

U.S.-Africa Summit Galvanizes Trade Relations, Private Sector Investment



WASHINGTON, October 13, 2014 (ESIA) -- In early August 2014, leaders from 50 African nations convened in Washington, DC for the first U.S.-Africa Summit. The unprecedented gathering, themed “Investing in the Next Generation,” focused on trade and investment on the continent, as well as Africa’s security and democratic development.

The Elliott School spoke with [Ambassador David Shinn](#) , professorial lecturer and former U.S. ambassador to Ethiopia and Burkina Faso, about the impetus behind the summit and some of its key outcomes.

**The recent U.S.-Africa Summit was the first of its kind convened by a U.S. president.□
What motivated the Obama administration to look at U.S.-Africa engagement more closely?**

Ambassador Shinn: I believe President Obama, whose father was Kenyan, hoped it would be possible earlier in his administration to demonstrate greater interest in Africa. His first term was largely consumed by the domestic economic crisis. He only found time to make a brief trip to Ghana, although Secretary of State Clinton made several important trips to Africa.

In 2013, President Obama did visit Senegal, South Africa, and Tanzania and has, over the last six years, received a number of African leaders at the White House. As his second term reached the mid-point, his administration realized that time was running out to do something more dramatic vis-à-vis Africa, hence the U.S.-Africa Summit. Members of the administration have long understood that Africa is growing in importance.

The GDP growth rate for all 54 countries in recent years has been running at about 5 percent. With more than a billion people, Africa has the fastest-growing population in the world and a rapidly increasing middle class. Africa accounts for 10 percent of the world's known oil reserves. About 12 percent of Americans can trace their origins to Africa.

What were the goals of the summit and to what extent were they met?

Ambassador Shinn: One of the goals not widely covered in the press was to emphasize the importance of African youth and America's effort to develop better relations with that important component of African society. There was a desire to increase American investment in Africa and to encourage the U.S. private sector to become more engaged across the board.

One highlighted program was President Obama's "Power Africa" initiative [to double the number of people with access to power in Sub-Saharan Africa] that had been announced in 2013. Extension and expansion of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act was also high on the

agenda. Another goal was to improve security cooperation between the United States and Africa. These goals were largely achieved.

What were some of the commitments agreed to between the United States and African leaders?

Ambassador Shinn: The Summit resulted in the announcement of \$14 billion in new private-sector investment in Africa. This included, for example, \$5 billion from Coca Cola over six years, \$3 billion from General Electric over four years, and \$2 billion from IBM over seven years.

The United States announced \$12 billion in new funding for Power Africa, thus reaching a total of \$26 billion for that initiative. There was agreement to request from Congress extension of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act and to expand it. The White House also announced three new security cooperation programs: Partnering to Counter Terrorism in Africa, the African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership, and the Security Governance Initiative. Additionally, the Summit was preceded by a meeting of 500 participants in the Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders. This is an ongoing program that will continue throughout the Obama administration.

How can the United States maintain the momentum of the conference and build on its successes?

Ambassador Shinn: This is, of course, the hard part. It is easy to become distracted, as we have seen in recent weeks by issues such as the U.S. mid-term elections, the crisis in the Ukraine, and the threat from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. The one big story out of Africa—Ebola in West Africa—is for all of the wrong reasons. New crises will continue to arise in the remaining two years of the Obama administration, thus detracting from the President's

ability to focus on Africa. I believe he will make another major trip to the continent before his term ends and there will probably be a series of visits to Africa by cabinet level officials. In the meantime, it will be up to the bureaucracy in Washington to implement the commitments that were agreed upon at the Summit.

The big question is what happens just over two years from now when there is a new administration. Will that administration decide to host another U.S.-Africa Summit? Will it continue the Power Africa initiative and the Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders? To his credit, President Obama left in place and supported the two principal Africa-focused initiatives of the George W. Bush administration: PEPFAR [President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief] and the Millennium Challenge Corporation. Africa policy tends to be less controversial on Capitol Hill and between the two major political parties. As a result, the initiatives from the Obama administration may remain in place irrespective of the outcome of the 2016 elections.

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