



# Canada's Africa Strategy: What You Need to Know and Why It Matters for Artificial Intelligence, Health, and Innovation

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## **Abstract**

This piece explores Canada's renewed engagement with Africa, focusing on its potential to reshape diplomatic and economic ties between the two regions. It looks at Canada's ambitious strategy, which emphasizes co-development, collaboration, and inclusivity, and asks whether it has clear, actionable steps or if it's just a broad statement without measurable goals or accountability. The analysis highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of this approach, specifically in the areas of AI, health, and innovation, aiming to provide insights for policymakers, scholars, and the public on how practical and effective Canada's new partnership model with Africa might be.

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## **A. Canada’s Africa Strategy: What You Need to Know**

Canada recently unveiled its new Africa Strategy, marking a significant departure from traditional development narratives. Gone are the days of the outdated “we’re here to help” mindset. Instead, Canada's approach focuses on genuine partnership, mutual learning, and collaboratively shaping a better, shared future. Unlike previous strategies, which often positioned Canada as the provider and African nations merely as recipients, this new vision emphasizes mutual respect and equitable partnerships. The strategy recognizes Africa’s immense potential, vibrant innovation ecosystems, and rich diversity, aligning closely with Africa's own aspirations and priorities.

Let's dive into what you need to know about Canada's plan.

### **I. Why Africa? Why Now?**

Africa is a continent on the move, brimming with opportunity and dynamism. With the youngest and fastest-growing population globally, abundant natural resources, and rapidly expanding markets, Africa is poised to shape the global economy of the future. Canada recognizes this immense potential and is proactively taking steps to build robust, mutually beneficial partnerships across the continent. At a time when the global landscape is marked by increasing instability, geopolitical shifts, and heightened competition, it is more important than ever for Canada to diversify its partnerships and strengthen its strategic relationships. Africa, with its growing economic influence, vibrant youth, and increasing global voice, is an essential partner in this endeavor. Engaging meaningfully with African nations not only advances economic interests but also contributes to global security and stability. Hon. Robert Oliphant, Parliamentary Secretary to Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, recently highlighted Canada's forward-thinking strategy towards Africa. Speaking at the strategy launch, Hon. Oliphant emphasized that this approach is not driven by any specific external threat or reactionary impulse. Rather, it’s about foresight—building deeper ties today to secure a prosperous and stable tomorrow. This new chapter of Canada-Africa relations underscores Canada's commitment to mutually respectful partnerships, recognizing African nations as equal and vital players on the world stage. By investing in youth, innovation, sustainable economic development, and security collaborations, Canada is contributing positively to the shared growth and resilience of both regions. Africa's trajectory presents Canada with an opportunity to engage with a vibrant, dynamic continent full of promise and potential. Together, Canada and African nations can build a future marked by collaboration, innovation, and mutual prosperity.

### **II. What Makes This Strategy Different?**

This isn’t your grandfather’s foreign policy. Canada's fresh approach toward Africa isn’t just innovative—it’s transformative. Here's what sets it apart:

**1. It’s About Mutual Learning:** Gone are the days when international engagement meant offering one-sided solutions. Canada understands there’s as much to learn as there is to contribute. As Hon.

Rob Oliphant notably put it, “It is not us helping Africa; it is about us learning, co-creating, and growing together”. This humility and openness set a new benchmark in global diplomacy.

**2. Co-Development Takes Center Stage:** Canada didn’t craft its strategy in isolation. Instead, it prioritized authentic collaboration by engaging more than 600 diverse African stakeholders—ranging from academics and entrepreneurs to civil society leaders. This inclusive process ensures the policy genuinely aligns with African priorities, aspirations, and visions for the future.

**3. Recognizing History to Shape the Future:** True partnerships acknowledge history openly and transparently. Canada's strategy does exactly this, recognizing the enduring impacts of colonialism and expressing a clear commitment to moving forward in a spirit of mutual respect, equality, and genuine collaboration.

**4. An Evolving Strategy:** This isn’t a static blueprint—it's a dynamic, adaptable framework designed to evolve as Canada and Africa's relationship deepens. Over the next seven years, Canada plans to develop, refine, and recalibrate its work plan, ensuring it remains responsive to changing circumstances, emerging opportunities, and mutual goals. In short, Canada’s new strategy represents a bold departure from traditional foreign policy, signaling a deeper, more respectful, and more meaningful engagement with Africa.

### III. What’s Canada’s Plan?

Canada’s Africa Strategy represents an ambitious and comprehensive approach designed to strengthen partnerships, enhance cooperation, and drive sustainable progress across Africa. The strategy revolves around five central pillars, each aimed at building meaningful relationships, fostering mutual prosperity, and promoting stability and sustainable growth:

- 1. Stronger Connections and Diplomatic Engagement:** Canada is proactively expanding its diplomatic presence in Africa, enhancing the depth and quality of diplomatic relationships across the continent. Key initiatives include:
  - Expanding Diplomatic Footprint:*** Establishing new embassies and appointing special envoys to enhance direct engagement.
  - Strengthening People-to-People Ties:*** Prioritizing cultural exchanges, academic partnerships, and other forms of social connectivity.
  - Diaspora Engagement:*** Recognizing the African diaspora in Canada as a vital cultural and economic bridge, Canada is launching a dedicated diaspora engagement mechanism to leverage their expertise, foster deeper cultural understanding, and promote collaboration.
  - Collaboration with Regional Bodies:*** Enhancing cooperation with African regional economic communities, institutions, and parliaments to foster integrated regional development.
- 2. Boosting Business and Economic Cooperation:** Canada is deeply committed to fostering robust trade relationships and economic growth, ensuring mutual economic prosperity:
  - Africa Trade Hub:*** Creating a dedicated platform to facilitate increased trade and investment opportunities between Canada and African businesses.

**Supporting AfCFTA:** Actively backing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), a landmark initiative aimed at creating a single continental market to drive regional economic integration and development.

**Investment Agreements:** Negotiating and signing Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements (FIPAs) to ensure secure and mutually beneficial business environments.

**High-Level Trade Missions:** Organizing high-profile trade delegations and missions to Africa, helping Canadian businesses engage directly with African counterparts and explore emerging markets and opportunities.

3. **Helping People Thrive and Achieving Sustainable Development:** Canada's enhanced commitment to Africa emphasizes sustainable and inclusive growth through targeted humanitarian aid and strategic investments:

**Increased Aid:** Elevating financial support and aid effectiveness, focusing on youth employment, education, healthcare, food security, and poverty reduction.

**Climate Action and Sustainability:** Prioritizing investments in renewable energy projects, sustainable infrastructure, and initiatives addressing the urgent challenge of climate change.

**Educational and Health Investments:** Expanding educational access, particularly for girls and marginalized communities, and enhancing healthcare infrastructure to foster long-term socio-economic stability.

4. **Promoting Peace, Security, and Human Rights:** Canada is dedicated to supporting stable, safe, and equitable societies in Africa by focusing on conflict prevention, resolution, and human rights:

**Supporting African-led Solutions:** Encouraging and funding African-led peace operations and conflict prevention initiatives to foster local empowerment and sustainable peace.

**Inclusivity in Peacebuilding:** Prioritizing the critical roles of women and youth in peace and security processes, empowering them as key contributors to sustainable stability.

**Democratic Governance and Human Rights:** Strengthening democratic institutions, advocating good governance, and actively promoting and protecting human rights across the continent.

**Revised Approach in the Sahel:** Introducing a tailored, comprehensive strategy to address the unique security and humanitarian challenges in the Sahel region.

5. **Collaborating Globally and Advancing Shared Priorities:** Canada recognizes Africa's critical role in global affairs and advocates for stronger African representation on the world stage:

**Global Representation:** Actively advocating for increased African participation and representation in major international forums, including the United Nations Security Council and the G20.

**Advocacy for African Integration:** Persistently supporting initiatives to integrate African perspectives into global decision-making, emphasizing the continent's vital contributions to global peace, security, trade, and environmental stewardship.

**Free Trade Advocacy:** Committed to ensuring Africa's integration into global free trade, recognizing the mutual benefits of inclusive global economic systems.

Through these five pillars, Canada's Africa Strategy seeks not only to reinforce existing ties but to pave the way for a transformative partnership marked by mutual respect, shared prosperity, and collective global progress.

#### **IV. Why Should You Care?**

**Canada and Africa Forging a New Partnership for a Brighter Future:** Canada's renewed approach towards Africa marks a significant shift, characterized by mutual respect, shared goals, and collaborative growth. At its heart lies an understanding that partnerships must move beyond aid, embracing a spirit of equality and cooperation that benefits both continents.

**Economic Opportunities for Mutual Prosperity:** Strengthening economic ties with Africa holds tremendous promise for Canada. The African continent, home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies and a dynamic entrepreneurial spirit, offers vast opportunities for Canadian businesses. From infrastructure and technology to agriculture and renewable energy, Canada's engagement can stimulate job creation, innovation, and sustainable economic growth. This economic partnership is not a one-way street; it fosters mutual prosperity, creating meaningful employment and growth opportunities for Canadians as well.

**Building a More Stable and Secure World:** Promoting peace, security, and democratic governance in Africa is not only beneficial to African nations but contributes to global stability. Canada's active involvement in peace-building initiatives, democratic reforms, and security cooperation supports environments where human rights flourish, conflicts diminish, and economies thrive. A stable Africa is beneficial for the international community, reducing humanitarian crises and fostering global economic security.

**Amplifying African Voices on the Global Stage:** Canada is deeply committed to ensuring African perspectives are prominently included in global dialogues and decision-making processes. By advocating for African representation in international forums, Canada seeks to elevate the continent's voice on critical global issues such as climate change, international trade, public health, and human rights. A truly global community demands inclusivity, and Canada's diplomatic efforts aim to support and amplify African leadership and insights.

**Engaging the Vibrant African Diaspora in Canada:** The African diaspora in Canada serves as a vital cultural, economic, and diplomatic bridge linking the two continents. Recognizing the diaspora's unique insights, connections, and contributions, Canada's strategy actively encourages deeper engagement. The diaspora's role extends beyond cultural exchange, becoming pivotal in facilitating trade, attracting investments, and advocating for policies that strengthen Canada-Africa relations. Supporting and empowering the diaspora not only enriches Canada's social fabric but significantly enhances bilateral relationships with African countries.

**A Vision for the Future:** This new partnership embodies a vision rooted in mutual benefit, shared responsibility, and collective advancement. As Canada and Africa deepen their connections, the outcomes—economic prosperity, enhanced global security, greater inclusion, and diaspora empowerment—set the stage for lasting, impactful change. Together, Canada and Africa can build a partnership that truly reflects the diversity, potential, and ambitions of both regions. By embracing this collaborative spirit, Canada positions itself not only as a partner but as an ally invested in Africa's success and committed to a shared, prosperous future.

## **B. Implications of Canada's Africa Strategy for Health, AI, and Innovation**

Canada's strategic commitment to Africa focuses on interconnected pillars of health system strengthening, artificial intelligence (AI), innovation, and technology. By addressing these critical areas collaboratively, Canada seeks to empower sustainable development and meaningful growth across the continent.

***Strengthening Health Systems:*** Canada pledges significant investment in Africa's healthcare infrastructure, underscoring the importance of robust and resilient health systems. Key commitments include the training and retention of skilled healthcare workers, expanding access to essential medicines, vaccines, and advanced medical technologies. Special emphasis is placed on combating infectious diseases, as well as enhancing maternal and child health services to reduce mortality rates and improve overall community health outcomes.

***Promoting Responsible AI in Healthcare:*** Recognizing AI's transformative potential, Canada prioritizes the development and deployment of responsible AI-driven healthcare solutions. Responsible AI technologies, including advanced diagnostics, personalized medicine, predictive analytics, and telemedicine, are central to this strategy. These tools promise significant improvements in healthcare quality, precision, and accessibility, particularly benefiting underserved communities and rural regions where healthcare professionals are scarce.

***Fostering Innovation Ecosystems:*** A vibrant innovation ecosystem is fundamental to sustainable health improvements. Canada actively fosters collaboration between Canadian and African researchers, entrepreneurs, startups, and academic institutions. Initiatives include technology transfer programs, capacity-building workshops, joint research ventures, and incubator programs aimed at nurturing local entrepreneurship and innovation. The ultimate goal is to support homegrown solutions designed specifically to address Africa's unique health challenges.

***Addressing Knowledge Gaps:*** Canada acknowledges the critical importance of locally led and context-specific research to address knowledge gaps and ensure meaningful solutions. To achieve this, Canada supports equitable international research partnerships, ensuring African researchers and institutions play a leading role in defining research priorities, conducting studies, and applying findings effectively. This empowerment aims to cultivate a self-sufficient research environment in Africa that can sustainably drive health improvements and policy innovation.

***Leveraging Technology:*** Technology serves as an essential accelerator in reaching remote and marginalized populations. Canada's strategy embraces emerging digital technologies, and digital health platforms to enhance healthcare delivery and reach a broader patient population. Investments in digital infrastructure aim to bridge urban-rural divides, allowing communities in even the most remote regions access to timely, efficient, and effective healthcare services.

***Building Sustainable Partnerships:*** At its core, Canada's strategy embodies partnership, recognizing health, AI, and innovation as intrinsically interconnected components essential for Africa's sustainable development. By collaborating closely with African governments,



communities, and stakeholders, Canada aims to co-create solutions, ensuring that initiatives are locally relevant, sustainable, and impactful. This strategic partnership positions Canada not merely as a donor but as a committed ally in Africa's journey toward improved health outcomes, economic resilience, and sustainable growth.

### **C. Some Critical Observations**

Canada's Africa Strategy sets forth an ambitious and forward-looking vision, centered on genuine partnership, co-development, and mutual respect. This progressive approach marks a positive shift from traditional narratives, demonstrating a commitment to deeper and more meaningful engagement. While the overarching goals are well-articulated, the strategy could benefit from greater clarity regarding timelines, measurable outcomes, and financial commitments. It is understandable that, as a strategy, the document primarily focuses on defining the vision and objectives—the “what” and “why” of Canada's engagement. In this regard, the strategy succeeds in outlining an inspiring and ambitious direction. However, to ensure effective implementation, it will be crucial to develop a comprehensive framework for each pillar, detailing the “how”. This framework should include concrete actions, financial commitments, and clear accountability mechanisms to support the departments and agencies responsible for bringing the strategy to life. By incorporating explicit milestones, well-defined indicators of success, and transparent evaluation processes, Canada can translate its high-level aspirations into meaningful, sustainable outcomes. Strengthening these elements will not only reinforce the credibility of the strategy but also enhance its long-term impact, ensuring that the vision of genuine partnership with Africa is fully realized.

### **D. Conclusions**

Canada's renewed Africa Strategy represents a transformative shift toward genuine collaboration, mutual respect, and shared prosperity, marking a significant departure from traditional development paradigms. By embracing principles of partnership rather than paternalism, Canada emphasizes mutual learning, co-development, and equality, laying the groundwork for long-term, meaningful relationships. Central to this strategy are robust investments in diplomatic relations, economic cooperation, and inclusive, sustainable development. Canada's focus on innovation, technology, and strategic economic integration, including explicit support for the African Continental Free Trade Area, underscores a shared commitment to mutual economic benefit. The comprehensive strategy also recognizes Africa's critical role in global stability and prosperity. Canada actively promotes stronger African representation in international institutions, affirming its dedication to elevating African voices globally. Moreover, meaningful engagement of the African diaspora in Canada further enhances these ties, serving as a pivotal bridge in facilitating economic, cultural, and diplomatic connections. Through strategic investments in healthcare systems, innovation ecosystems, and AI-driven technological solutions, Canada addresses key challenges and opportunities within the continent. By empowering local research capacities and prioritizing equitable partnerships, Canada not only fosters immediate improvements but lays the groundwork for enduring, locally-led progress. Ultimately, Canada's Africa Strategy embodies a forward-thinking, dynamic, and respectful collaboration aimed at achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. This modern approach, moving decisively away from outdated paternalistic models,

positions Canada as a committed partner dedicated to co-creating a future of shared prosperity, stability, and inclusive global advancement.

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