

Russia Continues Supplying Food to Africa in Multipolar World

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It all began in March 2023 with an ear-deafening applause during the inter-parliamentary conference under the theme 'Russia-Africa in a Multipolar World' that was held in Moscow. Russian President Vladimir Putin offered what was referred to as 'no-cost deliveries' of grains to six African countries. This unique promise was consolidated and renewed during the second Russia-Africa summit held in St. Petersburg. Russian media, with its highest public oriented reports and propaganda narratives, keeps on informing its public that Russia feeds Africa and its 1.4 billion population.

Under the auspices of the State Duma of the Russian Federal Assembly on March 20, President Vladimir Putin was the guest speaker at the plenary session. Putin based his arguments for building stronger comprehensive relations on the fact that Africa is increasingly becoming a continent of opportunities, its potential economic attractiveness and, what's more, it possesses vast resources.

He stressed that

"Russia is reliably fulfilling all its obligations pertaining to the supply of food, fertilisers, fuel and other products that are critically important to the countries of Africa, helping to ensure their food and energy security. We are ready to supply some of the resources to countries free of charge."

Putin added:

"By the way, let me note that at the same time, despite all the restrictions and limitations, Russian grain, almost 12 million tonnes were sent from Russia to Africa. I would also like to add that Russia is ready to supply to the African countries in great need, at no expense." (Applause.)

Russia's Foreign Ministry understands the concern that its 'African friends' are desperate for food, and has repetitively offered warm assurances for the 'no-cost deliveries' of grains to Africa's poorest countries. Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov, who has been driving the Russia-Africa relations for almost two decades since his appointment in 2004, has also indicated in his speeches 'free grains' intended to feed Africa.

Lavrov, during a news conference following the 78th session of the UN General Assembly on September 23, indicated, over the questions relating Russia with Africa, that there were outcries about the Black Sea Initiative.

"It took six months for the first shipment of 20,000 tonnes to get to Malawi and another three months for 34,000 tonnes to reach Kenya. Now we cannot send 34,000 tonnes to Nigeria. They are just rotting there," he said in his remark to a media question in New York.

On October 9, Lavrov meeting with Secretary-General of the Arab League Ahmed Aboul Gheit, recalled that during the Russia-Africa summit, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared Moscow's decision to "send a free large shipment of grain as humanitarian aid to six African countries that are on the World Food Program list."

"These are the countries that are most in need of food. These supplies will be completed by the end of the year," he said, and added that Russia "has already been compensating" for the grain deliveries that reached Africa's poorest countries that are on the list of the World Food Programme.

Quoting Russian Agriculture Minister Dmitry Patrushev, Russian media Interfax News Agency in early October reported that Russian grain supplies to African countries would start within a month and a half. "We are now completing the work on all documents. I think they will go within one to 1.5 months," Patrushev told the News Agency.

As reported, President Vladimir Putin said at the Russia-Africa forum in July that Russia was ready to supply from 25,000 to 50,000 tonnes of grain to several African countries free of charge in the coming months. He was referring to supplies to Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Eritrea, Mali, Somalia and Zimbabwe. Grain delivery will be free, according to the October 6th news report.

According to the Kremlin's and Ministry of Foreign Affairs' description, the poorest African countries in need of food supplies include Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Eritrea, Mali, Somalia and Zimbabwe.

Putin had previously announced that Moscow would send up to 50,000 tons of grain to six African countries at no cost.

"We will be ready to provide Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, Mali, Somalia, Central African Republic and Eritrea with 25-50,000 tons of free grain each in the next three to four months," Putin told a Russia-Africa summit in July, adding that his country would also cover the delivery costs.

The biggest question is ensuring food security. African Development Bank (AfDB) President Akinwumi Adesina, on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, reiterated that "food aid cannot feed Africa," stressing that the continent "does not need bowls in hand, but

seeds in the ground, and mechanical harvesters to harvest bountiful food produced locally.”

“As far as I’m concerned, we shouldn’t be talking about food security in Africa more than five years from now. There’s no reason for it,” he said, adding: “We have the technology and the financing to do it at scale.”

According to the estimates of the 2022 Global Report on Food Crises, 140 million people in Africa face acute food insecurity. But, Africa would be able to overcome food insecurity within the next five years as the continent has enough financial and technological resources to address the issue, according to Akinwumi Adesina.

In practical terms, Russia is not feeding the entire Africa and its population which stands at 1.4 billion, but only six (6) African countries. Geography documents Africa as consisting of 54 African countries. This can also be confirmed by the African Union. With current developments, African leaders have to make a complete shift, at least change their development paradigm and approach by adopting new measures toward prioritizing agriculture to feed its population.

At the Nairobi summit on Climate Change held in September 2023, primarily to review and systematize possible options for Africa to finance climate change, which invariably relates to agricultural production, African Union Commission head, Moussa Faki Mahamat, went straight to the point in his demand, on behalf of the 54-member states, that the international investment must be “massively scaled up to enable commitments to be turned into actions across the continent of Africa.”

Among most of the speakers at that Nairobi summit, Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki’s remarks seemingly carried different weighty significance. While concluding his talk at the gathering, he reminded of the necessity for Africa to mobilize its own resources rather than extend hands for handouts that may aggravate the existing situation by inviting interference and corrupt practices. Mobilizing inside resources will be enabling and motivating creativity at the level of the continent.

Nevertheless, Isaias Afwerki strongly urged Africans to back away from accepting donations. Rather, better to mobilize resources and get away from this dependency that will definitely compromise everything at the level of the continent.

It is always puzzling that Africa has all the resources, arable lands and huge water resources. Yet, Africa is poor, the majority of the population is wallowing in abject poverty. Unbelievably low standard of living still persists and is widespread across Africa.

But the point here is that African leaders must get down to their tasks to avoid being always rebuked to leave their ‘begging bowls’ at home when travelling abroad. As always trumpeted, Africa is immensely rich. It is rather necessary to broaden engagement with external players in food production and to ensure food security within the context of the current geopolitical situation in the world.

In recent years, the People’s Republic of China has built increasingly stronger ties with African countries and is Africa’s largest trading partner. China has the desire to shift its focus to agriculture and industrialization on the continent. Chinese President Xi Jinping recently unveiled plans to build more manufacturing plants in Africa, ramp up food production there and equip thousands of Africans with vocational skills to support the

continent's agricultural modernization.

At the 15th BRICS summit – a platform hosted by South Africa last August with participation of African leaders, Xi Jinping made a number of concrete proposals including (i) China will launch the Initiative on Supporting Africa's Industrialization and (ii) China will launch the Plan for Supporting Africa's Agricultural Modernization.

A Harvard University study led by professor Calestous Juma showed that Africa could feed itself by making the transition from importer to self-sufficiency. African agriculture is at the crossroads. And that, Africa has to focus on agricultural innovation, follow by industrialization, as its new engine for regional trade and prosperity.

According to the United Nations Economic Development Report, Africa is now at risk of being in debt once again, particularly in sub-Saharan African countries. Time and again, Wikipedia also reminds that despite a wide range of natural resources and the human capital, Africa is the least wealthy continent per capita and second-least wealthy by total wealth, ahead of Oceania.

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