

**Media Release  
EthicsSA**

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**CHINESE BUSINESS IN AFRICA: FACTS VS FEELINGS**

*EthicsSA calls for dialogue between Africa and China on Chinese businesses in Africa*

The Ethics Institute of South Africa (EthicsSA) has launched a [survey](#) to gauge perceptions about Chinese companies doing business across 15 African countries. The Institute's CEO, Deon Rossouw, says the survey aims to provide a factual basis for dialogue with the Chinese government and Chinese companies about their involvement in Africa.

"China has become a major investor across Africa and it's clear that there are widespread negative perceptions about its involvement," says Professor Rossouw. "China is now Africa's largest trading partner, and Chinese investment in Africa is now sitting at around \$122 billion per year. Given the importance of the relationship, particularly to Africa, we cannot rely on rumour and misinformation—hence the importance of this survey."

Professor Rossouw says that it is important to recognise that Africa accounts for a relatively small percentage of China's total foreign investment—around 10 percent—and yet attracts a disproportionate amount of attention. Many believe this suits China as it deflects attention away from the major investments it is making in Asia, Europe and the United States.

"One must also concede that China has made a positive and very visible impact on Africa's infrastructure, with many of the big projects across the continent funded by that country," he says. Several factors are contributing to negative perceptions about Chinese investment in Africa, Professor Rossouw believes. The most important is probably the Chinese policy of non-involvement in any trading partner's internal politics; as a result, China has had high-profile interactions with dubious governments such as Zimbabwe and Sudan. In addition, many of China's deals to access energy, mineral and other natural resources are secret, opening them up to suspicions of corruption.

There are also allegations that some Chinese infrastructure projects are of inferior quality, and that insufficient attention is paid to ongoing maintenance.

Indeed, some commentators feel that although perhaps more benevolent than previous colonial enterprises, the Chinese is essentially a neo-colonial power intent solely on extracting African resources. This perception is fuelled by the labour and general corporate social responsibility practices of many Chinese companies, which mirror those prevalent on mainland China itself and which do not meet Western standards.

The Chinese government is currently engaged in drafting legislation to guide its foreign investments. This is probably an indication that it is alive to how these negative perceptions could affect its ongoing foreign investments. Many Chinese believe that the negativity surrounding their African activities is fanned by the Western media because China is threatening Western interests.

"The [survey](#) we are launching today will help us to move beyond impressions by determining what Africans themselves think about China's impact on their economies and communities, and what Chinese workplace and environmental practices are really like," says Professor Rossouw. "EthicsSA

intends to use the survey results, along with a supporting literature survey, to initiate a process of dialogue with the Chinese government and Chinese companies active in Africa.”

The survey will be open to citizens of the 15 participating countries, and can be located at <https://g3research.co.za/index.php/257173>.

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**ISSUED ON BEHALF OF:** [Ethics Institute of South Africa](#)

**ISSUED BY:** [PR Republic](#)

**MEDIA CONTACT:** Juanita Vorster, 079 523 8374, [juanita@prrepublic.co.za](mailto:juanita@prrepublic.co.za)

***ABOUT EthicsSA (Ethics Institute of South Africa)***

The Ethics Institute of South Africa (EthicsSA) is a non-profit, public benefit organisation. EthicsSA offers a wide range of ethics-related services to organisations and individuals in the public and private sectors, as well as in the professions. These include:

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