

# Prospects and Impediments to China-Africa Sports Cooperation in the Contemporary Era

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the evolving dynamics of China-Africa sports cooperation within the broader context of South-South development partnerships and the Belt and Road Initiative, which have significantly enhanced bilateral engagement over recent decades. Through a systematic review of policy documents from Chinese and African governmental institutions, an integrative analysis of scholarly literature in international relations and sports studies, and in-depth case studies of key initiatives including stadium diplomacy projects in Kenya, Ethiopia and Senegal, athlete and coach training programs, and sports infrastructure developments—the research comprehensively assesses the opportunities and challenges characterizing current sports collaborations between China and African nations. Findings reveal that while notable progress has been achieved, as demonstrated by successful Olympic preparation support, football academy establishments, and expanded athletic exchanges, persistent challenges remain. These include cultural differences impeding mutual understanding, economic disparities leading to unequal resource distribution, questions about project sustainability, and governance shortcomings related to transparency and coordination in joint undertakings. To address these issues, the study proposes targeted policy recommendations: instituting cultural sensitivity training, developing equitable funding mechanisms, incorporating environmental and social sustainability indicators into project design, and advancing collaborative governance reforms. These measures aim to strengthen future Cooperation, foster mutually beneficial and sustainable partnerships, and contribute to the transformation of global sports governance frameworks.

**Keywords:** China-Africa Sport Cooperation, Sports Diplomacy, Belt and Road Initiative, Africa Infrastructure Development, South-South Cooperation, Soft Power.

## INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, China-Africa relations have witnessed a profound transformation, evolving from traditional aid-based partnerships into a comprehensive strategic cooperation spanning economic, political, social, and cultural spheres. Within this expansive framework, sports cooperation has emerged as a vibrant component of China-Africa engagement, serving multifaceted diplomatic, developmental, and cultural objectives. The establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 and the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 have provided robust institutional frameworks, significantly expanding the scope and depth of bilateral sports collaboration. China's engagement with Africa through sports embodies a distinctive form of “stadium diplomacy,” effectively merging infrastructure development with cultural exchange and soft power projection<sup>[1]</sup>. Since the 1960s, China has constructed over 80 major sports facilities across Africa, establishing itself as one of the continent's foremost providers of sports infrastructure<sup>[2]</sup>. These significant investments have not only furnished essential venues for athletic pursuits, but also stand as enduring symbols of China-Africa friendship and cooperation.

The contemporary landscape presents both unprecedented opportunities and formidable challenges for China-Africa sports cooperation. The African Union's Agenda 2063, which explicitly prioritizes sports development as integral to continental transformation, resonates powerfully with China's global development initiatives and

its sports-going-global strategy. However, critical questions regarding long-term sustainability, cultural compatibility, debt implications, and equitable partnership models demand scrutiny.

This paper addresses three fundamental research questions: First, what key achievements define the current state of China-Africa sports cooperation? Second, what challenges and structural constraints limit the effectiveness

of existing partnerships? Third, what prospects exist for future cooperation, and how can current limitations be strategically addressed? Through a systematic analysis of policy documents, academic literature, and case studies, the following lines contribute vital insights into contemporary dynamics within China-Africa relations while offering practical recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Conceptual Foundations of Sports Diplomacy**

Sports diplomacy, referring to the strategic deployment of sporting activities to attain political, diplomatic, and soft power goals, has become increasingly prominent within international relations scholarship<sup>[3]</sup>. Scholars like Murray and Pigman (2014) argue that sport functions as a distinct diplomatic instrument capable of transcending conventional political divides and fostering people-to-people connections<sup>[4]</sup>. Within China-Africa relations, this diplomacy manifests through diverse mechanisms such as infrastructure development, technical assistance, training initiatives, and competitive exchanges. Joseph Nye's concept of "soft power" offers a framework for interpreting China's sports engagement across Africa<sup>[5]</sup>. Unlike hard power tactics reliant on economic or military pressure, soft power aims to attract and persuade via cultural appeal, political values, and institutional legitimacy. Yet, contemporary research indicates that China's soft power strategy diverges markedly from Western models, emphasizing pragmatic cooperation and mutual benefit over ideological influence<sup>[6]</sup>.

### **South-South Cooperation Framework**

China-Africa sports cooperation operates within the broader paradigm of South-South cooperation, characterized by horizontal partnerships between developing countries based on shared experiences, mutual learning, and collective development aspirations. This framework fundamentally distinguishes China-Africa sports collaboration from traditional North-South aid relationships by emphasizing principles of reciprocity, non-conditionality, mutual benefit, and respect for sovereignty and national development priorities. Academic research by scholars such as Carmody and Kragelund (2016), highlights how these core South-South cooperation principles significantly influence the design, negotiation, and implementation phases of Chinese sports projects in Africa<sup>[7]</sup>. The approach promotes a genuine partnership, moving beyond the traditional donor-recipient hierarchy by actively supporting Africa's self-driven sporting ambitions and infrastructure development objectives within the framework of a shared developmental trajectory. This commitment to horizontal cooperation and mutual respect constitutes the foundational principle of the collaborative model.

### **Stadium Diplomacy**

The phenomenon of "stadium diplomacy" has attracted significant scholarly attention, particularly regarding China's extensive stadium construction program across the African continent. Xue and Ren (2019) provide a comprehensive analysis of the architectural and diplomatic dimensions of Chinese-built stadiums, arguing that these large-scale, high-visibility facilities serve as potent "catalysts for bilateral relations" and enduring symbols of China-Africa friendship and solidarity. These stadiums often become landmark structures hosting major continental and international sporting events, enhancing national prestige for host countries. However, critical perspectives from scholars like Lindlacher and Pirich (2024) raise pertinent questions about the long-term economic viability, maintenance costs, local utilization rates, and overall sustainability of such stadium projects<sup>[8]</sup>. They scrutinize whether these facilities generate lasting economic benefits beyond their construction phase and integrate effectively into local sports ecosystems. Crucially, research by African scholars provides essential, grounded perspectives on recipient-country experiences with Chinese sports

infrastructure. Studies by Kenyan researcher Dennis Munene and Ghanaian scholar Paul Frimpong emphasize the critical importance of local ownership, effective management structures, skills transfer, and capacity building in ensuring the sustainable operation of these facilities and maximizing long-term benefits from China-Africa sports cooperation<sup>[9]</sup>. Their work highlights the importance of collaborative partnerships that effectively cultivate local expertise and ensure infrastructure is aligned with, and supportive of, locally driven sports development strategies.

## **Historical Evolution of China-Africa Sports Relations**

### **The Formative Stretch (1960s–1980s)**

Tracing the roots of China-Africa sports cooperation back to the 1960s reveals that Beijing began extending aid as part of a wider gesture of solidarity with newly independent African states. In those years, the partnership was mainly driven by motives and a shared resistance to colonialism and imperialism<sup>[10]</sup>. The 1987 completion of the Moi International Sports Centre in Kasarani, Kenya stands out as a landmark moment underscoring China's commitment, to fostering sports development across the continent<sup>[11]</sup>. The Cold War backdrop left an imprint on the sporting ties between China and Africa, turning athletics into a subtle arena for political signaling and global positioning<sup>[12]</sup>. Beijing's backing of African nations entry into competitions (especially after apartheid-driven bans sidelined many African states from world events) deepened political camaraderie and laid the groundwork for a durable long-term partnership between both sides since the political independence of African nations<sup>[13]</sup>.

### **The Expansion Period (1990s–2000s)**

The collapse of the Cold War, followed by China's economic reforms and opening up opened a fresh slate of possibilities for sports cooperation with Africa. In that era, collaboration began to take on a shape through a series of agreements and the launch of training programmes for African athletes and coaches. China started sending its specialists to African nations while simultaneously inviting African athletes to train in Chinese facilities<sup>[14]</sup>. The establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 provided a stage, for coordinating these sports-related initiatives with early FOCAC action plans explicitly earmarking sports exchanges, technical assistance and infrastructure development<sup>[15]</sup>. This institutionalization marked the pivot from spontaneous ad-hoc cooperation, to a partnership, underpinned by reciprocal advantage and a sustained long-term commitment.

### **The Era Marked by All-Encompassing Partnerships (2010s–Present)**

When the Belt and Road Initiative was launched in 2013, it opened pathways for weaving sports cooperation into the tapestry of infrastructure and connectivity. Its focus on people-to-people links meshes neatly with the objectives of sports collaboration, exchange and mutual understanding<sup>[16]</sup>. Recent FOCAC summits have put sports increasingly at the heart of the China-Africa partnership pledging support, for sporting events and the expansion of training programmes. By taking part in sports diplomacy (whether handing over a stadium or attending a match during a state visit), President Xi Jinping has raised the profile of China-Africa sports cooperation<sup>[17]</sup>. Embedding sports development into China's broader development-cooperation strategy signals the growing weight the sector carries in relations.

## **Current State of China-Africa Sports Cooperation**

### **Infrastructure Development and Stadium Diplomacy**

China's advancement of sports infrastructure in Africa stands as one of the most prominent and influential facets of bilateral collaboration. Official figures show that China has erected more than 80 sports venues across the continent, covering major stadiums, training hubs, and community sports centers<sup>[18]</sup>. These endeavors span from extensive national arenas to smaller local facilities intended to boost community sports involvement. Key illustrations include the Abidjan Olympic Stadium in Côte d'Ivoire, known as the "Bird's Nest of Africa," which functions as a central venue for regional athletic competitions. The China-Gabon Friendship Stadium in Libreville has effectively accommodated numerous Africa Cup of Nations fixtures and other global events. In

the Republic of Congo, the Brazzaville Stadium complex, with its 60,000-seat capacity, is among Africa's largest sports installations. The planning and erection of these structures demonstrate responsiveness to local environmental and cultural demands<sup>[19]</sup>. Chinese engineering and architectural teams have woven native design motifs, weather adaptations, and cultural inclinations into stadium blueprints. Yet, difficulties linked to upkeep, sustainable operations, and usage efficiency have arisen in certain situations<sup>[20]</sup>.

### **Training Programs and Human Resource Development**

Sports partnership between China and Africa has instituted comprehensive training initiatives for athletes, coaches, and sports administrators. The Chinese government has enabled learning opportunities for thousands of African sports specialists through scholarships, exchange schemes, and technical aid efforts<sup>[21]</sup>. These programs encompass various sports such as table tennis, badminton, track and field, football, and traditional Chinese disciplines like wushu. The Africa-China Sports Training Center project has founded training bases in multiple African nations, delivering specialized coaching and modern equipment<sup>[22]</sup>. Chinese instructors in Africa have attained remarkable triumphs such as in Egypt, with Egyptian table tennis competitors securing international victories under Chinese tutelage<sup>[23]</sup>. Similarly, African athletes training in China have profited from sophisticated facilities and technical know-how. Language and cultural exchange segments of training initiatives have nurtured greater mutual understanding among participants from both regions.

### **Technology Transfer and Innovation**

Current China-Africa sports cooperation is progressively integrating technology transfer and innovative elements. Digital tools, sports science implementations, and data analysis are being deployed to refine training approaches and athlete achievements. The application of artificial intelligence and virtual reality in sports training marks emerging fields of joint effort. Chinese sports technology firms have forged partnerships with African entities to furnish equipment, software, and technical services<sup>[24]</sup>. These alliances target building local capabilities in sports technology advancement and reducing dependency on external systems. The merging of mobile payment solutions and digital platforms for sports event coordination reflects broader China-Africa teamwork in digital economy growth<sup>[25]</sup>. Environmental sustainability factors are increasingly embedded in sports technology ventures, incorporating renewable energy setups and eco-friendly substances in facility erection. The formulation of green stadium benchmarks and sustainable sports infrastructure denotes a developing sphere of China-Africa sport collaboration<sup>[26]</sup>.

### **Key Partnership Initiatives and Institutional Frameworks**

#### **Belt and Road Initiative Sports Components**

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has created significant new opportunities for integrating sports cooperation within broader connectivity and development frameworks, fostering a unique avenue for international engagement<sup>[27]</sup>. Sports infrastructure projects such as stadiums and training centers, are increasingly designed as integral components of larger economic development corridors. These corridors strategically connect transportation networks, urban development hubs, and special economic zones, creating synergies and connectivity within the local community. The BRI's foundational emphasis on enhancing people-to-people connectivity aligns perfectly with the core objectives of sports cooperation, which focus on facilitating cultural exchange and building mutual understanding, acting as powerful cultural bridges. Consequently, BRI sports projects place a strong emphasis on principles of sustainability, ensuring local community participation and securing tangible long-term benefits for recipient communities. This commitment is often reflected in the careful integration of sports facilities with educational institutions, healthcare centers, and broader community development programs, showcasing a holistic approach to development. Furthermore, the digital connectivity components inherent in many BRI projects actively support modern sports initiatives, including live sports broadcasting, sophisticated event management systems, and innovative digital platforms for enhanced fan engagement activities<sup>[28]</sup>.



## Multilateral Partnerships and Triangular Cooperation

China-Africa sports cooperation is progressively evolving to incorporate more complex multilateral partnerships, involving international organizations and other development partners alongside the bilateral relationship. Cooperation with global bodies like UNESCO on specific programs, such as sports education initiatives and cultural heritage preservation linked to traditional games, demonstrates China's proactive engagement with established global governance institutions<sup>[29]</sup>. Strategic partnerships with major international sports organizations, notably the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and continental sports federations like the Association of National Olympic Committees of Africa (ANOCA), provide crucial support for athlete development programs, technical training, and the organization of high-level competitions across the continent<sup>[30]</sup>. Notably, innovative triangular cooperation arrangements have emerged in several African nations<sup>[31]</sup>. These models typically involve Chinese technical expertise and project experience where African partners nations are mostly responsible for local implementation and context-specific adaptation, and third-party entities (such as international financial institutions, foundations, or other donor countries) provide financing or specialized resources. These arrangements effectively leverage the distinct comparative advantages of the different partners while simultaneously addressing common financial and technical capacity constraints faced in development projects. The growing involvement of key African Union institutions, such as the African Union Commission, and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in shaping and coordinating these partnerships further strengthens continental ownership, ensuring alignment with pan-African priorities, and enhancing policy harmonization within the continent.

## Major Challenges and Constraints

### Operational and Financial Challenges

High operational and upkeep expenses, including significant costs for utilities, security, and routine maintenance characterize sports infrastructure projects, compounded by constrained income generation capabilities due to low event frequency and limited commercial sponsorships. This reliance on governmental subsidies often strains public budgets, particularly in economically vulnerable regions. The absence of profitable stadium operational models, such as those integrating multi-use facilities or public-private partnerships, has led to widespread underuse and decay of certain facilities, resulting in wasted investments and reduced community benefits. Debt sustainability worries have arisen over major sports developments funded via Chinese loans, with concerns about repayment capacities amid fluctuating economic conditions of certain African countries. Detractors contend that costly stadium initiatives might exacerbate debt crises in fragile African economies by diverting funds from essential services like healthcare and education<sup>[32]</sup>. Debates over prioritizing sports investments versus other development needs, such as infrastructure for basic utilities have sparked controversy in some nations, fueling public discontent and policy gridlocks. Insufficient local expertise for facility oversight and preservation presents persistent hurdles, as many regions lack trained personnel for technical management and preventive upkeep<sup>[33]</sup>. A shortage of skilled technicians and specialized equipment vendors across many African regions heightens operating costs through expensive imports and frequent repairs, ultimately shortening facility longevity and undermining sustainability<sup>[34]</sup>. Establishing enduring funding strategies, like dedicated revenue streams from tourism or local events, and enhancing local administrative skills through capacity-building programs, remain vital objectives for long-term viability.

### Cultural and Communication Barriers

Cultural disparities and communication obstacles substantially hinder China-Africa sports partnership initiatives, manifesting in misunderstandings during joint training sessions and project planning. Linguistic differences restrict direct exchanges between Chinese experts and African peers, diminishing effective knowledge sharing and often necessitating costly interpreters or delayed translations. Conflicts stemming from misunderstandings about cultural norms, such as differing approaches to punctuality or authority, coaching techniques like regimented drills versus adaptive methods, and organizational styles including top-down versus collaborative decision-making have emerged in some projects leading to inefficiencies and strained relations. Varying perspectives on sports advancement, competition, and performance assessment highlight broader

cultural gaps between Chinese and African settings, with Chinese emphasis on collective achievement and long-term development contrasting with African focus on individual expression and immediate outcomes. The focus on group training and regimentation in Chinese sports traditions, prioritizing discipline and uniformity, may clash with individualistic preferences in certain African communities where personal creativity and flexibility are valued. Religious and cultural factors affecting gender involvement in sports, such as modesty requirements or societal restrictions on female participation, add further complications by limiting access and opportunities for women and girls. Cultivating cultural awareness and cross-cultural dialogue abilities among participants demands considerable resources, including workshops and exchange programs, and prolonged dedication to build mutual trust. Creating cultural orientation initiatives, such as pre-deployment briefings on local customs, and multilingual tools like translated manuals constitutes essential yet underfunded cooperation components, critical for fostering inclusive and effective partnerships.

### **Governance and Institutional Capacity**

Deficient governance frameworks and restricted institutional capabilities in some African states limit sports cooperation program efficacy, often due to fragmented regulations and weak enforcement mechanisms. Corruption, administrative failures, and political volatility undermine project execution and durability, causing delays, cost overruns, and abandoned initiatives that erode public confidence. Opaque procurement procedures, such as non-transparent bidding for construction contracts, and inadequate accountability systems erode public trust and project results by enabling mismanagement and reducing oversight. Poor coordination among government bodies, sports associations, and global partners causes inefficiencies and redundant efforts, exemplified by duplicated funding applications or conflicting project timelines. The lack of holistic national sports policies and growth plans in certain African countries impedes strategic decision-making and resource distribution, hindering long-term development and alignment with broader socio-economic goals. Strengthening institutional capacities through training in project management and governance best practices, and refining governance mechanisms like anti-corruption measures and transparent reporting, necessitates sustained commitment from both domestic and international stakeholders along with technical aid for capacity development.

### **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion**

Persistent gender imbalances and inadequate social integration pose major hurdles in China-Africa sports collaborations, limiting the equitable distribution of benefits and participation opportunities<sup>[35]</sup>. Females encounter multiple barriers to sports engagement, such as cultural constraints like traditional gender roles discouraging physical activity, insufficient facilities lacking female-friendly amenities such as changing rooms, and scant advancement prospects due to biases in coaching and leadership pathways<sup>[36]</sup>. Low female representation in sports leadership roles curtails their impact on program design and rollout, perpetuating exclusionary practices and missed innovations. Tackling gender disparities requires tailored measures, including women-only facilities for safe participation, female coaches as role models, and initiatives to boost female involvement through community outreach and scholarships. Embedding gender equity principles throughout sports cooperation, from policy formulation to implementation, remains a continuous challenge needing ongoing focus and dedicated resources. Integrating marginalized groups, like individuals with disabilities requiring accessible infrastructure and specialized programs, and ethnic minorities facing discrimination in access, warrants extra consideration to ensure inclusivity and maximize social impact.

### **Environmental and Sustainability Considerations**

#### **Environmental Impact of Sports Infrastructure**

Large-scale sports infrastructure projects raise critical environmental sustainability questions, particularly regarding their long-term ecological footprints. The construction of stadiums and training facilities demands substantial material inputs such as concrete and steel, leading to high energy consumption and significant land use alterations that can result in habitat loss, soil erosion, and biodiversity decline. These environmental consequences are exacerbated by resource-intensive operations, including water usage for turf maintenance and energy for lighting and cooling systems. Climate change considerations are increasingly relevant for

facility design and operation in African contexts, where rising temperatures and erratic weather patterns necessitate adaptive strategies. The adoption of green building standards, like LEED or BREEAM certifications, and renewable energy systems in sports facilities represents positive developments toward reducing carbon emissions and resource depletion. For instance, several recent Chinese-built stadiums in Africa, such as those in Kenya and Senegal, incorporate solar power arrays, rainwater harvesting systems for irrigation and sanitation, and sustainable materials like bamboo or recycled composites to minimize waste. The Lesotho National Stadium project serves as a prominent example of sustainable design, incorporating local materials such as indigenous stone and timber to reduce transportation emissions, along with climate-responsive architecture featuring natural ventilation and shading elements to enhance thermal comfort. Waste management practices, including recycling initiatives for plastics and food waste during events, water conservation through low-flow fixtures and greywater reuse, and energy efficiency via LED lighting and smart grid integration, remain vital considerations for both existing and new facilities to mitigate operational impacts. The development of comprehensive environmental management systems, such as ISO 14001 frameworks, and robust monitoring mechanisms like real-time sensors for air and water quality, supports long-term sustainability objectives by enabling data-driven improvements and compliance with environmental regulations. Additionally, training programs for facility managers increasingly include environmental management components, covering topics like carbon footprint calculation, sustainable procurement, and community engagement to foster a culture of eco-responsibility among staff and stakeholders.

### **Climate Adaptation and Resilience**

Climate change impacts including more frequent extreme weather events like floods and storms, rising temperature averages, and shifting precipitation patterns leading to droughts or heavy rains, profoundly affect sports infrastructure and activities across Africa, disrupting events, damaging facilities, and increasing maintenance costs<sup>[37]</sup>. Building climate-resilient sports facilities requires systematically incorporating adaptation measures into all phases of design and construction processes, such as conducting vulnerability assessments for site selection and integrating flexible engineering solutions. The use of climate-appropriate materials, such as heat-reflective coatings and permeable pavements to reduce urban heat island effects, advanced cooling systems like evaporative chillers or geothermal heating, and robust drainage infrastructure including bioswales and retention ponds, supports facility resilience by preventing structural damage, ensuring year-round usability, and enhancing safety for athletes and spectators. Community-based sports programs such as youth leagues or fitness clubs, may contribute significantly to climate adaptation by promoting physical fitness to build individual health resilience, fostering social cohesion through shared activities that strengthen community bonds, and enhancing disaster preparedness via drills and awareness sessions on emergency protocols. Sports facilities can serve as essential community resilience hubs during climate emergencies, providing temporary shelters, distribution points for aid, and communication centers equipped with backup power and water supplies. The integration of sports programming with climate education and awareness campaigns, such as incorporating sustainability themes into coaching curricula or hosting events that highlight local climate challenges, supports broader adaptation objectives by increasing public understanding, encouraging behavioral changes, and building collective capacity to respond to environmental threats.

### **Technology Innovation and Digital Transformation**

#### **Digital Sports Development**

The evolution of sports through digital means creates novel prospects for Sino-African collaboration in technological advancement and skill enhancement. Bilateral agreements are fostering the creation of mobile apps dedicated to athletic instruction, performance tracking, and supporter interaction. Emerging fields of joint effort include leveraging big data analysis and artificial intelligence for nurturing athletes. Digital systems for broadcasting and disseminating sports content have broadened the reach of events and shows throughout Africa. Partnerships between Chinese tech firms and African media entities supply hardware, programs, and technical support<sup>[38]</sup>. Enhancing indigenous content creation aids in fostering cultural interchange and sharing insights. Nonetheless, disparities in digital access among and within African nations hinder the reach and impact of digital sports projects. Constraints such as poor internet systems, expensive connectivity, and low

digital skills reduce engagement in these initiatives. Overcoming these obstacles demands unified funding for digital foundations and capability enhancement.

## **Sports Science and Innovation**

Sino-African teamwork in sports science and novel approaches centers on boosting competitor results, preventing injuries, and refining coaching techniques<sup>[39]</sup>. Setting up labs and research hubs promotes data-driven strategies for athlete growth. Joint efforts by researchers from both regions advance knowledge creation and technology sharing. Areas where Chinese know-how can aid African athlete progress include applying biomechanics, physiology, and psychology to training regimens. Exchange initiatives for experts and academics encourage idea transfer and skill development. Innovating by designing culturally relevant training practices that integrate traditional African sports and movement styles offers significant potential for advancement.

## **Case Studies of Successful Initiatives**

### **Kenya: Moi International Sports Centre, Kasarani**

The Moi International Sports Centre Kasarani in Nairobi stands as a prime example of successful China-Africa sports collaboration<sup>[40]</sup>. Built with Chinese support in 1987, the complex has seen numerous renovations and upgrades, the latest for the 2024 African Nations Championship. Its 60,000-seat capacity and contemporary facilities rank it among Africa's leading sports venues.

The Kasarani project illustrates the progression of China-Africa sports cooperation from basic infrastructure delivery to a comprehensive partnership encompassing capacity building, technology transfer, and event hosting support. Chinese technical experts have consistently provided maintenance and training for local personnel. The venue has successfully staged major international events, such as the All-Africa Games, World Under-18 Championships, and continental football tournaments.

Kasarani Stadium's economic impact extends beyond sports, hosting concerts, conferences, and community events. It generates employment for hundreds locally and bolsters surrounding small businesses. Nevertheless, operational cost and revenue generation challenges persist, requiring ongoing attention.

### **Senegal: National Wrestling Arena**

Dakar's National Wrestling Arena exemplifies culturally sensitive sports infrastructure development. Designed specifically for traditional Senegalese wrestling, it demonstrates China's willingness to support indigenous sporting traditions instead of imposing external models. The arena's unique architecture blends traditional Senegalese elements with international competition standards. President Xi Jinping's personal presence at the arena's 2018 inauguration underscored the project's diplomatic importance<sup>[41]</sup>. Hosting major wrestling competitions and cultural events, it contributes to preserving and promoting Senegalese heritage. Its focus on cultural sensitivity and local ownership has established it as a model for similar initiatives elsewhere. The arena's success highlights the importance of integrating local cultural preferences into project design. Its multipurpose function enables hosting diverse events, enhancing financial sustainability. Training programs in arena management and event organization have developed local expertise, reducing reliance on external support.

### **Ethiopia: Africa Hall Sports Complex**

The Africa Hall Sports Complex in Addis Ababa showcases multilateral cooperation involving China, Ethiopia, and the African Union<sup>[42]</sup>. Serving as both a competition venue and a training center for continental sports programs, its location at the African Union headquarters emphasizes its symbolic importance for African sports development.

The complex features advanced training facilities, sports science laboratories, and athlete accommodations. Chinese technical expertise in design and equipment combined with Ethiopian cultural knowledge and African



Union coordination. Sports development programs for young athletes across Africa highlight the facility's continental impact.

Integrating educational components like sports management courses and coach certification programs creates lasting benefits beyond infrastructure. Partnerships with Ethiopian universities and research institutions foster knowledge transfer and local capacity building<sup>[43]</sup>. The complex has served as a model for regional sports development initiatives.

## **Economic Impact and Development Outcomes**

### **Employment Creation and Skills Development**

China-Africa sports cooperation has created significant employment opportunities across multiple sectors. Construction of sports facilities has provided jobs for local workers, engineers, and suppliers. Facility operation and maintenance require ongoing employment for security personnel, groundskeepers, administrators, and technical staff. Skills development programs associated with sports projects have built local capacity in construction, engineering, facility management, and sports administration. Technology transfer and training programs have created opportunities for career advancement and professional development. The multiplier effects of sports facilities include supporting businesses such as restaurants, hotels, and retail establishments.

However, ensuring that employment benefits reach local communities and particularly disadvantaged groups requires careful attention to procurement policies and hiring practices. The development of local supplier networks and small business support programs has enhanced economic benefits. Monitoring and evaluation systems that track employment outcomes and ensure accountability are essential.

### **Tourism and Event Economy**

Major sports facilities and events have contributed to tourism development and economic diversification in several African countries. International competitions hosted in Chinese-built stadiums have attracted visitors, generated media coverage, and promoted destination marketing. The development of sports tourism products and services has created new economic opportunities.

Event hosting has required the development of supporting infrastructure, including accommodation, transportation, and communication systems. Local businesses have benefited from increased demand for goods and services during major competitions. The legacy effects of hosting international events include improved infrastructure, an enhanced international profile, and strengthened institutional capacity.

However, the economic benefits of sports facilities and events are not automatically realized and require strategic planning and management. Investment in complementary infrastructure, marketing, and service quality is essential for maximizing tourism benefits. Monitoring systems that track economic impact and distributional effects help ensure broad-based benefits.

## **Youth Development and Education through Sports**

### **Scholarship and Exchange Programs**

China-Africa sports scholarship programs have provided educational opportunities for thousands of young African athletes and sports professionals. The Chinese Government Scholarship program specifically includes sports-related study opportunities at leading Chinese universities and specialized sports institutes<sup>[44]</sup>. These programs combine academic education with practical sports training and cultural exchange.

The China-Africa Youth Sports Exchange Program facilitates short-term visits and training camps for young athletes. Participants gain exposure to advanced training methods, sports science applications, and cultural exchange opportunities. The program has contributed to improving technical skills and building long-term relationships between Chinese and African sports communities.

However, challenges related to language barriers, cultural adaptation, and career development pathways require ongoing attention. The development of support services, including language training, cultural orientation, and career counseling, has improved program outcomes. Alumni networks and ongoing mentorship programs help maintain relationships and maximize long-term benefits<sup>[45]</sup>.

### **Grassroots Sports Development**

China-Africa cooperation increasingly emphasizes grassroots sports development and community-based programs. The construction of community sports centers, school facilities, and neighborhood courts has expanded access to sports participation. These initiatives focus on promoting physical fitness, social cohesion, and positive youth development.

Training programs for community sports leaders and volunteers have built local capacity for program implementation and sustainability. The integration of sports programming with health education, life skills development, and conflict resolution has enhanced program impact. Partnerships with local organizations and community leaders ensure cultural appropriateness and local ownership.

The use of sports as a tool for addressing social challenges, including youth unemployment, crime prevention, and social integration, represents an important development sector in China-Africa cooperation<sup>[46]</sup>. Evidence of positive outcomes includes increased school attendance, improved health indicators, and enhanced social cohesion. However, measuring long-term impact and ensuring program sustainability require ongoing investment and evaluation.

### **Women's Participation and Gender Equality**

#### **Promoting Women's Sports Participation**

China-Africa sports cooperation has increasingly prioritized women's participation and gender equality<sup>[47]</sup>. The construction of female-specific facilities and the development of women's sports programs have addressed traditional barriers to participation<sup>[48]</sup>. Cultural sensitivity and community engagement have been essential for successfully promoting women's involvement in sports. Training programs for female coaches and sports administrators have addressed gender imbalances in leadership positions. Scholarship opportunities specifically targeting female athletes and sports students have created pathways for advancement. The integration of gender equality principles into all aspects of sports programming has become standard practice.

However, deep-rooted cultural attitudes and structural barriers such as religious practices continue to limit women's sports participation in many contexts. Addressing these challenges requires long-term commitment, community engagement, and partnerships with women's organizations and advocates. Success stories of female athletes who have benefited from China-Africa cooperation serve as important role models and advocates.

#### **Leadership Development and Capacity Building**

Developing women's leadership capacity in sports organizations is a critical component of gender equality efforts. Leadership training programs, mentorship opportunities, and networking initiatives have supported women's advancement in sports administration. The establishment of women's sports committees and advocacy groups has strengthened female voices in decision-making processes. Chinese women sports leaders have served as mentors and role models for their African counterparts. Exchange programs and study tours have provided exposure to different approaches to women's sports development. Sharing experiences and best practices has contributed to improved programming and policy development.

Building institutional support for women's sports requires changes in organizational culture, policies, and resource allocation. Training programs for male leaders on gender equality and women's empowerment is important for creating supportive environments. Monitoring and evaluation systems that track gender equality outcomes will improve accountability and program effectiveness.

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## **Policy Recommendations and Future Directions**

### **Enhancing Sustainability and Local Ownership**

Enhancing the sustainability and local ownership of China-Africa sports cooperation necessitates fundamental shifts in project design and implementation strategies. Future initiatives should prioritize comprehensive feasibility assessments, incorporating business planning, operational analysis, and meaningful community consultation. The development of sustainable financing models that leverage both public and private sector resources can help reduce reliance on government subsidies. Capacity building for local stakeholders in facility management, maintenance, and programming should be systematically integrated into project planning from the outset. Training programs for technical staff, administrators, and coaches must combine theoretical instruction with hands-on practical experience. Establishing institutional twinning arrangements between Chinese and African sports organizations can facilitate sustained support and mutual knowledge exchange. Community ownership and engagement should be strengthened through inclusive consultation mechanisms, locally representative advisory committees, and transparent benefit-sharing frameworks. Integrating sports facilities with educational institutions, healthcare services, and broader community development initiatives can enhance their utilization and long-term viability. Robust monitoring and evaluation systems should be implemented to assess both quantitative performance indicators and qualitative impacts on social development outcomes.

### **Promoting Innovation and Technology Transfer**

Future China-Africa sports cooperation should prioritize innovation and technology transfer to establish sustainable competitive advantages. Joint research and development initiatives can effectively address region-specific challenges in Africa while capitalizing on China's technological and institutional expertise. Priority areas should include climate-responsive sports infrastructure design, affordable training equipment, and digital platforms for sports education and talent development. Technology transfer efforts must focus on enhancing local innovation capacities rather than relying solely on the importation of Chinese solutions. Strategic partnerships among Chinese and African universities, research institutions, and technology enterprises can foster collaborative innovation ecosystems. The formulation of balanced intellectual property frameworks—protecting innovations while ensuring broad accessibility—can incentivize private sector engagement. Digital transformation strategies should account for existing infrastructure limitations, affordability barriers, and gaps in digital literacy. Targeted investments in broadband connectivity, mobile-based platforms, and digital skills training programs are essential to expanding access to digital sports resources. Moreover, the creation of culturally relevant content and localized applications will enhance user engagement and ensure contextual appropriateness.

### **Strengthening Governance and Accountability**

Enhancing governance and accountability in China-Africa sports cooperation necessitates the strengthening of institutional frameworks, transparency mechanisms, and inclusive stakeholder engagement. The formation of joint oversight committees with equitable representation can enhance project monitoring and inter-institutional coordination. Systematic public disclosure of project outcomes, financial expenditures, and developmental impacts can significantly improve transparency and accountability. Anti-corruption safeguards—such as transparent procurement procedures, conflict-of-interest regulations, and protections for whistleblowers—should be institutionalized across all cooperative initiatives. Capacity-building programs targeting project managers, government officials, and community leaders in ethical conduct and principles of good governance can serve as preventive measures against mismanagement. The implementation of independent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms can ensure objective performance assessments. Prioritizing the institutional development of recipient countries is essential to ensuring the long-term effectiveness of cooperation. Technical assistance in areas such as sports administration, policy formulation, and regulatory system design can foster sustainable institutional capacity. Furthermore, South-South knowledge exchange platforms among African nations can facilitate the sharing of practical experiences and proven best practices.

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## Expanding Multilateral Partnerships

Future China-Africa sports collaboration should embrace multilateral partnerships involving international organizations, other bilateral donors, and private entities. Partnering with UN agencies, the International Olympic Committee, and regional sports federations can unlock supplementary resources and specialized knowledge. Tripartite models combining Chinese technical proficiency, third-party funding, and African execution offer significant potential.

Private sector involvement can supply alternative funding, technological innovation, and management proficiency. Public-private ventures for facility development and management enhance operational efficiency and long-term viability. Corporate social responsibility initiatives by Chinese and global firms can foster community-level sports programs. Priority should be given to regional integration schemes that advance continental sports growth while achieving cost-effectiveness through economies of scale. The African Union's Agenda 2063 outlines a strategic blueprint for harmonizing sports development efforts region-wide. Regional sporting federations and centralized training hubs can serve multiple nations while strengthening pan-African capabilities.

## CONCLUSION

This in-depth examination of China-Africa sports cooperation in the contemporary era unveils a multifaceted picture marked by accomplishments, persistent difficulties, and promising prospects. Spanning over six decades, this partnership has matured from basic infrastructure provision into a holistic engagement covering facility construction, human resource training, technology exchange, and institutional strengthening. The impact is evident in the establishment of more than 80 sports facilities throughout Africa, the training of thousands of athletes and coaches, and the successful organization of major international events. Nevertheless, significant challenges demanding innovative solutions remain. Economic sustainability issues, cultural divides, governance shortcomings, and environmental impacts constrain the long-term efficacy of current strategies. A focus on large-scale infrastructure, often without sufficient operational planning, local ownership, or financial viability, has fostered dependencies contrary to partnership ideals. Language and cultural barriers persistently hinder effective knowledge transfer and program delivery.

The analysis highlights crucial areas for enhancing future cooperation. Firstly, transitioning from project-centric aid to comprehensive partnerships emphasizing local ownership, capacity building, and sustainability. Secondly, better integrating sports collaboration within wider development frameworks like the BRI, FOCAC mechanisms, and African Union strategies. Thirdly, leveraging innovation and technology transfer to tackle specific African challenges while building competitive strengths. Gender equality, youth development, and social inclusion emerge as vital priorities needing sustained focus and targeted action. The broader potential of sports to advance health, education, and social cohesion remains underutilized. Future projects must systematically incorporate environmental sustainability and climate adaptation measures to ensure long-term viability. Strengthening the institutional framework through improved coordination, transparency, and stakeholder participation is essential. Engaging multilateral partners—international organizations, other bilateral donors, and private sector entities—can mobilize additional resources and expertise, mitigating risks and costs.

Looking ahead, China-Africa sports cooperation holds substantial potential to contribute to regional development and global sports governance reform. The guiding principles of equality, inclusiveness, and mutual benefit offer valuable insights for international cooperation across sectors. Realizing future opportunities and overcoming present challenges will necessitate unwavering commitment, creative approaches, and genuine partnership from all involved parties. This new era presents unprecedented possibilities alongside significant responsibilities. The decisions made by policymakers, sports leaders, and development practitioners in the next decade will determine whether this partnership fulfills its potential as a model for South-South cooperation and a catalyst for African sports advancement. While the stakes are considerable, the potential benefits for millions of young Africans, sporting communities, and bilateral relations render this an endeavor deserving of our utmost dedication.



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