# China is powering Africa's green tech moment

By Dulue Mbachu (Africa correspondent), in *South China Morning Post*, Sept 8, 2026

*Record photovoltaic additions and major infrastructure deals allow developing countries in Africa to bypass fossil fuel price shocks and ignore the U.S. 'drill, baby, drill' oil strategy for the continent*

In the U.S., the push is on to 'drill, baby, drill' for yet more fossil fuels. In China, meanwhile, the national strategy is to 'walk towards the light'. Two energy behemoths, two contrasting approaches to energy.

For African countries working out which way to go, the deciding factor is cost. With China's advances in solar generation and battery technologies making acquisitions cheaper, a consensus is coalescing across the continent around renewable energies.

"Africa's solar revolution is here," says Sonia Dunlop, CEO of the Global Solar Council. "Growth is spreading to new markets across the continent while rooftop and distributed systems are putting power directly into the hands of households and businesses."

Wars in Ukraine and the Middle East have delivered "two major fossil fuel supply shocks in four years" that "exposed the brutal cost of energy dependence", Dunlop explained. But cheap solar and improved battery storage have enabled the rapid replacement of fossil fuels with solar power across Africa, she said.

Africa's solar additions surged a record 54 per cent in 2025, according to the Global Solar Council (GSC), adding as much as 4.5 gigawatts in new photovoltaic power. With the U.S.-Israel war on Iran causing the biggest disruption in oil and gas supply in history, installations in 2026 are expected to set another record.

Across Africa, China has been involved in developing several renewable energy projects including hydroelectric, wind and solar. Among them is the 1.8GW Benban Solar Park in Aswan, Egypt, completed in 2019 and involving state-owned China Energy Engineering Corporation and TBEA, a green energy equipment manufacturer.

Ethiopia's Adama I and II wind farms, with a combined capacity of 204 megawatts, were funded by the China Exim Bank and built by HydroChina and the CGCOC Group in 2015. This marked the start of Ethiopia's journey towards tapping wind power potential of up to 1,300GW.

Together with the 5,150MW Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, the country is working towards complete reliance on green power supply and streets filled with electric cars.

South Africa's De Aar wind power project, offering a capacity of 244MW, was developed and is run by China Longyuan Power Group and China Energy Investment Corporation, serving more than 300,000 homes in the country's Northern Cape province. South Africa is the continent's

biggest importer of solar-related power products, enough to generate 3GW of power annually, according to official trade figures.

Morocco hosts China's most ambitious green footprint in Africa, leveraging its position as a bridge to Europe to build a manufacturing and export hub – including a US$1.3 billion electric vehicle gigafactory and battery component facilities capable of powering one million EVs annually.

China has also supported renewable energy development across several African countries. In Kenya, it built a solar plant to bring clean power to rural communities previously dependent on diesel, while in Zambia and the Ivory Coast it has funded and constructed major hydroelectric projects.

In Nigeria, the continent's most populous country, significant developments illustrating "both the urgency and the opportunity" to cut fossil fuel demand are unfolding, according to the GSC. With barely seven hours of grid supply daily, Nigerian households were forced to rely on some 22 million petrol- or diesel-powered generators, costing about US$12 billion a year to run, according to the 2025 'Connecting the Sun' study produced by GSC. These generated eight times more power than the national grid, the study noted, but came with high environmental and health costs. A surge in solar installations in the country since the Ukraine war began is curbing this fossil fuel demand.

"High fuel costs are the real accelerant" for renewable energy adoption across Africa, said Cheta Nwanze, a partner and analyst at SBM Intelligence, an economic research firm based in Lagos, Nigeria. "Cheap Chinese panels simply made the alternative viable."

Under a policy change announced in April, the Nigerian government adopted a decentralised grid system to tap into the excess power generated from homes while enabling the establishment of off-grid power and interconnected mini-grids – all reliant on solar power. New business models in real estate, power supply and distribution are emerging to take advantage of the decentralised regime.

Given Africa's rapid population growth and burgeoning middle class, the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) projects that oil demand on the continent will continue growing, doubling to 9.2 million barrels a day by 2050. It is an estimate now challenged by rising oil and gas prices and increased adoption of renewable alternatives.

With 60 per cent of the world's best solar resources, Africa needs annual investments of US$190 billion between 2026 and 2030 to achieve a transition to clean energy, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). The IEA projects that Africa's solar power deployment this year will surpass last year's. The agency notes in a report that 15 major African markets imported more than US$400 million worth of solar panels in the first quarter of 2026 alone, compared with US$600 million for all of 2025.

Moreover, as the retreat from crude oil gathers pace in Africa and other parts of the world, global oil producers may be heading towards an oversupply trap, according to analysts. Oil producers, including in the U.S., face the double-edged risk of "price wars from oversupply" and renewable

energy taking away their customers, according to Nwanze. “Trump is expanding supply into a market where China is exporting the technology that erodes long-term demand for that supply.”