
CHINA-AFRICA: Three-year partnership plan announced

Wagdy Sawahel
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China and 49 African countries have agreed on a three-year action plan for establishing strategic partnerships in science and technology as well as higher education to promote knowledge-based sustainable development. The plan was announced earlier this month at the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Sharm El Sheikh in Egypt.

Under the plan, Chinese and African higher education institutions will establish a new type of one-to-one inter-institutional cooperation model between 20 universities or vocational colleges in China and the same number in Africa.

To promote African human resources development, China will increase the number of scholarships to African students to 5,500 by 2012, boost scholarships for Chinese language teachers to help them study in China, and double efforts to raise the capacity of local African teachers to teach the Chinese language, plus offering training to 3,000 doctors, nurses and administrative personnel.

Besides carrying out 100 joint research and development projects over the next three years, China will invite 100 African post-doctoral students to conduct scientific research and will offer research instruments to all African researchers who return to their home countries after completing long-term joint research tasks in China.

To demonstrate its recent science and technology achievements, China will co-host with Egypt a China Exhibition on Innovative Technology and Products in Cairo next month. The exhibition will promote S&T cooperation for the transfer of advanced applicable technologies with a major impact on Africa's economic and social development such as technologies for drinking water, agriculture, clean energy of biogas, solar energy and small hydro-power plants, information and communication technologies, and health.

Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao told the conference that China would grant African countries US\$10 billion in low-interest development loans over the next three years, establish a \$1 billion loan programme for small and medium-size businesses, and forgive the remaining debt on certain interest-free loans that China has granted less-developed African nations in the past.

The \$10 billion in new loans is double the amount China pledged at the last meeting in 2006 while abolishing the debt African countries already owe continues a series of annual loan cancellations that also dates back to 2006. Wen told officials of the 49 African nations in attendance that this year's session "represents a new stage of development in relations with Africa".

But critics see China's actions as neo-colonialism and part of the Chinese global move to ensure steady supplies of raw material that its industries need to continue the country's massive economic expansion. As US commentator Llewellyn King wrote last week in a column published in the Hearst Newspapers, "While China buys off Africa's elites, and provides them with weapons to support their own people, the rape of Africa will continue..."

(For a detailed discussion of these issues, see this week's Feature: "**Continent-wide colonialism flourishes**".)

Among other agreements made at the Egyptian conference, China will send 50 agricultural technology teams to Africa, train 2,000 African agricultural technicians, build a number of agricultural technology demonstration centres that will carry out experiments, demonstration projects, and training programmes in crop seed selection, farming, fish breeding and animal raising.

China and Africa will enhance cooperation in agricultural infrastructure, grain production, breeding industry, exchanges and transfer of practical agricultural technologies, and in processing, storage and transportation of agricultural products. As well, China will contribute US\$30 million to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization to set up a trust fund to support South-South cooperation between China and African countries under the framework of the UNFAO Special Programme for Food Security.

To help African countries adapt to climate change and strengthen environmental protection, China will increase its training for African countries and expand bilateral exchanges and cooperation in climate change, forest resources cultivation, the use of new energy, environmental management and pollution prevention and control.

China will share experiences with African countries in reducing drought risks, and will send experts to Africa to disseminate technologies and promote their application. The nation also plans to co-sponsor, together with the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, a China-Africa international seminar on reducing drought risks in Africa in 2010 and will strengthen exchanges and cooperation with African countries in surveillance and prevention of earthquake and other disasters.

* IES Abroad, one of America's leading study abroad providers, will launch a **Business In China Program** next year. The programme will be offered through the IES Abroad Center in Shanghai and will introduce US college students to Chinese business practice and strategy through academic classes, internships at international and local companies, and interactions with Chinese and international business people.

Through studying topics such as the political economy of China and perfecting Chinese language skills, students will gain skills and experiences invaluable in today's highly competitive global market.

The course will be run as a partnership with the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, a research institution that focuses on applied economics and management.