Description

Since China announced its opening and reform just three decades ago, it has skyrocketed to the top of the list in science and technology development. Intensive investment into research and education has paid off, and China now publishes the maximum number of scientific papers in the world.

However, the country is not restricting the growth to itself. China has launched development efforts throughout Southeast Asia and Africa to bolster South-South cooperation and enhance its global partnerships. China recently announced a 60-billion USD development package for Africa. As part of this package, China plans to train Africa's next generation of scientists. Let us learn more about this ambitious endeavor of China.

China Funds Comprehensive Knowledge Exchange

China's plan was unveiled at the third summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) held in Beijing in September. China will provide a total of 60 billion USD in funding for eight development initiatives in Africa. 50 billion of this will come from the Chinese government, while the remaining 10 billion will be invested by Chinese companies. While specific details on the distribution of funding among African nations were not provided, China did outline its strategy to boost scientific and technical know-how among African scientists. Training will be a significant part of the program and include opportunities in both Africa and China.

China will make 50,000 scholarships available to aspiring and practicing African scientists to study in China. Another 50,000 people will be able to receive funding for short-term training opportunities, such as attending workshops or seminars. Postgraduates will be able to apply for scholarships to study in China or at African institutions, such as the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology in Juja, Kenya. The plan also encourages African students to join the Young Scientists Exchange Program, which allows for study in China for up to one year.

Development Plan Garners Mixed Reactions

The announcement received mixed reactions from academics around the world. However, the majority of voices are optimistic. Tommy Karikari, a neurology researcher from Ghana who works at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, happily noted the plan includes funding for local training as well

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as overseas. He emphasized that brain drain is a significant problem in Africa. He added that he also believes that offering local scholarships and training opportunities will help stem the tide.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa also expressed enthusiasm over the development plan. He said that it would increase educational and employment opportunities throughout Africa. Lina Bendabdallah studies Chinese foreign policy in Africa at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. She feels that the summit focused on more ways to include African scientists in China's Belt and Road initiative. She posits this as a win for Africa with significantly increased emphasis on capacity building.

Unsurprisingly, there are also skeptics. Ademola Adenle, who studies sustainable development at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, says that the Chinese-funded agricultural technology development centers represent Chinese commercial interests. He says that this new development plan may further give Chinese companies access to African resources.

Will China Lead a New Wave of International Cooperation?

The overall mood for this new plan is hopeful. It will no doubt give African researchers access to more opportunities for international collaboration. The benefits of international scientific research collaboration for publishing and general scientific knowledge are well-established. We can hope that China will inspire other countries to follow its example and invest in similar development and exchange programs.

What do you think of China's new development plan? How can initiatives like this benefit the scientific community? Please let us know your thoughts in the comments section below.

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