

**GT:** The theme of the 2024 Summit of the FOCAC is “Joining Hands to Advance Modernization and Build a High-Level China-Africa Community with a Shared Future.” What’s your perspective on this theme?

**Ngcaweni:** FOCAC is a significant platform for engagement between China and Africa. “Joining hands to advance modernization” indicates that this forum aims to focus on mutual development in a context of mutual respect, recognizing the need for cooperation.

“A shared future” reflects how China views its relationships with other parts of the world and how it engages with other countries and regions, emphasizing that establishing common goals is essential. In practice, it means that shared aspirations are combined with the sharing of resources. It also entails deepening collaborative efforts and treating others with respect and as equals.

**GT:** Regarding China’s increasing engagement with Africa in recent years, is this development positive for the African continent?

**Ngcaweni:** Some people are concerned about China’s influence in Africa. Who is worried and why?

In my view, those who are particularly concerned, especially in the West, recognize that there is now an alternative modality of cooperation and that they no longer have a monopoly on influence over the African continent. They are also compelled to acknowledge that a different approach is possible – one that goes beyond imposed conditionalities and exploitative relationships, which are not developmental in form and substance. Those who attempt to articulate concerns about China’s possible “exploitation” often fail to provide an alternative, nor are they committed to engaging in developmental initiatives that equalize opportunities.

Many are concerned because they fear trade competition. China has been doing well, affirming increased intra-African trade and reducing many countries’ dependence on their former colonizers. Some also assume that Africans cannot negotiate better contracts and that the relationship with China is biased. Such assumptions are somewhat racist and based on the presumption of low capacity. However, Africans are now at the forefront of securing better deals and ensuring that we act in the longer-term interest of our people in Africa.

**GT:** In what ways can China assist Africa in its energy transition?

**Ngcaweni:** There is an incredible opportunity for mutually beneficial cooperation between Africa and China on the green energy transition. Africa has many opportu-

#### Editor’s Note:

The 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is being held in Beijing from September 4 to 6. It takes place at a critical juncture when the world is grappling with various regional and global crises and there is a pressing need for countries from the Global South to join hands. How will this year’s FOCAC elevate ties between China and Africa? What is the significance of building a high-level China-Africa community with a shared future? The Global Times (GT) interviewed a number of former officials and pundits from various African countries to share their insights and stories.

In the fifth article of this series, GT reporter Su Yaxuan interviewed Busani Ngcaweni (**Ngcaweni**), director-general of the National School of Government in South Africa and research associate in world economics at the University of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

nities to do things differently and to utilize our natural endowments more effectively. The continent has many of the minerals needed for new green energy equipment. China increasingly recognizes that Africa, as an industrial hub for production, makes much more sense than merely serving as a source for raw material exports. This approach emphasizes mutual benefit and win-win strategies. Naturally, we must continually restate the importance of industrialization and manufacturing in Africa so that China continues to benefit from infrastructure investments. A much more aggressive approach to investments in industrialization

would be the next step in demonstrating to the world that this relationship is about mutual development and it’s not as one-sided as many would like to propose.

**GT:** You mentioned that “it is crucial to tell the real China-Africa story.” Could you

share some examples of such stories?

**Ngcaweni:** Let me give you an example about South Africa. In South Africa, we are one of the fastest-growing markets for Chinese vehicles. In my interpretation, ordinary South Africans use their money, go to a bank, and obtain loans to buy cars made in China, such as those from Great Wall Motor or Haval. It means that people are embracing products from China, which are increasingly perceived as being of good quality.

This is not a government activity. These are individuals and households making their own spending choices. That’s the real story of how South Africans connect with China on a personal level. This mutual appreciation highlights the people-to-people connections between the two countries.

To measure the relationship between

the two countries, you must go deeper into it. Then you will find that South Africans want to study in China because they feel safe, see opportunities, and believe they will receive higher-quality education.

**GT:** Western media has portrayed China’s development financing in Africa as a “debt trap.” How do you respond to this narrative?

**Ngcaweni:** China is not interested in establishing a culture of conditionality. China is not interested in imposing policies in Africa. Its ethos revolves around finding common solutions to challenges as they arise. Regarding the “debt trap” narrative, we must

question these alarming tendencies. What exactly is this trap? Africa needs to develop and requires resources, and credit lines are opening, especially from China. The BRICS Bank (New Development Bank), the African Development Bank and others have agreed to establish credit lines that are different from historical ones. These credit lines are not accompanied by conditionalities that make

our people’s lives impossible. They are really about implementing projects.

So, I don’t believe the “debt trap” narrative. The main issue is that Africans must negotiate and sign good, mutually beneficial contracts with China.

**GT:** What are your prospects for the future of China-Africa cooperation?

**Ngcaweni:** The opportunities for the future are great. If we sustain the current momentum, we will likely tell a very different story of development moving forward. Our current narratives are dominated by a history of exploitation, followed by neo-colonial penetration, aid dependency and a lack of development. Many in the Global North have gone so far as to suggest that Africa is a lost continent. They fail to understand that what is unfolding will make a significant difference for everyone around the globe.

The prospects for China and Africa are very positive. China is focused on developing and navigating realities that are mutually beneficial. Our people welcome relationships where they can experience the tangible benefits of modernization and mutual development. This FOCAC summit has substantial and real value for China and Africa.

We need to communicate better and more effectively to convey the real story. It is the people who will defend the relationship between our countries for a long time to come.



**Busani Ngcaweni**  
Photo: Courtesy of Ngcaweni

## TOP TALK

### 巅峰对话

‘It is crucial to tell the real China-Africa story’



2024年中非合作论坛峰会  
The 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation  
Sommet 2024 du Forum sur la Coopération Sino-Africaine

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The 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation is held in Beijing on September 5, 2024. Photo: VCG