institutionalism best explains how the BRICS nations cooperate in the UN General Assembly.

Monyae & Matambo (2021) also emphasizes how the development of BRICS and FOCAC was in reaction to perceived inequalities in international organizations, resulting in platforms that embody liberal institutionalist ideals of cooperation and norm creation. Similarly, Nuruzzaman (2020) also claims that BRICS functions within the liberal international order, rather than against it, thereby improving global governance via parallel institutionalism. Despite realist and liberal institutionalists’ common position on the fact that anarchy is a significant barrier to interstate cooperation (Mearsheimer, 1994), liberal institutionalists believe that cooperation is still possible in an anarchic environment. In contrast, the neorealists argue that institutions mirror the distribution of power in the international order and have little independent impact on how states act (Mearsheimer, 1990). On the other hand, Liberal institutionalists think that these problems may be solved through institutions that encourage cooperation by

disseminating information to all parties and lowering the possibility of deception. Platforms like BRICS, the EU, the AU, and FOCAC are examples of how institutional frameworks in a multipolar world foster collective action and changes in global governance. In this way, cooperation is possible under anarchy when nations pursue absolute gains (Axelrod et al., 1985).

#### GLOBAL ALLIANCES & COOPERATION FORUMS

The economic union known as the BRICS alliance is made up of rising markets in the Global South. It includes economic behemoths like China, the second-largest market in the world after the US, Russia, a European Orthodox superpower, Brazil, a Latin American economic powerhouse, and India, an economic competitor of China and Taiwan in Asia, and lastly South Africa, the most industrialized nation, and the second-largest economy in Africa (Tella, 2017). Presently, the BRICS inter-governmental organization consists of ten nations: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. The concept of a BRICS-like organization may be traced back to Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov and the two RIC (Russia, India, China) and IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) forums (Patnaik, 2023). The phrase BRIC was first created by British economist Jim O’Neill and then supported by his employer Goldman Sachs in 2001 to refer

to the collection of developing markets (Baumann et al, 2017). A combination of strategic, economic, political, and developmental factors led to the development of international cooperative platforms like BRICS established in 2009. The AU started to represent African interests in BRICS-related meetings and summits, especially after South Africa joined BRICS in 2010 (Anand, 2020).

In the midst of the changing global economic landscape, the BRICS nations have emerged as champions of economic multilateralism, challenging conventional paradigms of economic governance and integration (Nach et al., 2024). The factors driving the BRICS-Africa partnership include economic multilateralism, in which the BRICS nations support a multipolar global order and question Western-dominated institutions like the IMF and the World Bank (Nach, et al., 2024). Strategic investment is another important aspect, since Africa has a wealth of natural resources and expanding markets, while BRICS provides technology transfer and infrastructure funding (Yiblet, 2024). Additionally, South Africa's membership in BRICS in 2010 helped bring African interests into the bloc, which promoted greater interaction with the continent (Parfinenko, 2020). The primary motivator of geopolitical influence is the desire to change international norms for development and governance through BRICS expansion and programs like the New Development Bank (Zhao, 2025). It is also worth

noting that before the emergence of the BRICS+ bloc, several bilateral relations had existed particularly between Africa and Brazil, Russia, India, China, Europe and also the US. With respect to Brazil-Africa partnerships, Brazilian influence on the African continent has grown dramatically over the past ten years. Between 2003 and 2013, the South American nation expanded its diplomatic presence from 17 to 37 representations in Africa (MRE, 2011).

Brazil has successfully improved its global standing by providing assistance to its African partner nations in their battle against hunger and poverty (Brazilian Cooperation Agency, 2012). Brazil has also become an integral part of the international effort to address food production issues and hunger (Bodman et al., 2011). This has led to the introduction of a number of incentives for Brazilian businesses to enter the African market in an effort to establish Brazil as a reputable participant on the continent (Menezes 2012). Economic relations between Brazil and its neighboring continent have flourished throughout the last ten years. Brazilian companies have established a presence in 27 of the 54 African nations with more countries viewing the continent as a desirable location to do business (Vieitas et al., 2013). Former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff sought to woo the African continent while maintaining strong ties with African nations (Instituto Lula, 2014).

As of Russia-Africa partnerships, Russia has shown a renewed

commitment to the African continent in recent times. For starters, by the early 1990s, the Cold War was over, and Russia's foreign policy was now driven by its true strategic economic considerations. The newly formed Federation of Russia faced serious economic challenges in the 1990s because of the legacies of the former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of "Perestroika" and "Glasnost" (Fidan et al., 2010). Consequently, Africa was forced to the margins of the Kremlin's foreign policy radar (Tralac 2011). In the 2000s, Russia's interest in Africa was revived. This resurgence took place in the context of Russia's evolving foreign policy, which started to take shape in the late 1990s (Fidan et al., 2010). Russia shifted its attitude toward foreign policy throughout the 2000s because of numerous disagreements with the West on various international agendas. In its relations with Africa, Russia provided multilateral projects to foster diplomatic ties with the OAU and other regional organizations (Ivanov 2002). Filatova (2000) argues that there are two primary drivers of Russia's relationship with Africa: history, as Russia continues to maintain varied political and geographical configurations with African countries, and the fact that Russia has never colonized any African nation.

In relation to India-Africa Partnerships, the connection between "India" and "Africa" brings to mind an ancient and lengthy trip, characterized by repeated allusions to the millions of years ago when Gondwana

land was the same; the commercial and cultural interactions that started in the pre-Christian era; the proximity and issues brought by colonization; the shared fight for independence and emancipation under shared symbols and strategic alliance (Shubhajt, 2015). It is important to highlight that, in contrast to the major powers' current competition to improve their collaboration with Africa, India has had the longest relationship with the landmass and the longest friendship with the people of the African continent (Roy, 2015). At the inaugural plenary meeting of the first summit in New Delhi, in 2008, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh referred to Africa as "our Mother Continent" (Vigyan Bhawan, 2008). The Third India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-III), which took place in New Delhi in 2015, was a historic event which brought together representatives from all 54 African nations (Bhatia, 2015). As a result, India announced a generous package of economic aid to Africa (Narayan, 2015). At the historic opening of the third summit, Modi emphasized that the relationship between India and Africa represents "a partnership beyond strategic concerns and economic benefits" (Narayan, 2015).

For a variety of reasons, China and Africa began to interact at the end of the Cold War. In terms of giving help and development aid to Third World nations, China's role as an emerging power became clear. It was at this point that Africa began to recognize China's importance as a reliable economic

partner when the West had neglected to support the continent (Naidu et al., 2009). As a result, China became a crucial political ally and began to serve as an alternative to the Western model of development. China's engagement with individual African countries increased throughout the 1990s (Muekalia, 2004). Within the global community, both China and Africa collaborated to challenge US's position as a leader and advocate for an equitable global order (Naidu et al., 2009). The establishment of FOCAC in 2000 served as a forum for promoting diplomatic, trade, security, and investment ties with Africa (Anshan et al., 2012). FOCAC has evolved from a forum of diplomatic exchange and development-centric body to a more comprehensive economic-political-security soft power nexus, that drives China's long-term vision in Africa (Ze Yu, 2022). According to McDonald (2012), China is not only offering the continent possibilities of financial gain, but it is also attempting to strengthen Africa's frequently marginalized institutions, such as the NEPAD and the AU, in international affairs.

Finally, the EU and the US have constantly worked together to strengthen their relations with Africa. Historical events, culture, geography, a shared future, and a shared set of values all connect Africa and Europe (The Council of the European Union, 2007). The Treaty of Rome, the Yaoundé Convention, and its successor Lomé agreements are examples of the long-standing ties between the EU and

Africa. The idea of collaboration has underpinned the EU's relationship with Africa (Farrell, 2006). Since the historic Africa-EU Summit in Cairo, in 2000, where partnership was strengthened by institutionalizing dialogue, there has been significant changes on both continents in terms of accelerating integration processes while deepening the unions (The Council of The European Union, 2007). This led to the formalization of the AU-EU alliance (European Union, 2025). On the other hand, the first formal US-Africa relations begun when the US and Morocco signed the "Moroccan American Treaty of Peace and Friendship", in 1786, establishing diplomatic and commercial ties (U.S Africa Command, 2008). Following the Cold War, the United States and Africa moved closer to fostering economic growth, democracy, and security collaboration. As a result, programs like the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the establishment of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2007 were created (U.S Africa Command, 2008). Over the years, Africa has also been able to diversify its partners, which has resulted in changes in both European and Africa relations (Shiferaw et al., 2023).

#### ASSESSMENTS OF GLOBAL COOPERATION FORUMS

Several commentators and world leaders have expressed both positive and negative opinions about the BRICS (Wolff, 2023) in relation to its competing



interests, disputes resolution, and lack of clarity in goal pursuit. However, the BRICS has worked together to create rival projects such as the New Development Bank, the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement, BRICS PAY, the BRICS Joint Statistical Publication (Federal State Statistics Service (2024), and the BRICS basket reserve currency (Raimondi, 2023). Over the course of its 15-year existence, BRICS has created about 60 intra-group organizations and think tanks to engage in conversation on topics spanning 34 fields (Kirton et al., 2022). The BRICs have launched a number of initiatives, including the Belt and Road Initiative, the New Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the G20, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Hooijmaaijers, 2021a). These initiatives pose a clear threat to Western leadership in world governance as regional nations compete with the West for power (Kim et al., 2015).

As a group, the BRICS is working to change the course of world economic growth and development. Since 2009, the annual BRICS Summits have been one of the most important initiatives (O'Neill, 2001). The BRICS Business Council (BBC) and the BRICS Think Tank Council (BTTC), offer intellectual support, promote private sector collaboration, and make policy recommendations (Kirton et al., 2022). Given the increasing influence of the BRICS in the world economy, experts have seen the BRICS as "a solid, increasingly comprehensive, cooperative success" (Kirton,

2015). Some analysts recognize the favorable outcomes of some multilateral programs, such as the establishment of the New Development Bank and the foreign-exchange reserves pool (Cooper et al., 2015), as well as the bright future of the BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism (Shelepov, 2017).

Regarding Brazil, its initiative SEP-PIR planned and implemented a wide range of activities to advance racial equality, including quotas for afro-descendant students and scholarships (such as PROUNI). The Brasil Quilombola Program, among other programs, gave priority to health initiatives that specifically targeted Brazil's black community. The Lula administration mandated the instruction of Afro-Brazilian and African History in Brazilian schools in an effort to highlight Brazil's African heritage (Lechini 2008). The Lula administration viewed Africa as a key partner in the UN because of its significant vote count in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) (Beri 2012). Due to its strong ties with Africa, Brazil has been able to establish significant international positions in other areas (Valadares, 2013). Beginning in 2007, BNDES credit lines for Africa were created and progressively increased from USD\$149 million to USD\$766 million in 2009 before experiencing a significant decrease as a result of the global financial and economic crisis that occurred towards the end of the Lula administration (BNDES 2012). Vale, Camargo Corrêa, Queiroz Galvão, and other major Brazilian firms started to engage in Africa throughout

the Lula era with the financial backing of BNDES and the government's political backing. About 25 Brazilian businesses are currently operating in 30 different African nations (Vieitas et al., 2013).

According to the African Development Bank (2011), Brazilian firms invested between USD\$10 billion and USD\$15 billion in African countries in 2013, based on the Brazilian business presence there. Significantly, since 2008, more than half of Brazil's development cooperation has gone to Africa. Another noteworthy finding is that South-South collaboration with Africa increased at a faster rate than it did with Latin America and Asia (Brazilian Cooperation Agency, 2012). Despite the fact that Brazil's development cooperation with non-Lusophone Africa began in 2005, South-South cooperation projects were already established with Botswana, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Benin, Gambia, Equatorial Guinea, Tanzania, and Zambia in 2006 (Brazilian Cooperation Agency, 2010:6). The number of collaboration projects that Brazil carried out on the African continent jumped from 115 in 2008 to almost 300 by the end of President Lula's administration in 2010 (Brazilian Cooperation Agency, 2011). Among African states, Brazil raised awareness of its technical proficiency in tropical agriculture, renewable energy sources (ethanol), and electrification initiatives for rural regions (Stolte 2012). Brazil further established a favorable reputation among the African nations by treating them

as partners in development, which also created opportunities for Brazilian firms (Stolte 2012; Stolte 2013).

In relation to Russia-Africa partnerships, the study reveals Russia canceled the debts of impoverished nations in 1999, amounting to USD\$ 904 million. By the year 2000, Russia had also granted debt relief totaling USD\$572 million (Ivanov 2004). In 2012, Russia informed the UN that it had cancelled USD\$20 billion in debt owed by a number of African nations. It also committed to double its Overseas Development Aid (ODA) to African nations (African Development Bank 2011). Education also became a central strategic tool that Russia employs in its relationship with Africa. Government scholarship quotas amounted to 4,700 scholarships in the 2023–2024 academic year and about 34,000 African students were given scholarship during the 2022–2023 academic year (изучают, 2023). As a result, Russia still provides 100,000 Africans with practical training or education at military academies and Russian institutions (Bilinov, 2006). Notably, Russian trade and investment in Africa have increased dramatically, particularly in the Maghreb, Egypt, and Sudan (Paczyńska, 2020). The increasing appeal of the African gas and oil markets for Russian businesses like Lukoil, Gazprom, Rosneft, and others was one factor (Shakhovskaya et al., 2019). In order to strengthen its position as a major contributor to global food security, Russia has also increased its wheat exports to sub-Saharan Africa including

vegetable oil production with Egypt and meat export contracts with Ghana and Morocco (Gavrilenko, 2019).

Since 2023, Russia has established military technical cooperation with around 43 African nations in order to train their military personnel and other law enforcement officials in Russian military academies (Caprile et al., 2024). According to Besenyő (2019), Moscow has been pursuing an “Africa policy” that mixes diplomatic outreach, military cooperation, weapons transfers, and economic engagement after decades of post-Cold War retreat. For governments looking for diversified alliances or respite from Western monitoring, Russia has become a tempting option because of this “no-strings-attached” approach (Ramontja, 2025). Also, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Guensburg, 2022) reported that Alrosa, the largest diamond mining firm in the world, was attempting to increase its operations in Angola and Zimbabwe. For instance, Alrosa mines diamonds in South Africa, Sierra Leone, Namibia, and Angola, where it has a 60% market share for diamond extraction. Renova, Lukoil, Rusal Boksit, and Norilskiy Nikel are some of the other significant businesses that conduct business in Africa (Lopatov 2007). In 2014, Gazprom bank, the third largest bank in Russia, established the first representative office in South Africa (Gillian, 2014). The primary sectors of Russian collaboration with Africa are mineral resources, energy, infrastructure, telecommunications, fisheries, education,

healthcare, tourism, and defense (Kwinnika, 2015).

In the case of India, it has helped Africa by providing USD\$1.2 billion in grants and USD\$7.4 billion in concessional credit and training 25,000 young Africans over the past three years. Establishing 100 capacity-building institutions, and promoting infrastructure, public transportation, clean energy, irrigation, agriculture, and manufacturing throughout the continent (India-Africa Forum Summit, 2008). Currently, India's connection with Africa is focused on commerce, science, and technology. India now plans to boost bilateral commerce to \$70 billion by 2015, after it has increased from USD\$ 967 million annually in the mid-1960s to USD\$ 40 billion in 2008–09 (Naidu, 2010). India's present plan in Africa places a strong emphasis on energy (IMF, 2010). The number of training opportunities for Africans in Indian universities has grown with over 15,000 African students enrolled in Indian universities on scholarships (Sharma, 2019). India's main oil and gas firm, ONGC Videsh, manufactures Sudanese oil and invested USD\$ 750 million in 2003 to acquire a 25% ownership in the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GN-POC) in Sudan (Berl, 2005). India now imports 3.24 million tons of “equity oil” from GNPOC every year.

In 2008, India finished building a \$200 million oil pipeline connecting Khartoum to Port Sudan on the Red Sea (Vines, et al., 2008). Nigeria is India's top commercial partner in

Africa. Between 8% and 12% of India's oil imports originate in Africa's most populous nation, while Nigeria continues to be the biggest importer of Indian-produced pharmaceuticals and goods in Africa (Singh, 2007). India's top investor in Africa, the Tata group, is currently represented in 11 African nations (Vines et al., 2007). Trade, investment, and development aid remain the foundation of maintaining and growing the partnership, particularly in economic relations (Obuah & Komi, 2024). Biswas (2024) notes a shift from traditional donor-recipient frameworks to developing strategic partnerships. India's strategy now focuses on infrastructure development, technology transfer, and capacity development in line with the development goals of the African Union. Biswas (2024) claims that these projects are influenced by India's desire to present itself as a South-South development partner that differs from Western or Chinese models, as well as by its historical solidarity.

Furthermore, the first FOCAC summit in 2000 led to China writing-off 10 billion RMB yuan in debt owed by heavily indebted poor nations in Africa. Beijing also established an Africa Human Resource Development Fund to support the training of skilled professionals in a variety of fields in African nations (Mishra, 2022). By the time the 2006 FOCAC summit took place in Beijing, more than 440 commodities from African LDCs were eligible for export to China. Additionally, Beijing gave different African nations USD\$3 billion

in preferential loans and USD\$2 billion in preferential buyer's credit. The commercial interchange between China and Africa increased by a factor of 5.2 during this time (Ze Yu, 2022). In 2006, Chinese President Hu Jintao gave Africa USD\$5 billion in concessionary credit and loans, which further cemented China's growing position as a creditor in the continent (Ighobor, 2013). In 2013, China also introduced its flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with the goal of fostering connectivity and collaboration between China and emerging nations. African leaders saw the BRI as an appealing alternative development model based upon the BRI's emphasis on trans-continental infrastructural connectivity which aligns with Africa's top priorities as stated in its Agenda 2063 (Githaiga et al., 2019). The China-Africa Development Fund, which was initially valued at USD\$5 billion has encouraged Chinese investment in Africa (Sun, 2018).

China continues to invest in energy security and infrastructure which include the USD\$666 million invested in Kenya's tech city and Nairobi's highway projects, as well as the 2600 MW hydropower project in Nigeria (Reuters, 2019). However, these projects have been accompanied by significant debt owed to China by Angola (USD\$ 25 billion), Congo Brazzaville (USD\$7.3 billion), Ethiopia (USD\$13.5 billion), Sudan (USD\$6.4 billion) (Broadman, 2021), and Zambia (USD\$6.6 billion) (Brautigam et al., 2021). Despite these debt traps, it is important to highlight that the Chinese

investment in Africa is growing under the umbrella of “One Belt, One Road” program (World Bank Group, 2019). The USD\$1.3 billion Tanzania Standard Gauge Railway (Nyabiage, 2021) and Nigeria’s longest double-track railroad in West Africa are two examples of the investments in railway projects and telecommunications. At least USD\$1 billion has been invested by China in Digital Silk Road initiatives in Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Angola. By finishing the Addis Ababa African Union Conference Center in 2012, China also followed through on its infrastructure development initiatives. By the end of 2009, China had finished more than 500 infrastructure projects throughout Africa (Mohan and Power, 2008). On the African continent, China has solidified its position as an appealing and alternative development partner (Mishra, 2022). Yiagadeesen (2010) argues that China’s aid to Africa is not selective as it has given aid to nations that have few or no strategic resources and has also provided grants, loans, infrastructure, and other forms of assistance to these countries due to their geopolitical and market value.

The European Union has also partnered with the African Union on several regional and continental projects. In 2018, negotiations commenced between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP, now OACPS) countries in relation to the new post-Cotonou agreement since the existing agreement had reached its maturity (Medinilla et al., 2019). However, the

negotiation process involved several internal bargaining on Africa’s representation in the discussions (Hurt, 2020). Consequently, the AU agreed that negotiations could proceed whilst it was consented that AU representatives could preside over regional protocol negotiations with the EU (Medinilla et al., 2019). According to the European Commission (2024), the EU is Africa’s largest trading partner, largest investor, and largest source of official development aid. It is worth noting that Europe and Africa have both undergone repositioning in this shifting global environment. The realignment of Africa is advantageous because it has given the continent more power to diversify its relationships (Shiferaw et al., 2023). The European Commission (2022) unveiled a USD\$168 billion investment plan, with a strong emphasis on energy, transportation, digital infrastructure, health, and education. The Africa-Europe Investment Package under the Global Gateway committed around €150 billion to enhance collaboration with African partners (European Commission, 2023).

Due to the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), the economic partnership agreements (EPAs) with sub-Saharan Africa, and the free trade agreements (FTAs) with some North African nations, more than 90% of exports from African countries enter the EU duty free (European Council, 2024). Nevertheless, the majority of Europe’s trade collaboration with Africa is still centered around raw materials and

other basic items (Lejarraga, 2023). For decades, the EU has been actively involved in security concerns in Africa making use of tools which include development, trade, economics, diplomacy, politics and military (European Union, 2004). The African Peace Facility (APF) and the Pan-African Programme (PANAF) are the two primary sources of EU financing for the AU (European Union, 2023). With €845 million for 2014–2020, the Joint Africa-EU strategy was supported by the EU's Development Cooperation Instrument (European External Action Service, 2018). Furthermore, the AU depends on the EU's assistance for its peacekeeping operations (Teevan, 2024). Although the EU has more financial and institutional resources, the AU asserts greater political legitimacy throughout the continent. This imbalance can occasionally give the impression of dependence or external dominance in peacekeeping missions (Horváth, 2024).

In addition, Horváth (2024) cautions that the relationship may turn into a competition if the EU's participation is seen as paternalistic or excessively restrictive.

In relation to US-Africa partnerships, numerous programs, like the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), were established in 2000 in response to the effects of US-Africa relations. This granted qualifying Sub-Saharan African nations duty-free access to the US market for a broad array of commodities. As a result, there was an increase in exports, job creation, and

industrial expansion in industries such as textiles and agriculture (U.S. Trade Representative, 2025). In an effort to strengthen economic links and encourage sustainable development, the US has signed a number of trade agreements with African countries and regional blocs, like the East African Community (East African Community, 2025). As a result, the EAC countries gained access to new technologies, manufacturing partnerships, and support for infrastructure development through interaction with partners such as the EU (Biswas, 2024; Obuah & Komi, 2024).

Additional initiatives under the PEPFAR programs include support for health, education, and infrastructure. In the fight against illnesses like HIV/AIDS, this has been crucial (Bush Center, 2025). Additionally, the U.S. has created AFRICOM, which is essential to organizing military aid and training in Africa (U.S. Africa Command, 2008). Over the years, AFRICOM has boasted about the capacity of various national militaries in terms of combat drills, counter defense tactics, intelligence gathering and joint training exercises. Notwithstanding these initiatives, recent US tariff policies have caused worries about the future of US-Africa relations, particularly about how they will affect the AGOA project and the stability of trade ties (Washington Post, 2025). The transition from aid-based to trade-based engagement has also received mixed responses, with some African leaders voicing concerns about the possible

loss of financial assistance for development initiatives (AP News, 2025).

#### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In general, the study found that cooperation forums are instrumental in promoting the strategic interests of countries outside the continent. However, several challenges such as navigating complex bilateral and multilateral relations, establishing collective goals, resolving disputes, and building mutual trust continue to undermine its sustainability. The findings suggest that Africa's partnerships with various extra-continental countries such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, the EU and the US have largely benefited the African continent. Africa has benefited from its participation in cooperation forums through provisions for economic aid, increased trade, infrastructure development, technical support in agriculture, and the export and import of goods and services. Other benefits include military capacity building initiatives, economic aid and provisions of scholarships for African students, etc. These engagements have also led to the promotion of human rights, democratic consolidation, and the tackling of various pandemics and epidemics, and poverty. The study findings further reveal substantial gains made by Africa within cooperation forums. It can be deduced from the above findings that Africa has moderately enhanced its agency within cooperation forums.

Scholars such as Soule (2021) argue that African governments and leaders are making strategic and sensible decisions about their partners when exercising their agency within global cooperative forums. This assertion is largely true when observing the shift of Africans from passive to active actors within various groupings. This shift is largely due to a reawakened Africa that seeks to demand value for its resources within the global space. Consequently, leaders are becoming more aware of the people's voices when addressing Africa's underdevelopment and creating opportunities for its citizens. Even though recent developments by African governments within cooperation forums indicate a shift toward a more assertive and self-defined approach to partnerships. The findings reveal a lack of pragmatism within the AU bloc, which has yet to optimize gains from its partnerships within these forums. This has led to a lack of acceleration in the Agenda 2063 project. This bottleneck is evident in the AU's marginal role in cooperation forums, which further hampers its chances of achieving its noble continental project.

Despite the noble objectives of the Global South agenda, which seeks to counter Western Hegemony and promote prosperity among its members, Africa is still lagging behind. It appears that Africa's influence in cooperation forums is limited due to its countries' poor capacity to negotiate fair partnerships and leverage their resources



effectively. This is affirmed by Kwinika (2015), who argues that Africa's most pressing challenge is the need for capacity to negotiate fairly, taking into account the added value of products derived from the continent's vast natural resources (Kwinika 2015). The inability to negotiate equitable agreements strategically has led some African countries into debt vulnerabilities, particularly those receiving significant Chinese aid and loans. These countries' situations have worsened as they are not able to repay the loans, which continue to accrue interest. However, analysts believe that China's presence in Africa might serve as a catalyst in charting new pathways to address Africa's underdevelopment (Agbebi et al., 2017).

From a liberal perspective, it can be deduced that extra-continental countries have sought to maximize their gains from cooperation forums while strengthening their relations with Africa. The liberal institutionalism logic is reflected in these institutionalized platforms, which establish organized, rule-based frameworks for commerce, investment, development cooperation, and conversation (Besenyő, 2019; Biswas, 2024; Obuah & Komi, 2024). These organizations help Africa and its partners advance their shared economic and political goals by fostering predictable engagement and lowering uncertainty (Horváth, 2024). Though these organizations' support is not geared towards addressing Africa's

structural issues, it has often alleviated the continent's numerous underdevelopment challenges. However, in line with criticisms of institutional liberalism, the study also recognizes that Africa's participation in these forums occurs within asymmetrical power dynamics. Often, external partners dominate the agenda and funding (Alden & Large, 2019; Arukwe, 2024). Consequently, no nation in Africa has ever released a "Chinese Strategy", an "Indian Strategy," or a "European Strategy" This poses a challenge because it could result in inconsistent regulations that might not always be in line with the national development goals of African nations (Zhang et al., 2017).

## CONCLUSION

Globally, cooperation forums have become major platforms for extra-continental countries seeking geopolitical influence and relevance in the contemporary world. A comparison of various engagement models with extra-continental partners reveals Africa's evolving position as a strategic actor in global affairs. While China emphasizes development security and Russia prioritizes military practicality with minimal political intervention, the EU on the other hand, places a high priority on normative governance (Ramontja, 2025). These models present Africa with a diverse array of partnerships that could transform its underdeveloped sectors. To achieve this the African Union, as



the continental leading body, must leverage its participation in the BRICS cooperation forum to garner support for its continental projects, especially those related to infrastructure and industrialization. Partnerships between Brazil and Africa remain relevant in key areas of Africa's underperforming sectors particularly agriculture. These partnerships could encourage youth initiatives within the sector. Regarding India-Africa relations, African nations could benefit from India's development capacity and technology transfer. African relations with the EU and the US could be enhanced in areas that align with the AU's Agenda 2063 and offer mutual benefits. To maximize the benefits of cooperation forums, Africa must spearhead an African strategic framework to guide its partnerships with extra-continental countries while protecting its sovereignty and institutional integrity. This would involve using strategic diplomacy to negotiate competing paradigms (Ramontja, 2025). Additionally, Africa's participation in cooperation forums should take a results-oriented approach by aligning with Agenda 2063, the continent's defining framework for long-term development. This hinges on Africa's ability to establish its niche through an "African Strategy" and ensure that its relationships with various blocs and partners are mutually beneficial, based on fairly negotiated partnerships that consider Africa's underdevelopment.

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