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# Critical Analysis of Canada's Africa Strategy: A Partnership for Shared Prosperity and Security

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## **Abstract**

Historically, Canada's Africa policies have been centered on development aid, peacekeeping, and humanitarian assistance. However, Canada's engagement with Africa has fluctuated over the decades, shaped by shifting global priorities, changes in political leadership, and the strategic interests of key allies, leading to varying levels of involvement on the continent. The new Africa Strategy seeks to reposition Canada as a relevant player on the continent, emphasizing economic partnerships, security collaboration, and diplomatic ties. Unlike previous policies that primarily framed Africa as a recipient of aid, the current strategy presents Africa as a partner in trade, innovation, and climate action. The strategy is framed as a partnership for shared prosperity and security, with objectives ranging from economic cooperation to human rights advocacy. This strategic shift, if effectively implemented, has the potential to enhance Canada's global standing and influence within the context of the rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape. This paper provides a detailed analysis of Canada's Africa Strategy, evaluating the strategy's objectives and their implications, offering a comparison with the Indo-Pacific Strategy. Furthermore, the paper provides policy recommendations for a more meaningful and sustainable approach to Africa, aiming to elevate Canada's role as a key contributor to the continent's development and stability in the 21st century.

**Key words:** Africa; Canada; African Union; Canada's Africa Strategy; Canada's Foreign Policy Analysis; Global Diplomacy

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## Introduction

Canada's engagement with Africa has evolved significantly over the decades, shaped by historical events, changing global dynamics, and shifts in Canadian foreign policy priorities [1]. The relationship has been characterized by development assistance, peacekeeping, and diplomatic efforts, though often marked by inconsistencies in long-term strategic commitment [2].

Canada's involvement in Africa dates back to the post-World War II period, when development assistance and humanitarian aid were central pillars of its foreign policy [3]. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Canada played a notable role in supporting newly independent African nations through financial aid, capacity-building programs, and technical assistance [1]. Canadian development organizations, such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), were instrumental in funding large-scale projects in agriculture, health, and education [4]. During the 1980s and 1990s, Canada expanded its engagement, particularly in response to the global debt crisis affecting African nations [5]. It participated in multilateral debt relief efforts, supported democratic governance initiatives, and contributed to peacekeeping missions in countries such as Rwanda and Sierra Leone. Canada's role in promoting international humanitarian assistance during crises, such as the Ethiopian famine of the 1980s, further strengthened its reputation as a development partner [6].

The early 2000s saw renewed efforts to strengthen Canada's Africa policy. The 2002 Africa Action Plan, developed under the G8 framework, emphasized poverty reduction, economic development, governance, and peace and security [7]. Canada was an active supporter of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), advocating for African-led solutions to economic and social challenges [8]. A significant milestone came in 2005 with Canada's leadership in the G8 Gleneagles Summit, which focused on increasing aid to Africa and relieving debt burdens. Under Prime Minister Paul Martin, Canada committed to boosting international assistance, strengthening African institutions, and expanding trade opportunities [9]. However, these commitments were not always sustained in subsequent years due to shifting domestic and global priorities.

Under Prime Minister Stephen Harper (2006–2015), Canada's focus on Africa diminished as the government prioritized economic relationships with emerging markets in Asia and Latin America [10]. Several African embassies and diplomatic missions were closed, and bilateral aid budgets were reallocated. The CIDA was eventually merged into the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development (now Global Affairs Canada), signaling a shift toward a more trade-oriented approach to foreign relations [11]. CIDA and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) played distinct yet complementary roles in Africa. While IDRC, established in 1970, focused on funding research and strengthening local knowledge for sustainable development [12], CIDA managed Canada's official development assistance, delivering aid through bilateral programs and multilateral partnerships. CIDA prioritized poverty reduction, governance, health, education, and economic development, while IDRC supported African researchers in developing context-specific solutions. Together, they contributed to Africa's development, with CIDA emphasizing direct aid and policy implementation and IDRC investing in long-term research and innovation. During 2006–2015, Canada maintained engagement with African countries on issues such as maternal and child health and mining sector investments, but there was a noticeable decline in high-level diplomatic initiatives [10].

When Justin Trudeau took office in 2015, there were expectations of a renewed commitment to Africa [13]. The objective of this paper is to provide a comprehensive analysis of Canada's new Africa Strategy 'Canada's Africa Strategy: A Partnership for Shared Prosperity and Security' (<https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/transparence-transparence/canada-africa-strategy-strategie-afrique.aspx?lang=eng>), critically assessing its goals, approaches, and potential impacts. This document evaluates the strategy's alignment with Canada's broader foreign policy objectives, its implications for Canada's role in global development and security, and the opportunities it presents for strengthening Canada's ties with Africa. It offers a comparison with Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy (<https://www.international.gc.ca/transparence-transparence/indo-pacific-indo-pacifique/index.aspx?lang=eng>), discusses the challenges and criticisms facing the strategy, and proposes policy recommendations for making Canada's engagement with Africa more impactful and sustainable.

This document is important for Canada, as it assesses how the new Africa Strategy could enhance the country's role on the global stage. For Canadian policymakers and government officials, it provides a critical evaluation of the strategy's potential to strengthen Canada's diplomatic and economic ties with African countries, contributing to long-term national interests. It highlights how Canada can capitalize on Africa's growing economic power, youthful population, and increasing geopolitical significance. For Canadian businesses, this analysis sheds light on new opportunities for trade, investment, and innovation partnerships in Africa's emerging markets. Additionally, for Canadian academics and development practitioners, the document provides an informed perspective on how Canada's policies can align with global development goals and sustainable solutions, particularly in areas like climate change, human rights, and security. Overall, the document is crucial for understanding the strategic opportunities and challenges Canada faces in repositioning itself as a more engaged and influential partner in Africa, ensuring that the country can better contribute to global peace, stability, and prosperity in the coming decades.

### **Methodological Note**

This analysis of Canada's Africa Strategy focused on evaluating its objectives, challenges, and implications by reviewing key relevant policy documents and comparing it with similar Canadian strategies such as the Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy. The analysis also considered expert opinions and critiques following the release of the strategy to assess potential shortcomings, especially in terms of resource allocation and alignment with Africa's needs. By examining the strategy's goals within the context of Africa's evolving geopolitical and economic landscape, the paper offers policy recommendations aimed at improving Canada's engagement and enhancing its role as a key partner in Africa's development and stability.

### **Canada's New Africa Strategy: A Shift or a Rebranding?**

The release of Canada's new Africa strategy 'Canada's Africa Strategy: A Partnership for Shared Prosperity and Security' signals an attempt to reposition itself as a key partner on the continent. Unlike previous policies that framed Africa primarily as a recipient of aid, this strategy emphasizes economic cooperation, security collaboration, and diplomatic engagement. It seeks to leverage Africa's growing role in the global economy while addressing shared challenges such as climate change, health security, and governance.



**Fig. 1.** Visual capture of Canada’s strategy on Africa.

Canada’s new Africa strategy focuses on five key areas to deepen its engagement with the continent, **Fig. 1**. First, it aims to strengthen diplomatic ties by enhancing its presence, appointing special envoys, and engaging the African diaspora in Canada. Second, it seeks to boost economic cooperation through trade, investment, and climate-friendly initiatives while supporting the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Third, the strategy prioritizes poverty reduction, youth empowerment, and climate adaptation by investing in renewable energy, infrastructure, and global health initiatives. Fourth, it bolsters security and human rights by supporting African-led peace efforts, counterterrorism, and democratic governance. Lastly, Canada intends to collaborate with African nations on global issues such as climate change, digital transformation, and multilateral reforms, advocating for Africa’s increased influence in international institutions.

### **Strategic Objectives and Their Implications**

**Table 1** summarizes the five strategies in terms of ‘How’ the strategies will be achieved and ‘Actions’ that will be taken to implement the strategies.

Canada’s strategy emphasizes stronger diplomatic relations, deeper institutional partnerships, and greater engagement with African diaspora communities in Canada. These efforts could bolster Canada’s soft power and improve its image as a committed partner to Africa.

Canada’s approach to economic cooperation highlights trade, investment, and sustainable development. Supporting the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and promoting resilient supply chains, particularly for critical minerals, are important steps toward economic integration. However, Canada faces significant challenges in positioning itself as a key economic partner. Major global actors like China, the European Union (EU), and the US have long-established economic ties with Africa, backed by substantial investments and trade agreements. In contrast, Canada’s trade volume with Africa remains relatively smaller.

The strategy outlines commitments to economic development, climate adaptation, and humanitarian assistance, aiming to integrate these areas through investments in renewable energy, infrastructure, and skills training, with a focus on artificial intelligence and digital transformation—through initiatives like Artificial Intelligence for Development—signaling a forward-thinking approach, the strategy.

Further, Canada aims to support African-led peace initiatives, democratic governance, and counterterrorism efforts, including technical assistance to the African Union Commission (AUC) and investments in security infrastructure.

Canada’s efforts to increase Africa’s representation in global governance structures, including UN Security Council reform, align with broader calls for a more inclusive international order.

**Table 1.** Summary of the 5 strategies of Canada towards Africa.

The 5 areas of Canada’s Africa strategy	
1	Strengthening Canada’s diplomatic engagement and people-to-people ties
How	Strengthening presence in the continent, relationship with African institutions, and African Canadian diaspora engagement
Action	Appointing new special envoys and embassies, partnering with the African Union (AU), expanding collaboration with regional economic communities and parliaments, and involving diaspora youths and businesses to inform Canadian government.
2	Enhancing economic cooperation
How	Enhancing opportunities for private sector and stakeholders, promoting inclusive economic system and transparent trade and investment atmosphere in Africa, and promoting climate positive and sustainable economic growth.
Action	Establishing high-level trade mission to Africa, creating Africa Trade Hub, providing support to the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), continuing Canada-African Union Commission (AUC) Trade Policy Dialogue, negotiating foreign investment promotion and protection agreements, promoting resilient supply chains and production of critical minerals in Africa, expanding analytical capability and understanding of Africa, and helping Africa in securing cutting edge Canadian policy, expertise, and technology for climate positive and sustainable growth.
3	Reducing poverty, supporting economic development, empowering youth and assisting in humanitarian crises and climate adaptation

How	Creating stronger connections between economic growth and development programs, investing in renewable energy and infrastructure, investing in youth and skill training, prioritizing mobilization of finance, combating climate change, and cooperating in global health and nutrition.
Action	Creating new Africa Trade and Development Program, programing with FinDev Canada, partnering with World Bank and African Development Bank for investing, funding for basic education, support technical and vocational training and skills programs, deploying Canada's innovative financing instruments, supporting Wheat Research Acceleration Fund, building on the International Development Research Centre's (IDRC) presence, supporting adaptation and addressing biodiversity loss, supporting advancement of health, combating infectious diseases, strengthening primary healthcare system, and improving nutrition.
4	<b>Bolstering partnerships for peace, security and human rights</b>
How	Supporting African-led peace operations and conflict prevention initiatives, promoting role of women and youth in peace and security, strengthening democracy and human rights, revising the Canadian approach to Sahel, countering terrorist threats, and mitigating chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats.
Action	Providing technical assistance to AUC, supporting early warning initiatives, supporting African centres of excellence, continuing peace mediation activities, amplifying and strengthening local leadership, deploying civilian advisers, supporting AU's Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, pursuing policy linkages with African institutions, investing in electoral systems, strengthening democratic electoral processes, advocating for human rights, protecting rights and freedoms, implementing Canada's new Sahel Regional Development Program, countering terrorist threats and translational crimes, investing in capacity building for counter terrorism, leading the Signature Initiative to Mitigate Biological Threats in Africa, and supporting African states in legislative and regulatory infrastructure.
5	<b>Advancing shared priorities through increased engagement on the global stage</b>
How	Supporting African participation and influence in multilateral spaces, advancing shared interests such as climate action, countering terrorism and translational crime, trade, and digitization.
Action	Working with African partners, mobilizing support, advocating for reform of United Nations Security Council to accommodate Africa, support AU, collaborate with South Africa, cooperation at World Trade Organization, press for reform of development banks to support Africa, strengthening partnering with Commonwealth and La Francophonie, engaging with African partners in climate action, change and security, and working with African countries to combat climate change.

### **Comparison of Canada's Africa strategy with Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy**

Canada's foreign policy strategies, especially in Africa and the Indo-Pacific, reflect the nation's evolving role in global geopolitics. In this section, we will compare two pivotal frameworks: Canada's Africa Strategy: A Partnership for Shared Prosperity and Security and Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy. Both strategies are designed to foster economic growth, security, and international partnerships but target distinct regions with different socio-political dynamics. The



following analysis examines six critical factors that define these strategies: geopolitical focus and regional priorities, economic engagement and trade partnerships, security and peacebuilding initiatives, humanitarian aid and development, cultural diplomacy and soft power, and climate change and environmental leadership.

Geopolitical focus and regional priorities are a key component of both strategies. Canada's Africa Strategy, outlined in 2025, is grounded in deepening economic, diplomatic, and security ties with African nations. The continent's diversity and rapid development make it a critical focus area for Canada, with priorities including promoting good governance, enhancing trade, and addressing regional security challenges, such as those posed by terrorism, conflict, and human rights violations. On the other hand, the Indo-Pacific Strategy, introduced in 2022, focuses on one of the most strategically significant regions in the world. Spanning countries such as Japan, India, and Australia, the strategy is centered on countering China's growing influence, enhancing trade relations, and strengthening security frameworks. The strategy explicitly aligns with Western allies like the United States (U.S.) and Japan to maintain a rules-based international order. While both strategies emphasize strengthening international ties, the Africa Strategy primarily focuses on regional development and security within a less stable environment. In contrast, the Indo-Pacific Strategy is more politically charged, reflecting global power struggles and competition with China. Africa remains largely a development and humanitarian priority for Canada, while the Indo-Pacific is central to global geopolitical dynamics.

Economic engagement and trade partnerships are essential pillars of both strategies. Canada's Africa Strategy emphasizes trade and investment, aiming to build stronger economic ties across diverse sectors, including natural resources, technology, and agriculture. Key to this strategy is Canada's support for African countries in fostering economic diversification and sustainable development. The Canada-Africa Business Forum and trade agreements play a significant role in this context. In the Indo-Pacific, while trade is also a cornerstone of Canada's approach, the region is economically more advanced, and Canada's strategy involves strengthening its trade relations with countries like Japan, India, and South Korea. The strategy emphasizes improving trade agreements, deepening supply chains, and leveraging new market opportunities, particularly in technology, clean energy, and digital innovation. The Africa Strategy is more focused on capacity building, development, and fostering partnerships to aid economic growth in emerging markets. In contrast, the Indo-Pacific Strategy is geared towards securing more robust economic partnerships with already-industrialized and advanced economies.

Security and peacebuilding initiatives form another critical element of both strategies. In Africa, security is a major concern in many nations, with challenges such as terrorism, armed conflict, and the threat of authoritarianism. Canada's strategy places a strong emphasis on peacekeeping, conflict resolution, and supporting African-led peacebuilding initiatives. Canada has committed to providing training, resources, and peacekeeping forces to countries like Mali and the Central African Republic. In the Indo-Pacific, security is also paramount, with a focus on maritime security, countering terrorism, and addressing rising tensions with China. Canada's strategy includes strengthening regional defense alliances, particularly through partnerships like AUKUS (Australia, UK, and the U.S.) and ASEAN. This also involves cybersecurity initiatives and preparing for potential challenges posed by regional instability. While both strategies aim at fostering peace and stability, the Africa Strategy is focused on conflict resolution in more fragile

states, whereas the Indo-Pacific Strategy revolves around securing strategic defense alliances and countering the influence of a dominant power, China. Africa requires a peacebuilding approach, while the Indo-Pacific necessitates defense preparedness and strengthening security partnerships.

Humanitarian aid and development support are pivotal elements in Canada's engagement with both regions. The Africa Strategy is heavily focused on humanitarian aid and development, addressing challenges such as food insecurity, health crises, and education. Canada continues to support major initiatives such as the Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, as well as clean water projects and women's empowerment initiatives. Similarly, in the Indo-Pacific, while humanitarian aid is also part of Canada's commitment, the strategy places more emphasis on development partnerships, particularly in the context of climate change, trade facilitation, and digital technology. Canadian aid in the region tends to prioritize infrastructure development and environmental sustainability rather than large-scale humanitarian relief. While both strategies involve humanitarian aid, the Africa Strategy leans more towards responding to immediate crises and systemic challenges like poverty and health, while the Indo-Pacific Strategy focuses on sustainable development, technology partnerships, and long-term infrastructure support. The latter's development approach reflects the higher levels of development and more advanced economies in the Indo-Pacific region.

Cultural diplomacy and soft power are also essential aspects of both strategies. Canada has long engaged with African nations through cultural diplomacy, leveraging its reputation as a peacekeeper and proponent of human rights. The strategy encourages the exchange of ideas and people, facilitating academic, artistic, and youth exchanges. Canadian cultural organizations are active across the continent. Similarly, Canada has embraced cultural diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific, focusing on promoting democratic values, human rights, and environmental sustainability. This is achieved through various educational programs, media, and art exchanges that strengthen the country's soft power in the region. Both strategies recognize the importance of soft power, but the Africa Strategy is more focused on humanitarian values and social justice, aligning with Canada's historical role in peacekeeping. The Indo-Pacific Strategy uses cultural diplomacy to support Canada's geopolitical interests, promoting democratic ideals and countering authoritarian influences.

Climate change and environmental leadership are focal points for Canada in both strategies. In the Africa Strategy, climate change is a central issue, with a focus on mitigating environmental impacts in countries that are most vulnerable. Canada supports renewable energy projects, climate adaptation strategies, and disaster risk reduction. Canada's commitment to financing climate resilience projects is a critical part of its development aid to Africa. The Indo-Pacific Strategy also acknowledges climate change, with a specific emphasis on the role of the region in global emissions. Canada works with countries like India and Australia to implement clean energy solutions, reduce carbon footprints, and address the impacts of natural disasters and rising sea levels. The strategy encourages collaborative environmental governance across the region. Both strategies recognize climate change as a threat multiplier. In Africa, the emphasis is on adapting vulnerable communities to climate impacts, while in the Indo-Pacific, Canada is more focused on cutting-edge technologies for carbon reduction and promoting regional collaboration on climate governance.

In general, while both Canada's Africa Strategy and Indo-Pacific Strategy share common themes of security, development, and economic partnerships, they differ in their regional priorities, geopolitical dynamics, and the scope of their diplomatic and security engagement. The Africa strategy is largely focused on supporting sustainable growth and peacebuilding in a diverse and developing continent, whereas the Indo-Pacific strategy is driven by geopolitical considerations, trade relations, and countering China's growing influence in an increasingly complex global environment.

### **Some Critical Observations**

The Strategy has been lauded for its ambitious vision of fostering genuine partnerships, co-development, and mutual respect between Canada and African nations. Although the overarching goals are clearly stated, the strategy would benefit from dedicated funding to support its various objectives and initiatives across multiple federal departments and agencies. As a strategy, it is understandable that the document primarily focuses on articulating the vision and objectives—the “what” and “why” of Canada's engagement—which it does in an inspiring and ambitious manner. However, for successful execution, it is essential to create a detailed framework for each pillar, addressing the "how," including dedicated funding to support its various objectives and initiatives cross multiple federal departments and agencies.

### **Recommendations**

We recommend five actions that will ensure the successful and effective implementation of Canada's Africa Strategy. These recommendations aim to shift Canada's strategy from a set of general aspirations to a more tangible, actionable, and mutually beneficial framework that supports Africa's development while ensuring long-term, meaningful engagement.

1. **Introduce Dedicated Financial Commitments:** Canada should introduce new and substantial financial commitments specifically allocated to support the strategy's various objectives and initiatives across multiple federal departments and agencies. These resources will ensure that the strategy is not merely aspirational but has the necessary funding to be effectively executed.
2. **Establish Concrete, Measurable Goals with Clear Timelines:** Canada should introduce concrete, measurable goals with clear timelines for each strategic priority within the Africa Strategy. This will ensure accountability and effectiveness, allowing for systematic tracking of progress. Each initiative—whether in trade, investment, development aid, education, or infrastructure—should be tied to specific performance indicators.
3. **Implement Regular Assessments and Independent Evaluations:** Establishing regular assessments and independent evaluations will help measure the impact of Canadian engagement. This will ensure that resources are being effectively utilized and that initiatives remain aligned with Africa's evolving needs. Independent evaluations will also enhance the credibility and impact of the strategy.
4. **Create Transparent Reporting Mechanisms:** Transparent reporting mechanisms, including publicly accessible progress reports and stakeholder consultations, will enhance credibility and enable African governments, civil society, and businesses to provide

feedback and hold Canada accountable for its commitments. This transparency will build trust and ensure that the strategy remains responsive to the needs of African nations.

5. **Embed Flexibility for Data-Driven Adjustments:** Embedding flexibility into the strategy will allow for data-driven adjustments where necessary. This will ensure the strategy can respond to changing political, economic, and social landscapes across the continent. By incorporating flexibility, Canada can adapt its approach to new developments, ensuring the strategy remains relevant and impactful over time.

By prioritizing these recommendations, Canada can build trust among African partners and position itself as a serious, long-term player in the region's development.

## Conclusion

Canada's Africa Strategy represents an important step toward deepening engagement with the continent. For the strategy to be effective, Canada must provide new financial resources, adopt a more Africa-centered approach, and ensure that commitments are backed by concrete actions. This will be critical in transforming the strategy from a diplomatic statement into a substantive policy framework.

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