

CHINA-AFRICA CO-OPERATION

Growing a digital economy

GROWING opportunities in the digital economy in Africa are emerging as the new front for the great leap in China-Africa relations. A report by the World Economic Forum written in collaboration with Deloitte says Africa's digital economy could contribute nearly \$180 billion (about R2.9 trillion) to the region's growth by mid-decade.

The Covid-19 pandemic pushed African countries to embrace Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to conduct government business and public service engagements online. Gone are the days when African governments ran without computers and internet connectivity.

Government business such as diplomatic engagements and management are now conducted through Zoom, Google meets, Skype, Twitter and Facebook – using voice and video-streaming services connected to the internet – making e-government a norm. African governments and multilateral institutions also use digital tools in their daily work, conferences, negotiations, representation, communication and policy analysis.

The African Centre for Economic Transformation says Africa realised significant digital inventions and innovations during the pandemic. Yet with only 39% of the population using the internet, Africa is the world's least connected continent.

The Infrastructure Consortium for Africa (ICA), suggests that as of 2015 about 75% of the population, and 15% of households in Africa had no access to the internet. Despite the significant growth in ICTs, mobile telephony use in the continent stands at 60%.

Although investment in ICTs continues to grow, it is unevenly spread, and rural African populations living in areas that offer poor incentives for investment ICTs are marginalised from digital society.

The African continent lags far behind the digital divide, characterised by uneven access to internet between the Global South and the North, as



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well as between and within African countries. Lack of access to faster, secure efficient internet connectivity, modern digital technologies and infrastructure is a major problem impeding investment in African countries.

The AU has set the goal of connecting every individual, business and government on the continent by 2030. The Africa Data Centres Association says Africa needs 1 000 megawatts (MW) of new facility capacity or about 700 new data centre facilities to meet such a demand on the continent.

The public sector in Africa has struggled to inject bigger investment into ICTs and to sponsor policies and regulatory frameworks which stimulate growth in digital economies.

The lack of critical infrastructure such as internet service providers, search engines, operating systems, undersea cables, satellites, the development of apps, content platforms, mobile handsets, data networks, mobile money, web browsers and content platforms, pervasively constrain positive growth of digital economies.

These daunting challenges may soon be forgotten as China and Africa seek to take mutually beneficial co-operation and investments in ICTs and digital economies to higher levels.

While many state and private sector players in the digital economy have given marginal attention to the emerging African tech market, China has prioritised the African continent as a

growing tech-market within the framework of mutually beneficial China-Africa co-operation. Such co-operation leverages the high demand for digital connectivity at all levels, from network building to consumer handset sales. China-Africa co-operation has the potential to revolutionise e-government services, document digitisation, national ID systems, tax services and business, allowing for effective tax collection and minimising corruption.

The Atlantic Council's African Centre suggests a mix of infrastructure support and government loans to finance digital programmes by African governments, telecoms, information and computer technology from China is transforming the African digital sectors.

The *Africa Times* reported that Chinese-backed digital transformation reached about 40 African nations by 2018.

The ICA says Chinese investment in ICTs infrastructure has surpassed \$1 billion since 2015. In 2022, Deutsche Welle reported that Chinese tech giant Huawei – sanctioned in the US and the Global North – is the largest telecommunications equipment manufacturer in the world, and dominates connectivity in African ICT markets. Huawei components supply 70% of 4G, and it's the leading supplier of 5G technologies across Africa, providing cheaper, more affordable and easy-to-use technologies, with very attractive terms to operators in Africa.

Chinese financial institutions like the Export-Import Bank of China have generously provided financing at affordable terms to African countries and private sector clients to invest in technology deployment and absorption in Africa, expanding participation in digital economies.

In 2020, at the China-Africa Internet Development and Co-operation Forum, China's Assistant Foreign Minister, Deng Li presented the China-Africa Partnership Plan on Digital Innovation, drawing from President Xi Jinping's statement at the Extraor-

inary China-Africa Summit on Solidarity Against Covid-19 in 2020.

Minister Deng Li focussed on broader co-operation with Africa in such new business forms as digital economy, smart city, 5G, strengthening digital infrastructure and growing digital economy to promote integrated development of digital technologies and the real economy.

He also spoke of promoting digital education to overcome the "talent bottleneck" that constrains digital innovation, promoting digital inclusiveness to benefit the wider African public.

The proposal called for African countries and China to jointly uphold digital security and enhance digital governance capacity, building co-operation platforms to promote digital progress through exchanges.

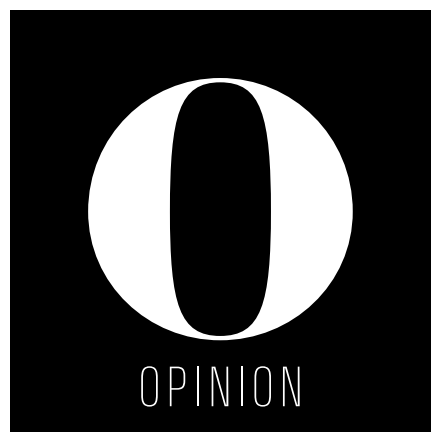
Based on the proposal, China offered to share its digital technologies with Africa to promote digital infrastructure connectivity that will see Chinese enterprises working with their African partners to participate in digital infrastructure projects like fibre-optic backbone networks, cross-border connectivity and new-generation mobile communication networks.

China also offered to help expand Internet access in Africa's remote areas to connect the last mile of the information network.

China further offered to support Africa in raising the level of digitisation in the public and corporate sectors, promoting industrialisation by applying new technologies such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things and mobile payments.

Chinese companies have earned trust, proving to be responsive to local regulations and governance, embracing local and national laws, while providing systems wanted by governments in Africa.

China-Africa relations are leveraging long-term mutually beneficial relations to bolster broadening trade, investment relations and much-needed growth in digital economies.



Dire situation exacerbated by lethargy

THE latest fuel price increases are going to unleash untold misery on consumers, particularly the disadvantaged and the poor.

While motorists can expect to experience pain at the pumps, the increases will have a negative impact on transport costs, resulting in terrible consequences for those living on the margins of society, as high food prices could cost even more in the near future.

The Automobile Association is right when it says the hikes – which will reach new record high prices – will put extra pressure on an economy already on its knees.

The increases were mainly due to the rand's poor performance coupled with international oil prices, but we need to know what the government is doing to protect consumers.

It can start by ensuring our taxes are properly spent. It can do well to revisit the fuel levy and consider decreasing it drastically. Far too much of our taxes are going to waste. One needs to look no further than all the multibillion-rand bailouts of some state-owned enterprises. It is evidently clear that our government lacks the appetite to exercise financial prudence in areas where it is most needed.

Also, one just needs to look at the rail service to realise that the country's public transport system is a mess. Commuters have no choice but to use buses or taxis. It is an intolerable situation when breadwinners of poor families are forced to spend a huge chunk of their wages on travelling to work.

There seems to be a chronic lack of political will to come up with an economic plan that addresses the country's key problems of inequality and unemployment.

Instead of confronting these challenges head on and offering the nation solutions, government leaders are more occupied with their internal battles in the governing party.

They should not forget who put them there. South Africans in general are getting fed up with the lethargic way the country is being run.

Across the length and breadth of South Africa there is disquiet in communities – more so in poorer areas.

People have grown tired of leaders who fail to serve them.

If those in government can't or won't lead properly, they should let capable people do the work.

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IMAGE OF THE DAY



A RESCUE helicopter flies over the glacier that collapsed on the mountain of Marmolada, one day after a record-high temperature of 10 degrees Celsius was recorded at the glacier's summit. Rescuers resumed the search for survivors after an avalanche set off by the collapse of the glacier, the largest in the Italian Alps, killed at least seven people and injured eight others. | AFP

QUICK READ

MAYOR

THE mayor of Mkhondo local municipality (Piet Retief) in Mpumalanga has denied using exorbitant public funds for a trip to the Durban July and for his birthday party over the weekend.

Mthokozisi Simelane, the unlikely youthful mayor of the small and largely agricultural municipality nestled along the South Africa-eSwatini border, came to power after ANC factions could not agree on their own candidate – and he was voted in. Simelane's name and pictures of him posing with expensive alcohol were all over social media. | IOL

ZONDO REPORT

THE Congress of the People has called on Parliament to form a joint ad hoc committee to look into implementation of the recommendations of the Zondo Commission report.

The party also wants Assembly Speaker Nosiviwe Mapisa to suspend serving MPs implicated in the commission's reports. Cope spokesperson Dennis Bloem said Parliament had been turned into the laughing stock of the world over the past 15 years due to a dominant party that had undermined all democratic processes. | IOL

WORKING WITH WHITE SETTLERS

Malema himself is a 'freedom cheater'

MASILO LEPURU

FANON once posited that the fundamental problem with Africa was its lack of ideology. In addition to this, Fanon stated that central to decolonisation was the restoration of the land.

While we agree with Fanon regarding the essence of decolonisation, we disagree with him regarding ideology, especially in the context of "South Africa". We posit that the fundamental problem in "South Africa" as far as Africans are concerned is the lack of a correct ideology.

The lack of a correct ideology to liberate Africans in "South Africa" and from "South Africa" has resulted in the hegemony of an incorrect ideology. This ideology is Charterism.

Charterism is a name given by Peter Raboroko in *The Africanist Case*, to those who subscribe to a document they call the Freedom Charter, which Motsoko Pheko calls the "Free-

dom Cheater".

Recently, the so-called Economic Freedom Fighters under their leader Julius Malema celebrated this incorrect ideology, and were even significantly joined by one prominent subscriber within the ANC. This is not surprising since the ANC has been the leading custodian of the Freedom Cheater since the split of the PAC.

This split gave birth to the antagonism between the charterists and the Africanists. For this piece, this split also galvanised the antagonism between the democratisation paradigm of the charterists and the decolonisation paradigm of the Africanists.

This piece is not about the Freedom "Cheater" as an economic document.

The debate around whether the Freedom Cheater provides for nationalisation as discussed in a document called "Nationalisation" co-authored by Temba A Nolutshungu and company from the Free Market Founda-

tion as "South African Von Hayek's second-hand dealers of ideas" is not our concern here.

We are interested in the Freedom Charter as an historical document, its celebration by Malema and company and the implications of freedom.

Isiah Berlin in, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, posits the existence of negative and positive freedom, which we will formulate as freedom from something and freedom to do something.

Given conquest since 1652 by European conquerors, Africans who pursue liberation want freedom from land dispossession and epistemic self-determination so that they can exercise their freedom to restore African self-determination and independence.

The Freedom Cheater states infamously that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white".

This Cheater does not explain how Africans became black, how "South Africa" came into being and how

whites came to belong to it.

Well, Africans of Azania became black due to European conquest which laid the foundation for "South Africa" to which whites belong as white settlers following their dispossession of African land since 1652.

"South Africa", which is conquered Azania, came into being based on land dispossessed from Africans in the form of two colonies and two republics which were consolidated by white settlers such as Smuts in 1910 through the Union Act of 1909.

In its formation as a white settler colony "South Africa" belongs to this day to whites only. By working with white settlers like Zille in accordance with the Freedom Cheater, Malema is himself a freedom cheater.

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