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G20 and Africa after the summit: Need for continuity, global voice and vision

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The Current Column

of 17 July 2017

G20 and Africa after the summit: Need for continuity, global voice and vision

Bonn, 17 July 2017. Strengthening cooperation with Africa is an important achievement of the German G20 presidency. Most African economies are neither well integrated in the global economy nor do they have significant influence on decision-making in global governance structures such as the G20, IMF or WTO. At the same time, Africa continues to be the continent where most poor people live, often in fragile states. Therefore, there is a need for better African representation in global problem-solving and a need for improving pathways to sustainable development in Africa. Can G20's priorities as outlined in the Communiqué make a difference for Africa's global representation and its sustainable development?

G20 cooperation with Africa has so far been limited to a number of stand-alone initiatives (e.g. on Industrialization in Africa and LDCs by the Chinese G20 presidency in 2016). Debates about G20-Africa cooperation have mostly taken place within the G20 Development Working Group (DWG). The German presidency now launched a G20 Africa Partnership to strengthen G20 cooperation with the continent. Its core element is the 'Compact with Africa' (CwA) that will be implemented by the African Development Bank, IMF and World Bank. It focuses on private investments that shall provide jobs and improve infrastructure (particularly energy) in individual African countries. Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Morocco, Ruanda, Senegal and Tunisia committed to present compacts. These CwA were the result of a process that culminated in the G20 Africa Partnership Conference in Berlin in June.

Starting with a number of concrete initiatives is a step in the right direction. However, a clearer vision will be needed for how the old and new initiatives relate to each other and how they contribute to a structural, great transformation needed for sustainable development in Africa. The G20 leaders' declaration refers to the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 and the UN's Agenda 2030. Yet, it is not clear how the CwA will contribute to the broader objective of African sustainable development. In addition, the CwA are not systematically linked to previous G20 initiatives that still wait for more thorough implementation (e.g. Energy Access Plan for Sub-Saharan Africa or support to industrialization). They also focus on developing bilateral compacts, rather than encouraging regional cooperation in creating an enabling investment environment.

The new G20 Partnership with Africa runs in parallel to and may compete with G20 members' bilateral agendas, in particular those of China (Belt and Road Initiative) or India and Japan (Asia-Africa Growth Corridor). In particular, it seems that the BRICS' support for the

G20 Partnership with Africa is limited. At least the BRICS did not mention cooperation with Africa in their joint press communiqué of the Hamburg Summit. On the other hand, the German G20-Presidency seems to be making efforts to align mainly with the EU's initiatives, particularly the EU external investment plan and preparations for the EU-Africa summit.

Whether the various bilateral and G20 initiatives of developed and emerging countries will reinforce each other or compete, will also depend on Africa's response. The AU is in the process of reforming its strategies to engage with various external partners and enhance the complementarity of various partnerships. The AU summit in July continued debates on a set of reform proposals presented by a commission headed by Rwandan president Kagame to AU heads of state earlier this year. These reform efforts must be an important point of reference for any G20 Africa cooperation. Only in this way, can the value added of the engagement with G20 compared to other partnerships be assured.

The initiatives of the German G20-Presidency aim at promoting an equal partnership with Africa. In the medium to longer term, this cooperation can only be sustained if Africa gets a seat at the table. Building on the communiqué's proposals for the G20 Partnership with Africa, the G20 should consider strengthening the cooperation with Africa across different workstreams beyond the DWG. Implementing the 2030 Agenda in cooperation with Africa and supporting the Agenda 2063 require policy coherence across G20 work streams and coordination with other international and regional organizations.

In addition, a strong case should be made to give a permanent membership in G20 to an African organization. For now, the AU and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) only have observer status. This involves a certain degree of informality. Coupled with both organizations' limited resources, this degree of informality creates few incentives to build capacity to cooperate with the G20 that would ensure greater and better participation in the agenda. Including one formal, regionally representative African seat would go some way to addressing the legitimacy deficit.

The G20 Partnership with Africa will only make a difference for sustainable development if (1) future presidencies keep the G20's commitment to cooperate with Africa, (2) it addresses the integration of African voices in global decision-making and if (3) it is expanded to a more visionary and broad-based engagement.