

The Future of Canada's Engagement With Africa

Canadian civil society recommending
a principled approach

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In recent months, Cooperation Canada and its members have actively engaged in conversations with Global Affairs Canada and other political actors about relationships between Canada and Africa, seeking to contribute to the redefinition of the rules of our engagement with and on the African continent. This written submission presents the views of Cooperation Canada and its members on what those rules should entail, proposing a set of guiding principles that can inform a range of policy orientations, including the economic strategy developed by the Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development and the engagement framework prepared by the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Why Canada Needs to Redefine its Engagement With Africa

The urgent need to transform the international cooperation architecture has been stated in multilateral fora and echoed in a recent [OECD report](#) on the aid system. This is also being repeatedly articulated by African political and social actors who, asserting their roles and importance on the global stage, claim in unison: Africa is the continent of the future. The Government of Canada also recognizes the need to demonstrate its strategic commitment to Africa and adopt sustainable partnership models with the continent.

As stated by Senator Amina Gerba, “Nothing in the affairs of Africa will escape the attention of the world and nothing in the affairs of the world will be accomplished without the help of Africans.” Canada is taking note of this, as shown by the initiative to develop new policy documents related to cooperation with Africa. This submission seeks to inform these policy documents in ways that reflect and address the conjunction in Africa of booming demography, sensitive geopolitics, and a growing economy, while acknowledging the numerous challenges that communities across the African continent are striving to overcome.

In Africa, the population is younger and faster-growing than in other regions. The child population is projected to increase by 170 million in this decade, taking the number of the continent's under-18s to 750 million by 2030. This is approximately the total population of Europe. This population growth somewhat affects Canada where, since 2001, over 60% of Black immigrants are from Africa, compared to 28% in 1981-90 and 47% in 1991-2000¹. However, this boom has shades of “demographic bomb”² as youth employment opportunities lag behind the growth rate - a fertile ground for illegal migration, resource-driven conflict, and civil unrest.

Africa is also of increasing geopolitical importance, as world powers vie for influence and presence on the continent. The African Union's invitation to the 2023 G7 summit is a recognition of the systemic influence of the continent in the world³. Several countries have initiated bilateral collaborations like the Belt and Road Initiative (China), Together with Africa Summit (South Korea), Prosper Africa Initiative (United States), Tokyo International Conference on African Development (Japan), India-Africa Forum Summit (India), UK-Africa Investment Summit (United Kingdom), Russia-Africa Summit (Russia) and Africa-EU Partnership (European Union). During a recent visit, President Macron expressed his desire to seal a new France-Africa partnership, departing with the old *Françafrique*. As nations compete for Africa's attention and resources, Canada's voice can stand out by casting attention to the global structures that hold back sustainable development in Africa, and supporting an enabling environment where women, youth and gender-diverse people can thrive.

1 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-657-x/89-657-x2019002-eng.htm>

2 <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/africas-population-explosion-is-a-ticking-time-bomb-african-development-bank-governors-17900>

3 <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-65649834>

Despite numerous challenges, Africa is strengthening economically. Indeed, many countries are experiencing higher rates of economic growth than the global average. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement is opening the largest free trade area in the world, creating vast economic opportunities for Africans and their partners. According to the Canada Africa Growth Coalition, over the next 30 years, a combination of employment-generating industries, trade, good governance, and targeted assistance could contribute \$15 trillion to sub-Saharan Africa's GDP.

The [2021 mandate letter](#) addressed to the Minister of Trade included the task of developing a strategy for economic cooperation across Africa that includes support for the African Continental Free Trade Area, facilitation of increased infrastructure investment, and expansion of partnerships in research and innovation. Canada's feminist leadership can make a difference through this strategy and other policy orientations regarding Africa by promoting a human rights-based approach that would prevent colonial relationships and predatory practices across the continuum of development, trade, and diplomacy.

More than ever, it is time for a clear and equitable Canada-Africa Strategy that reflects the current demographic, economic, and political context on the one hand, and fits the trajectory that Africa and Africans are setting for themselves on the other. Canada has an opportunity to redefine the principles and modalities of its engagement with and in Africa for the next decade, upholding the feminist framing of "Growth that Works for Everyone".

Why Is It Crucial for GAC to Collaborate With Civil Society

Canadian civil society organizations active in Africa, alongside strong African civil society organizations and movements, are international cooperation actors with capacity and agency. It is civil society that is spearheading the localization agenda, concerned with

shifting power from narratives that for too long have condoned paternalism and condescending practices in relationships between the global north and the global majority, including the African continent.

Through their programs, Canadian civil society organizations active in international cooperation and humanitarian assistance, in deep partnership with a diverse range of partners in Africa, have tested and experienced what works (and what doesn't). These organizations are ready to support Canada to enhance its presence and profile in Africa.

In recent months, Cooperation Canada and its members have actively engaged in conversations with political actors in Canada and in Africa, including Parliamentary Secretary Robert Oliphant, the Pan African Branch of Global Affairs Canada, the Assistant Deputy Minister for Sub-Saharan Africa, and African Union officials.

Cooperation Canada and its members seek to build on those conversations and contribute to defining the contours and content of the incoming policy orientations on cooperation between Canada and Africa, including the economic strategy and broader policy framework. Our voices and presence on the ground will be essential demonstrations of Canada's feminist leadership through the next set of Africa-Canada engagement policies.

What We Propose

Cooperation Canada and its members propose a set of principles that should underpin Africa-Canada engagement policies. We remain open to contributing to consultations involving Global Affairs Canada, and other Canadian and African stakeholders to translate the proposed principles into operational modalities of engagement. The proposed principles rest on the understanding that Canada needs Africa more than Africa needs Canada, and that Canada benefits from a reputational capital that is less politically charged than other countries present on the continent.

Principle 1: Embed Collaborative Design

This principle is about prioritizing the joint definition of key action areas by government and non-government actors, including civil society, women and gender-diverse people, and youth. This is about embedding in the new relationship between Canada and Africa the humility necessary to replace the logic of aid and development with the aspiration of true cooperation and equal partnership, based on mutual interests and reciprocity.

Importantly, this principle aligns with that of local ownership. Adopted as key to the development effectiveness agenda, the principle of local ownership rests on the premise that nothing about Africa is to be done without Africa. It is not for Canadians to define and decide what is best for the continent. The Agenda 2063 is the blueprint adopted by the African Union to achieve inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development. Canada's strategy cannot be developed in isolation of the African Union framework.

Operationalizing the principle of collaborative design should make space for Africa-Canada discussion tables with African regional organizations (covering the Maghreb, Sahel, Guinea Golfe, Congo Basin, Great Lakes, etc.) to better understand the socio-ecological diversity of the continent.

Principle 2: Support African Feminist Leadership

Canada's engagement with Africa must align with the [Feminist International Assistance Policy \(FIAP\)](#) in a way that centres African feminists, women, girls, and non-binary people in all their diversity, including members of the LGBTQI+ community. Feminist leadership has proved a most effective tool to enhance the social fabric of communities.

Operationalizing this principle in could include:

- Supporting the agendas of African organizations, including feminist funds, who are embedded in

and meeting the needs of the communities they serve;

- Before, during, and after any interventions, taking the lead from, listening to, and consulting with African feminists and women, girls, and non-binary people in all their diversity; and
- Meeting an ambitious target for gender transformative (GE3) programming (15% is in line with Canada's FIAP) and monitoring and reporting on progress toward advancing gender equality and women's rights.

Principle 3: Prioritize System-Oriented Interventions

Projects alone won't bring about fundamental changes. It is essential to dismantle the structures that perpetuate poverty, inequalities, and injustice and that feed the vicious cycles of crises the continent is battling against.

Operationalizing this principle in could include:

- Advancing triple nexus approaches, as outlined in the [OECD DAC Recommendation](#) on the Humanitarian Development and Peace Nexus;
- Increasing targeted Canadian Official Development Assistance to address poverty, inequalities, and social injustices, consistent with Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, its commitment to increasing Overseas Development Assistance year-on-year to meet the 2030 Agenda, and its commitment of 50% of bilateral aid to Sub-Saharan Africa;
- Encouraging Global Affairs Canada and Canadian civil society organizations to participate in and contribute to relevant multistakeholder conversations (for example with government, research, business and civil society actors); and
- De-risking and incentivizing last-mile interventions for women, gender-diverse people and youth;

- Supporting meaningful and equitable reforms in multilateral and development finance institutions, centering the debt restructuring imperative for African countries and least developed countries in Africa; and
- Addressing environmental and intergenerational inequity with a holistic ecosystem approach, including the rights of children, to address the climate crisis.

Principle 4: Promote Domestic Resource

Mobilization

As Canada revisits the rules of its engagement with Africa, it must be committed to replacing the logic of poverty alleviation with the imperative of wealth generation.

Operationalizing this principle in could include:

- Promoting fair taxation rules in partner countries;
- Addressing Canada's double taxation agreements¹ and unequitable Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements² (FIPAs);
- Promoting transformative use of remittances;
- Promoting Indigenous knowledges;
- Promoting Africa-led conflict resolution; and
- Promoting research and development of home-grown solutions to local challenges.

1 Canada has DTAs in effect with at least 13 African countries, see <https://taxsummaries.pwc.com/canada/individual/foreign-tax-relief-and-tax-treaties>

2 <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/fipa-apie/index.aspx?lang=eng>

About Cooperation Canada

Cooperation Canada brings together Canada's international development and humanitarian organizations and advocates for them by convening sector leaders, influencing policy and building capacity. Together, we work with partners both inside and outside Canada to build a world that's fair, safe and sustainable for all.

Land Acknowledgement

Cooperation Canada acknowledges the historical and on-going oppression and colonization of all Indigenous Peoples, cultures, and lands in what we now know as Canada. The land on which Cooperation Canada's office is located is the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabe People. We believe that social justice in Canada and globally depends on reconciliation with all Indigenous peoples, including the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, who are the original guardians of the land we are grateful to be sharing.

www.cooperation.ca

39, McArthur Ave. 613-241-7007

Ottawa, ON, K1L 8L7 info@cooperation.ca

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