

COOPERATION WITH AFRICA

Africa - G20 cooperation: reducing complexity, increasing opportunities

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Abstract

Interest among international partners to cooperate with Africa is high. G20 countries generally follow two parallel tracks: they have their own bilateral initiatives and, in some cases, use the G20 to launch policy initiatives. These parallel bilateral and G20 processes create many opportunities for African actors. But the initiatives are not always complementary and not always sustained in the medium- to long-term. The G20 might want to broaden debates on its impact on development by better coordinating bilateral and G20 initiatives (particularly with regard to support for investments) and by including African representatives in all working groups. African actors could enhance division of labour between Pan-African and regional institutions. Overall, Africa needs to invest in its strategic engagement with the G20, for instance by monitoring commitments against African priorities.

Challenge

Africa continues to be relatively weakly represented in international debates, despite its strong membership within the United Nations and a growing number of country-to-continent dialogue formats, such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) and numerous other initiatives organised by the USA, Japan, Turkey or South Korea. Additionally, there are region-to-region dialogues between the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) as well as Africa-South America Summits. Yet, in relevant global governance “clubs”, Africa is barely represented. The G20 is a key example: only South Africa is a member. Pan-African organisations are only observers, and do not have their own seat, unlike the EU. At the same time, developments in Africa are substantially influenced by decisions at the G20 level, e.g. in the areas of trade, taxes, macro-economic stability or climate.

Competition among international partners to pursue new cooperation initiatives with Africa is high. In this regard, G20 countries generally follow two parallel tracks: they have their own bilateral initiatives and only in some cases use the G20 to launch new/different policy initiatives. These bilateral and G20 initiatives are not always complementary and they are not always sustained and followed up in the medium- to long-term. For instance, during the 2017 German G20 Presidency, Germany proposed a G20 Compact with Africa while the EU in parallel launched an EU External Investment Plan during the AU-EU summit in November 2017. Both aim at strengthening the investment environment in African countries and creating incentives for (foreign) investments in infrastructure and other areas. Both remain largely disconnected from other international partners’ investments in infrastructure and other areas. In 2016, the Chinese G20 Presidency launched a new but poorly followed-up G20 initiative



on industrialization for Least Developed Countries, while the Belt and Road Initiative – with substantial financial resources linked to it – has remained a bilateral endeavor with multiple and varied implications from region to region. Whether and how the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor promoted by India and Japan will feature during the Japanese G20 presidency remains unclear so far. As development success can only be driven from within, a key success factor for international cooperation is how such cooperation is supportive of African initiatives.

These numerous initiatives provide the opportunity for African countries to leverage their design and decide which cooperation initiatives to prioritise. At least in theory, African countries could also exploit this position of strength to encourage cooperation initiatives to be more aligned with African priorities. At the same time, coordination of various international actors also weighs on African (and international actors') capacities and some initiatives may not complement one another. This brief develops recommendations on how to best use the interest of G20 countries (and indeed other external partners) in collaborating with Africa to enhance sustainable development and structural transformation across the continent in line with Africa's agendas.

Proposal

Opportunities for African actors

Strengthen engagement beyond the G20 Development Working Group: Pan-African organisations and South Africa as the only African G20 member may want to strengthen pro-active engagement with G20 working groups beyond the Development Working Group (DWG). The working groups on climate sustainability, trade and investment, agriculture, energy, employment, tax/finance might be particularly relevant as G20 policies in these areas have major direct and indirect consequences for African countries. One way of encouraging wider engagement would be for the G20 to make it a standard rule for all G20 working groups to include African representatives. This would have the further effect of widening African participation beyond South Africa and the AU/NEPAD via directly inviting particular African stakeholders, without necessarily having to change G20 membership. In line with the way in which the AU usually operates, the modality of such inclusion should be determined by the AU chair and the AUC. Co-opting individual African countries would be more ad hoc than systematically including Pan-African institutions.

Increase division of labour among African actors when engaging with G20 actors: Pan-African actors could strengthen arrangements for division of labour among them

on G20 engagement by identifying which Pan-African actors would lead on specific topics. They could also enhance input to the G20 from African regional organisations. In this regard, the AU and African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) could set up permanent desks dealing with and facilitating engagement with the G20. This cooperative division of labour should be coordinated by the AU Commission.

Define concrete and actionable priorities based on Africa's Agenda 2063 and its 10-year implementation plan: The AU could publish a yearly list of African key priorities that could feed into G20 discussions. These would not be the kind of long-term transformative goals as seen in Agenda 2063, but – derived from the long-term agenda and the 10-year implementation plan – more concrete, shorter-term goals that could be made actionable by one or two G20 Presidencies. This would allow the continent to take a pro-active role in shaping G20 discussions, and should be tailored to also inform discussions in the various G20 workstreams and Engagement Groups such as the Think20, Business20 or Women20.

Enhance monitoring mechanisms: In order to deal with the complexity of working with the G20 club and its individual members at the same time (as well as other international actors), and to highlight contradictions, African actors could strengthen mechanisms to monitor the launch and implementation of various international initiatives and facilitate discussion of how they fit into wider G20 agendas from year to year. This assessment could be done by the AU or the UN Economic Commission for Africa and the key findings could be presented once a year to the AU General Assembly and shared with the G20. Agenda 2063's 10-year implementation plan could be an important basis against which to assess G20 countries' initiatives.

Primary engagement with G20 anchored with AU Commission rather than AU Chair: The AU has started a fundamental reform process. The AU's relations with external partners as well as division of labour between AU and RECs are part of this reform debate. Debates are still at an early stage and no decisions have been taken. Until these changes have been finalised, we propose that the primary engagement between the AU and the G20 be anchored with the AU Commission, rather than the AU Chair, as is the current practice. Engagement with the AU Chair is easily disrupted because it changes annually; this disruption is exacerbated by the G20's own annual change of leadership. More systematic AU-G20 engagement would gain cross-year stability through engagement with the AU Commission under the guidance of and as mandated by the Assembly and Executive Council.

Options for the G20 and G20 member countries

Mainstream cooperation with Africa across G20 working groups: Acknowledging the



constraints of the Development Working Group, and working towards mainstreaming the sustainable development debate in line with Agenda 2030, seems appropriate. At present, the DWG's focus on LICs (including Africa) has led to the isolation of development from the wider work of the G20. The new mandate of the DWG from the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2016) to "act as a coordinating body and policy resource for sustainable development across the G20" still needs to be fully embraced by the group. Political trajectories in several G20 member states (US, UK, France etc.) since the global economic crisis have revealed the political costs of uneven development within so-called developed states. The Development Working Group's activities should therefore be tied more closely to key G20 focus areas such as infrastructure financing and the future of work. The G20 should also make more effort to ensure that the direct/indirect effects of G20 policies for African countries are debated across the various G20 working groups and in cooperation with African partners.

Ensure follow-up of Africa-related G20 initiatives and strengthen coherence between G20 and individual G20 member countries' initiatives. While the G20 and its members will certainly continue to launch parallel initiatives, more could be done by G20 member countries to avoid duplication and strengthen coherence of various initiatives. Particularly in the area of investment promotion and infrastructure investments, various initiatives exist in parallel. Building on priorities of African partners, these initiatives could be further streamlined to maximize the benefit and financial resources available for African actors.

What next?

The G20 Presidency of Argentina: The G20 Presidency gives Argentina a historic opportunity to engage with African and other G20 actors. As the chair is traditionally the "honest broker" between all club members, Argentina can use the Presidency to maintain momentum regarding the cooperation with African partners and thereby build its reputation within the G20 and beyond it. A key priority of the Argentinian Presidency should be to 'keep the ball in the play'. With the Chinese and the German G20 presidencies, the African dimension of the G20 cooperation has gained prominence. Argentina should grasp the opportunity and support the previous presidencies' initiatives, while, at the same time, prepare the ground for making cooperation with Africa a prominent topic of the Japanese Presidency.

The G20 Presidency of Japan: The Japanese Presidency next year presents an interesting opportunity to bring the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor to the G20 table and align it with other initiatives. Geopolitical preoccupations may make this a long shot. However, a useful interim measure could be proposing a G20 format tasked



with specifically bringing each year's troika and the AU together to find possible areas of alignment between different bilateral engagements with Africa. In practice many of these development plans target similar nodes in Africa, and a facilitation forum could make their implementation more efficient.

African Union and other African actors: With a view towards the Japanese Presidency, African actors should plan ahead early on. With regard to infrastructure investments, it would be very useful for African actors if conversations are encouraged between different infrastructure-focused initiatives between G20 members and Africa, notably the Compact with Africa launched under the German G20 presidency (2017), the EU External Investment Plan and the China Belt and Road Initiative.

South Africa: As the only African G20 member, South Africa has an important role to play. This is a balancing act, as Pretoria cannot claim to speak for the continent. Yet, the country has experiences in engaging in structures of global governance. In 2018, South Africa is the chair of the BRICS and thus can offer a bridge between numerous engagements with the African continent and as a key partner to most external partners to the continent. Argentina has been invited to the BRICS Plus meeting on the last day of the BRICS summit in Johannesburg. Both Pan-Africanism and engagement with global commercial and political partners such as the EU, China, India and Brazil remain in Pretoria's self-interest, which can provide the necessary energy (and perseverance) to keep African perspectives on the G20 agenda.



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