

G20 Anticipating New Dawn with African Union

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Johannesburg was the scene for the 15th BRICS — Brazil, China, India, Russia and South Africa — summit held late August during which leaders raised African Union's permanent seat in the G20. Early September, New Delhi is the scene for the G20 summit to discuss changing geopolitical situation and global development and most likely to make historic approval finally of AU's permanent seat in G20.

South Africa and India are both members of BRICS, and are both members of G20. **President Cyril Ramaphosa** witnessed two new African States (Egypt and Ethiopia) entry into BRICS. On the other hand, Indian **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** seeks admission for African Union (an organization of 54 Member-States) into G20.

As the BRICS leaders converged in Johannesburg, the consensus is to undertake collective work towards a multipolar world.

By taking this muscular step in the current geopolitical changes, it means opening a new chapter in human history and it is a strong resolve by nations of the global south represented by vast majority of the world population to end forever many years of colonialism and neocolonialism and to establish a new world order and the political, economic and cultural system that encourages equitable development of all nations, elimination of poverty and creation of decent living for all.

In New Delhi, however, the summit chorus will have a different rhythm, as the G20 members are wealthy nations mostly from the Global North. These are also well-represented in all international organizations and well-structured institutions including the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF). One distinctive feature here is that the G20 brings together both rich and poor nations, and of India, a key member of both clubs.

Noticeably there are wide policy differences: while BRICS is considered as evolving into some kind of geopolitical rival to the Global North, some BRICS members hold confrontational opinions and thoughts. Emerging nations are simply "looking for alternatives, not replacements" of any system. Despite the fact that some differences on

policy approach, the desire for BRICS expansion also showed the demand for a change.

For this discussion, it is necessary to note two distinctive features here, the first is that G20 plays an important role in shaping and strengthening global architecture and governance on all major international economic issues.

And the second is that BRICS expansion was “more about progressive efforts to find a system that will help to solve the problem of poverty, hunger, and the underdevelopment of billions people in the developing countries” demonstrated by the horrendous migrant crisis where thousands of desperate people are assembling at national borders like between the US and Mexico or be it along the Mediterranean which has already become a mass grave for migrants) of showing that developing countries are heartily rallying to its side against western hegemony, rather than concrete plans to work together.

For African States, BRICS serves as an alternative avenue to explore its support against further economic exploitation and to control interruption in their internal affairs in the continent, and to assert their right to process their resources and produce value added goods as means of becoming middle income societies in the foreseeable future through high technology and industrialization largely ignoring the fact that much rather depends on their own policies and approach as well as system of governance.

AU on the Summit Agenda

As the BRICS group grows, so G20 will also expand in numerical strength. The pendulum is noticeably turning; global leaders have already supported the appeal for admission of African Union (AU) into the G20. The G20's three-day conference this September 9-10 in New Delhi, India will definitely push AU's ascension, with a permanent seat, in the powerful group, making an indelible milestone history for both AU and G20.

While witnessing this historical moment, the greatest questions for politicians, academics, business community and the general public is the strategic significance and geopolitical implications for the African Union as a continental organization and for Africa.

Long before the summit, Modi says India as G20 host will be inclusive and invites African Union to become permanent member. The concern was similar during the time of forming Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) which until today embraces in its entirety the Global South. The NAM meets regularly to deliberate on pertinent issues affecting its members.

Modi underlined India's role as the G20 host this year and hinted that it would focus on highlighting the concerns of the developing world, and has unreservedly proposed the African Union to become permanent members of the forum.

“We have a vision of inclusiveness and with that vision, we have invited the African Union to become permanent members of the G20,” Modi said as he addressed the Business 20 Summit in New Delhi.

The G20 is an industry event and part of the summit of the G20 leading rich and developing nations. Over three days, industry and policy leaders from around the world have discussed themes like building resilient supply chains, digital transformation, debt distress facing developing countries and how to advance on climate change goals. Their recommendations will be shared with the G20 governments, according to the organizers.

A key part of that strategy is bringing the African Union into the G20 fold, analysts say.

“When India assumed the G20 presidency last December, we were acutely conscious that most of the Global South would not be at the table when we meet,” said **External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar**. “This mattered very much because the really urgent problems are those faced by them. ... And India, itself so much a part of the Global South, could not stand by and let that happen.”

He said the G20 has so far deliberated on rising debt, sustainable development, climate action and food security, among other issues that affect low to middle-income countries.

“The core mandate of the G20 is to promote economic growth and development. This cannot advance if the crucial concerns of the Global South are not addressed,” Jaishankar added.

During the previous summit, G20 nations agreed to work on reforms to the World Trade Organization, At the Rajasthan meeting for instance, G20 members agreed to improve WTO functioning and strengthen trust in the multilateral trading system. The G20 takes in nations conducting over 75% of global trade and is presently functioning under Indian presidency.

Proposed reforms would include having a well-functioning Dispute Settlement System accessible to all members by 2024, as per the official statement. Disputes over trade largely persistent. India’s trade deficit with China is the highest of any country, and stood at \$101.28 billion in 2022, according to official data. Now there are similar arguments and concerns over China’s trade with Africa.

Global Leaders Call for AU’s Membership

At the same time, world leaders have overwhelmingly declared support, and viewed it in a broader context, that African Union has a permanent representation at G20. As part of the priority call for some structural reforms, African Union’s permanent membership will top the agenda, which Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has proposed granting at the upcoming summit in New Delhi.

Interestingly, African Union’s proposed ascension unto G20 has unflinching support from many leaders, at least, over the past few years. It includes the United States, Europe, China, India and Russia.

President Joe Biden, during the the U.S.-Africa Leaders’ Summit held mid-December 2022, described as a platform for 49 African leaders + the African Union, jointly pitched their collective expectations and aspirations in the emerging new global world.

Scanning through the discussions, what is probably appealing is United States’ desire towards (re)defining its relationship with Africa on African terms. In addition, Biden has urged that the African Union be given a permanent seat in the G20 – an influential collection of the strongest economies in the world. South Africa is the only member from the continent. Notwithstanding any criticisms, Biden has thrown his backing behind the African Union securing a permanent membership in G20 which will enhance economic ties in its own right with Africa.

As Chair of the African Union (2022 – 2023), Senegalese **President Macky Sall**, asserted

that Africa's future prosperity is linked to the global economic system, the African Union, on behalf of Africa, uses its leadership and geo-strategic position to optimize necessary links suitable for economic development, industrialization and promoting trade with the continent, and for the next generations.

Sall emphasized several reasons such as the necessity of adopting fundamental policy leveraging the industrialized poles, rather than partitioning the world, describing this step as a smart decision in the age of multi-polarity. Due to its geopolitical importance of the United States, African nations need not have to jettison their cooperative relations, but make strong call for restructuring and reforms, lobby for long-term strategic and inclusive relations.

Early April 2023, Russian **President Vladimir Putin** signed an order to endorse Russia's updated foreign policy concept which was compiled and presented by the Ministry of Foreign of Affairs. The new concept was updated to incorporate additional measures and redefine parameters of necessary actions in relation to the United States, Western and European confrontation and determine important roles in the emerging multipolar world by the Russian Federation. In the same document, and even long before its adoption, Russia has consistently been advocating for United Nations reforms, calling for broadening the representation of Africa and in other similar foreign organizations including the G20.

Without mincing words, Putin said:

“Russia proactively supported the initiative to grant the African Union membership in the Group of 20. It is the right decision reflecting the reality and the balance of power in today's world.”

In addition to that, Moscow supports the legitimate aspiration of African States to pursue their own independent policy, to decide on their own future without imposed 'assistance' by third parties.

President of the People's Republic of China, **Xi Jinping**, during the China-Africa Leaders' Dialogue held August 24 in Johannesburg, rained praises that Africa has made big strides on the path of independence, seeking strength through unity and integration. With steady progress under Agenda 2063 of the African Union (AU), the official launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and growing coordination among the sub-regional groups, Africa is becoming an important pole with global influence.

Xi Jinping also said that

“China will continue to support Africa in speaking with one voice on international affairs and continuously elevating its international standing. China will work actively at the G20 summit to support the AU's full membership in the group. China supports making special arrangements on the U.N. Security Council reform to meet Africa's aspiration as a priority.”

The new historic galloping convergence between G20 and African Union really requires close attention since it will definitely re-shape the growing relations which is most important in the emerging multipolar world. At least the African side of it largely boils down to the acceptance speeches, the main long-term objectives and primacy of conceptual ideas of the President of Comoros Islands and Chairperson of the African Union (2023 - 2024), Azali

Assoumani, Chairman of African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, will definitely remain for future generations.

Among high dignitaries, there are also in attendance to witness AU's ascendancy into G20, are Egyptian President and 2023 Chairperson of NEPAD, **Abdel Fattah el-Sisi**, and Nigerian President, **Bola Ahmed Tinubu**. Director-General of World Health Organization, **Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus** from Ethiopia, and Director-General of the World Trade Organization, **Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala** from Nigeria.

By joining G20 this September 2023, the AU with a permanent seat will now have the explicit solid voice to make cases on behalf of Africa, especially this crucial time of political and economic reconfiguration. The processes could present, to some extent, complexities and contradictions.

Nevertheless, the AU in view of the substantial expertise accumulated down the years, the next logical step is to foster dialogue and exchange experience, with the aim of optimizing all aspects integration processes including the political, economic and cultural spheres and collaborating on the widest possible range of external issues, at the forefront of integrating with G20.

It primarily highlights the fulfilling the promise promoted widely at conferences and summits, further re-enforces the necessity for multifaceted partnership with Africa by the G20. It is one-step, if not a big-leap forward from mere intentions, diplomatic niceties and rhetoric previously expressed to concrete deeds making Africa more visible in G20. It has many interpretations though, depending on diverse perspectives, politics, economy and social and cultural.

Importance of B20 Business Platform

On its website, India's G20 says Nigerian **Tony Elumelu**, Chairman of Heirs Holdings, is named to co-chair the Business 20 (B20) India Action Council focusing on African economic integration. Established in 2010 within the G20, it comprises corporate business enterprises and organizations and serves as the official platform for dialogue between the G20 and the global business community.

Africa is undoubtedly facing greater multifaceted challenges and these will definitely continue in the near future, so it implies that the B20 has a pivotal role and a unified voice in uniting global business leaders to provide their perspectives on matters concerning global economic and trade governance, and determine its slice for Africa.

With the global attention turning to Africa, this also underscores the ambitious endeavor of African economies toward achieving continent-wide economic integration. It emphasizes the need for the B20 to unite and provide substantial support in facilitating the success of this integration process, ultimately contributing to African economic development.

Without over-estimating its importance, this platform has a meaningful advantage for Africa and beyond. By facilitating increased business participation in Africa, international cooperation in this realm will create an enabling environment conducive to inclusive growth.

G20 - Economic implications for Africa

The African Union's strategic framework Agenda 2063 highlights the importance of

preserving African values and unity, and Pan-Africanism.

As we expect in coming years, AU has to use its G20 membership – a qualitatively new status – for the development of high-tech and export-oriented industries in the sector. It has lay the groundwork for expanding areas of collaboration and launching ambitious long-term projects, rather than engage in geopolitical games.

The basic question here is what needs to be done to bring about a substantial improvement in collaboration between G20 and 54-member-states African Union? The new global challenge is not only lining up for or in search for new funding but rather completely new mindsets about economic development paradigm shift. Today, Africa is one of the most promising and fastest-growing regions of the world, with leading powers actively competing with one another.

Seemingly the accelerated economic integration processes have become an overarching trend throughout the world. Therefore, the AU has to critically revitalize this economic integration with the G20 to provide new perspectives on crucial projects related to infrastructure, logistics, energy, trade, agricultural and industrial development, digitalization, migration policy, and employment.

At first since its creation, G20's primary tasks include support economic development of the Global South, but it has over these years and to a considerable extent, distanced from its initial driven visions, promoting a more unequitable distribution of resources and supporting largely a unipolar sort of world. It is, therefore, necessary to use the platform to think of building an alternative mechanism for international cooperation with a focus on the developing world.

Final Hope for Africa

With the current situation, G20 is now only as a formidable alliance that fosters its members. Majority of developing nations, mainly located in the south including Africa, express growing frustration over outdated structures of global governance, under-representation in many international organizations that no longer reflect the realities of the 21st century. Hence one of the important questions taking place at the summit is seeking collaboration between G20 and the African Union.

Judging from the historical landmark the AU has the potential, despite the widespread political vulnerabilities, to make an invaluable contribution to developing and tackling current economic challenges facing Africa, with its estimated 1.4 billion people, by collaborating and partnering through G20. After all, the G20 members, account for nearly 85% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), have bilateral and multilateral relations, and in addition multiple partnerships with Africa.

By simple definition, the G20 includes the world's 19 wealthiest nations plus the European Union. With African Union, it becomes G21 or G20+African Union. The 54-member AU was created in May 1963 and now experiencing dynamic political changes on the landscape and has unique stipulated models of transforming the continent – incorporated into what is popularly referred to as the AU Agenda 2063.

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