

Africa-Engagement Framework: An Opportunity for Canada

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Issue

The challenge for Canada to date in its relationship with the African continent is based to a large extent on the lack of a new, more strategic, meaningful and trusted partnership. Importantly, not pursuing a strategic and achievable policy direction in Africa at this moment in time could pose a significant opportunity lost for Canada. Our research suggests that Canada could spear-head an evolving, more comprehensive commitment to Africa through augmenting its assistance programs with higher education capacity building.

Overview

Canada has been a champion of multilateralism within the rules-based international system (Global Affairs Canada [GAC] 2023). The mandate of GAC tasks the department with leading negotiations of bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral trade agreements (GAC 2023). Canada's engagement with Africa to date has been shaped by humanitarianism, development and peace and security commitments (GAC 2021b). However, Africa's priorities have evolved, and the steps Canada has taken to develop a new African engagement framework reflect Canada's recognition of this and the need to transition to a newly defined relationship and commitment.

Background

Canada's Engagement to This Point

Multilateral engagement in Africa has been on the Canadian radar as the discourse suggests that Canada and Africa share common visions of peace, sustainable development and equal opportunity. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and African Union (AU) Chairperson Moussa Faki have discussed how continued economic transformation and growth in Africa creates opportunities for all (Canada 2020). In October 2022, the Government of Canada committed \$223 million in project funding to support various priorities shared with African countries:

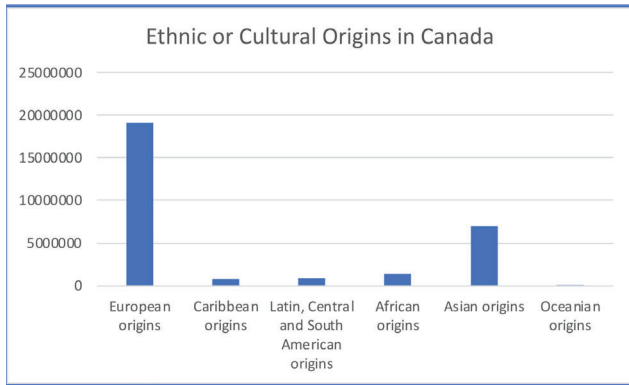
- Over \$37 million allocated to peace and security initiatives (GAC 2022a);
- Over \$18 million for economic development and support for small and medium sized businesses (ibid.);
- Over \$168 million for sustainable development focusing on work towards gender equality, education, and COVID delivery (ibid.).

Canada also has trade and investment interests in Africa, concentrated in 10 Sub-Saharan countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Mozambique, Senegal, South Sudan and Tanzania (GAC 2021b). To date, Canada's engagement in Africa has involved peace and security funding, development and growth assistance, and identifying further opportunities for increased investment.

A Logical Progression to Further Engagement

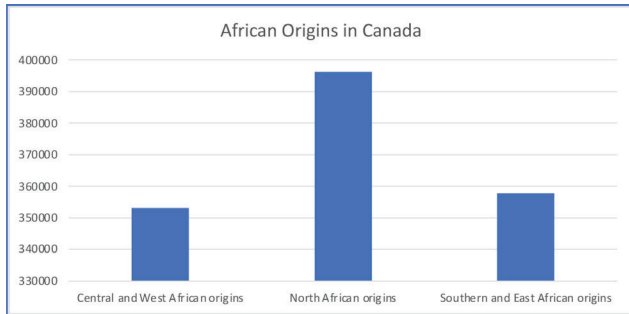
Beyond the shared priorities between Canada and the African continent, the people-to-people links facilitate further reasons for engagement. The African diaspora is the third largest in Canada (see Figure One) — yet Canada lacks any significant multilateral commitment. The majority of migrants come from North Africa, followed by Southern and East Africa, and Central and West Africa (see Figure Two).

Figure One: Ethnic or Cultural Origins in Canada



Source: Graph created by Mark Pompilii, from data sourced from Statistics Canada (2022).

Figure Two: African Origins in Canada



Source: Graph created by Mark Pompilii, from data sourced from Statistics Canada (2022).

Demographic trends suggest that, with approximately 70 percent of people on the African continent under the age of 35, exponential growth will be observed in both the diaspora and at home. Further, many African Canadians have strong commitments to their cultures and homelands (Tetty et al. 2006). Diaspora organizations can act as a catalyst for collective identity as members of diaspora networks form obligations towards their host societies and countries of origin (ibid.). Globalization has intensified

the commitments to local communities, ultimately making diaspora groups an important part of the policy process due to both familial ties and political connection to one’s homeland (ibid.).

Engagement Strategy

Canada should embark in multilateral relations with Africa that aim to foster economic growth, regional integration and intercontinental trade across the African continent. Canada’s engagement with the African continent should focus on developing the adequate infrastructure to grow intra-African trade.

Africa trades with outside regions more than it does with itself, despite the availability of regional and continental policies aimed at increasing intra-continental trade (Mlambo and Masuku 2022). In a period of post-decolonization African countries concluded that continental integration would become important towards their socio-economic and political development (ibid.). The formation of the Organization of African Unity (now African Union) and regional economic communities (RECs) indicated that Africa wanted to implement a continental agenda built on integration, communalism, and social cohesion (ibid.). However, Africa is not trading enough with itself to harness its full economic potential. Two important realities stand out from the above: first is the need for African states to reposition themselves economically after colonialism; and second appears to be the failure of many attempts to foster regional integration and increased intra-continental trade (ibid.). Despite acknowledging the existing challenges, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) emerges as a unique opportunity to grow intra-Africa trade and diversify trade exports with the rest of the world (ibid.). AfCFTA has huge potential to succeed as intra-Africa trade is expected to grow by the mid-2020s (ibid.).

Nonetheless, there are concerns that not all African states will equally benefit. Central to these concerns are fast-developing states and those which have the adequate infrastructure causing skepticism among some African states (ibid.). Benefits cannot only accrue to bigger economies such as South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Angola and Kenya if it wants to avoid the exit of some of the smaller countries as the agreement matures (ibid.). This will require a careful balancing between opening markets and protecting smaller players.

Canada should expand its multilateral engagement with African countries and regional organizations including the AU and RECs such as the East African Community and African Development Bank. This engagement should focus on supporting intra-African trade across the continent for social and economic development.

Recommendations

Canadian multilateral commitments in Africa should proceed through a soft power engagement strategy supporting multilateral relations with Africa through methods of science diplomacy to bridge opportunities for higher educational and civil society partnerships in the domains of energy, agriculture, natural resources and technology. Science diplomacy (SD) is an international policy instrument well suited to address the central challenges of the globalization age (Copeland 2011). SD is a subset of public diplomacy (PD) and should not be seen as a distant outlier (ibid.). It is a crucial, if under-utilized component within PD, and represents a significant source of soft power (ibid.). SD is significant not only in its capacity to resolve many of the world's most pressing problems, but also because it is an effective conduit for the transmission of essential human values such as evidence-based learning, cooperation, openness and sharing (ibid.).

This engagement framework would be welcomed as it operates on a partnership basis rather than an extractive nature, which is still being pursued by many Group of Seven nations. An engagement driven by educational and capacity-driven partnerships also aligns with Canada's international principles of equity diversity and inclusion and its feminist international assistance policy.

The recommendations are as follows:

GAC should foster educational partnerships with African institutions. Canada should promote collaborative education, science and technology research partnerships and networks in Africa for mutual benefit through training and technological development. Canadian scientists and professors from partner organizations should conduct field research in Africa. Canada must strengthen higher education and research partnerships to encourage academic knowledge and learning resource sharing through joint research programs and scholarships for African scholars under friendlier visa rules.

Capacity-building programs have been pursued by other donor countries; however, this support has been focused primarily on health, defence and security. Canada's higher education system is strong and African leaders have enormous respect for academics and academic institutions. Further, this engagement is relatively low risk but carries with it a high potential return on investment. It can also serve as an important basis for meaningful relationships at the policy and business levels. These meaningful educational partnerships can lead to the fostering of industry and sector-based expansion that promote collaborative research partnerships and training to support industrialization and the manufacturing sector that many of Africa's subsistence economies and diversification strategies are eager to realize. This expansion should primarily be focused on energy, agricultural, natural resource and technology industries.

Canada should increase its energy diplomacy with African institutions in renewable energy initiatives, research collaborations, and public and private networks. Canada can replicate the USA Inflation Act to strengthen its support of energy transition in Africa through finance, technology and research in gendered on- and off-grid private hydro, solar and wind power generation, in collaboration with other development partners such as the World Bank Group and International Finance Corporation in stimulating private investment in distributed renewable energy systems under the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency initiative.

GAC should foster partnerships through agricultural assistance programs. There has been a dramatic shift to the way in which African agriculture has been operating with economic growth, urbanization, and climate change affecting methods of production (Christiaensen 2017). The information base on which African agriculture operates has been limited, with dated technology and developing slowly (ibid.). Engagement in Africa's agricultural sector can involve scientific research, combined with traditional knowledge, to increase the productivity of their fields, diversify their crops, boost their nutrition and build climate resilience (Dongyu 2022). For this transformation to be achieved, African countries must be in the driver's seat (ibid.). This investment should be targeted towards the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme, a continent-wide initiative led by African countries to end hunger and reduce poverty through agricultural development (ibid.).

GAC should foster partnerships through natural resource governance. As Canada works to advance international standards and guidelines for the governance of natural resources, there is an opportunity to foster multilateral relationships with African institutions to develop best practices in natural resource extraction, development and security (GAC 2022b). Canada can offer collaboration, partnership and guidance from leading scientists, professors and experts to collaborate with African leaders and institutions to advance economic stability, natural resource extraction and to strengthen the governance of natural resources in Africa. This kind of collaboration would foster innovation, environmental protection and management, strengthen value chains and advance women's participation in key development sectors (GAC 2021a). Engagement in the governance of natural resource can be best achieved through research and the transfer of scientific knowledge to better inform the governance and expansion of Africa's natural resource sector and improve women's engagement in the governance of natural resources (ibid.).

GAC should prioritize investments that increase digital transformations in Africa. Technological advancement can transform Africa into digital Africa. Digital technologies (DT) are defined broadly to include digital and data infrastructure, broadband internet, smartphones, tablets, and computers (World Bank Group 2023). They also include more specialized productivity-enhancing solutions, such as management upgrading, worker training, procurement, marketing, logistics, financing and insurance (ibid.). Bold policy actions that create a conducive DT environment that is appropriate for Sub-Saharan Africa will result in positive impacts that are visible across governments, corporations and households (ibid.). This can also support Africa's growing workforce and facilitate continued learning.

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