

Webinar report:

Russia's Strategic Engagement in Africa – Insights and Research Findings

17 November 2021 – Zoom

On 17 November 2021, the [Russia-Africa project](#) of the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) hosted a webinar to present its latest research. The webinar covered the following topics:

- Russia and China in Africa: Prospective Partners or Asymmetric Rivals?
- Russia's Use of Media in Africa: Soft Power in Action
- A Selection of Case Studies
- Russia's Political and Economic Presence in Zambia and Tanzania

Mr Steven Gruzd, head of SAIIA's African Governance and Diplomacy Programme and one of the project leads, welcomed participants and speakers to the event. Mr Henning Suhr, Resident Representative at the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) South Africa, delivered opening remarks. Mr Suhr reminded participants that Russia's engagement with Africa is not new and emphasised the importance of African states deciding the terms of engagement with interested foreign powers for themselves.

The first presentation was made by Dr Samuel Ramani of the University of Oxford on the topic "Russia and China in Africa: Prospective Partners or Asymmetric Rivals?" Dr Ramani informed participants about the sectors in which Russia and China are most involved on the African continent and identified some synergy between the strategies of these countries, but also many differences. While both these countries are actively engaged in Africa, Dr Ramani emphasised that there is not much cooperation between these countries on the continent.

Ms Cayley Clifford, project lead (SAIIA), presented on the topic "Russia's Use of Media in Africa: Soft Power in Action." Several interesting research findings were presented by Ms Clifford. Russia is combating Western narratives in its media and is attempting to influence opinions through the media. The impact of digital platforms is of particular interest. Ms Clifford finds that influence building via social media is especially important and while it is not necessarily fake news that is being shared, social media engagements are often partisan and inflammatory. Case studies included Mali, Libya, and the Central African Republic.

The third presentation was done jointly between Mr John Githongo and Ms Khadija Sharife. They presented on a range of case studies focusing on Russian influence and engagement with Africa. Country case studies included Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Distinction was made between *Russia's* Africa policy and the *Kremlin's* Africa policy. Ms Sharife finds that Russia has no Africa strategy, but the Kremlin does. Mr Githongo departed from the fact that Russia does not have the same capacity and resources as other states, but it is not held back by this weakness. One of the most important realities of Russia's engagement with Africa is that Russia is willing to make mistakes, even ones that come with a human cost.

The final presentation was by Ms Dzvinka Kachur, Researcher at the Centre for Complex Systems in Transition, Stellenbosch University, on the topic "Russia's Political and Economic Presence in Zambia and Tanzania". Ms Kachur notes that there is a type of "Soviet heritage" in terms of Russia's engagement with these two African states, especially in terms of social capital, military cooperation, Soviet debt, and academic expertise. She focused on the involvement of several Russian state-owned

companies in these countries including ROSGEO, GAZPROM, LUKOIL, and ROSATOM. Nuclear cooperation between Russia and Zambia has increased significantly alongside the frequencies of contracts between legislative, financial and military institutions, according to Ms Kachur's findings.

The webinar was well attended, with 102 attendees recorded (this number includes speakers and producers). Attendees from the following sectors were recorded:

- Energy
- Chemical
- Utilities
- Government
- Education
- Financial institutions
- Advertising/Marketing

Geographic representation was also very diverse: Austria, Belarus, Burundi, Canada, Ethiopia, Germany, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Poland, Romania, Russia, Senegal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Zimbabwe. There was also embassy representation from the EU, Peru, Finland, Japan, Switzerland, Argentina, Philippines, Sweden, Zambia, Ukraine, Poland, Spain and the United States.

The livestream of the event is available [here](#). It has been viewed 153 times to date.