



POLICY BRIEF

**A NEW LIFELINE FOR THE
G20? THE ROLE OF AFRICAN
AND EUROPEAN ACTORS IN
ENHANCING ITS LEGITIMACY
AND EFFECTIVENESS**



Task Force 5
**THE FUTURE OF MULTILATERALISM AND
GLOBAL GOVERNANCE**

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موجز السياسة هل هو شريان حياة جديد لمجموعة العشرين؟ دور الفاعلين الأفارقة والأوروبيين في تعزيز المشروعية والفاعلية

فريق العمل الخامس
مستقبل التعددية والحوكمة العالمية



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ABSTRACT

The erosion of global governance has accelerated in recent years in the face of rising global inequality. The current global governance system lacks legitimacy, popular accountability, and effectiveness, and struggles to deliver solutions to key global challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic may sharpen the already existing crisis of multilateralism, or it may contribute to enhanced global cooperation beyond global health. This study investigates the role that the Group of Twenty could play in facilitating a deeper international engagement of African and European actors, for instance through a series of informal dialogues, exploring options for a reform of multilateral institutions.

لقد تسارع تجريف الحوكمة العالمية خلال السنوات الأخيرة في مواجهة تزايد عدم المساواة على مستوى العالم. فنظام الحوكمة العالمي الحالي يفتقر إلى الشرعية والمساءلة العامة والفاعلية، ويكافح من أجل تقديم حلول للتحديات العالمية الرئيسية. قد تزيد جائحة كوفيد-19 من حدة أزمة التعددية الموجودة بالفعل، أو ربما تساهم في تعزيز التعاون الدولي خارج نطاق الصحة العالمية. وتُحقق هذه الدراسة في الدور الذي يمكن أن تلعبه مجموعة العشرين في تيسير مشاركة دولية أعمق للفاعلين الأفارقة والأوروبيين، على سبيل المثال من خلال سلسلة من الحوارات غير الرسمية، واستكشاف الخيارات لإصلاح المؤسسات متعددة الأطراف.



CHALLENGE

The multilateral system at risk and the African context through a multilateral perspective

With the emergence of more power centers in the international system and increases in transnational problems, global consensus on common challenges has become more complicated. Individual countries and actors often consider how such efforts may affect their specific interests rather than collective progress. The absence of a global leadership to drive both a new institutional architecture and regulate public goods, such as climate change and health and food security, is exacerbating the consequences of growing transnational interdependence. There is a deadlock in the operation of global governance structures, as these become platforms for geopolitical contests and power politics at the expense of the challenges that these institutions are mandated to tackle.

A serious effort is required to upgrade existing informal and formal multilateral fora to make them more suitable for this purpose. In the current polarized global political environment, such effort will demand that the leadership drive such an agenda from regions and countries other than the established powers. In doing so, multilateralism will also gain greater legitimacy.

A functioning and legitimate rules-based multilateral system is of particular importance for African countries because they have the most to lose if global multilateral institutions are weakened. On the one hand, African countries (either individually or within regional groupings) have the capacity to forge decisions taken in multilateral fora such as the United Nations General Assembly or within the international climate negotiations. On the other hand, due to limited diplomatic capacities (especially within the UN or World Trade Organization) as well as a limited representation in other multilateral settings such as in the Group of Twenty (G20) (Leininger et al. 2019), African countries find it difficult to set agendas. Moreover, the difficulty of speaking unanimously as a continent further reduces the ability of African countries to influence global decision-making processes (Lala 2018).

CHALLENGE

Against this backdrop, the G20 could boost its legitimacy and thus, its role as an important vehicle for multilateralism through greater African engagement and representation (Mabera 2019). African representation within the G20 is particularly limited, as only South Africa is a full member of a club that has accrued increasing sway over global financial affairs. In the face of the severe economic crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of the G20 could be growing again and its decisions will have a direct impact on Africa as well.

The African Union (AU) is an observer at the G20. However, it has been undergoing a reform process also aimed at increasing its engagement and efficacy on the international scene (Kagame 2017). The AU's goal is to reduce its financial dependence on external donors and develop its own institutional capacities, enabling it to take on a more ambitious and formal global role, including within the G20. The organization has also consolidated its capacity to promote common positions on transnational issues; the Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Outbreak is the latest example, which also saw Africa act early and develop instruments to help deal with the pandemic (African Union 2020).



PROPOSAL

G20 Informal dialogues: Increasing legitimacy and the role of regional organizations

COVID-19 places multilateral cooperation at a crossroads. The pandemic could sharpen the existing crisis of multilateralism as many countries have turned inward and focused on domestic short- and medium- term responses to the crisis. These recent developments unfold in a context where countries are already unable to individually cope with transnational problems and challenges, such as environmental degradation, human development, and infrastructural investments. COVID-19 has reiterated how national governments (particularly those facing financial and political weaknesses at home) often suffer from limited capacities to protect their citizens' livelihoods. Therefore, a post-pandemic scenario might present the opportunity to find new forms of global cooperation. Whether the crisis will represent a favorable occasion for enhanced global cooperation will depend on key actors that take a leadership role in forging coalitions and alliances.

In the case of COVID-19, the G20 has not played the same effective coordinating role it played in dealing with the 2008 financial crisis. Nevertheless, there is an opportunity for members of the group, who are committed to reforming the multilateral order, to take up the responsibility. This would entail European G20 members, South Africa (as the only permanent member from Africa), and the AU, which has observer status, spearheading a series of informal G20 dialogues to explore various options for the future of multilateralism in a changed global order.

These informal dialogues would be open to other G20 members, African and other developing countries, as well as actors who are committed to reforming and sustaining multilateralism. It could include policy-makers and experts from the G20 engagement groups. The G20's wide network of engagement groups (T20, S20, C20, L20, B20, and W20), which often draw experts from beyond the G20 states, can mobilize knowledge and perspectives from a wide range of relevant non-state actors. Critically, such an initiative would also increase the G20's legitimacy by enhancing its inclusivity in idea generation and agenda setting. The informality would be important to ensure a free flow of ideas unconstrained by concerns around national positioning, which often marks more formal multilateral settings.

Why should European and African actors play such a convening role within the G20? Both the European Union (EU) and the AU are committed to sustaining, reforming, and strengthening the rules-based global order. In their bilateral relations, cooperation on multilateralism has become more prominent in recent years (ETTG 2020). The EU is a significant global economic player, with the largest trading bloc and some of the world's most advanced economies. Africa, on the contrary, carries both significant economic and demographic potential, and includes some of the world's poorest nations. A new multilateral order cannot be crafted only by the most powerful nations if it is to carry legitimacy. The present climate also makes it difficult to reach an agreement within the formal multilateral institutions. However, informal dialogues on specific issues, such as trade, global development, or global finance (Riano 2020), may contribute to the evolution of incremental consensus on some of these crucial global institutional reforms.

On the African side, the AU reform agenda foresees a more strategic and stronger role for the continental organization in managing its relations with external partners and on the global stage, enabling its participation in such dialogues. The AU and the eight formally recognized Regional Economic Communities comprise a complex architecture that is aimed at pooling political, financial, and market resources (Vanheulekom, Byiers and Medinilla 2020). Regional arrangements enhance the effectiveness and negotiating power of Africa in global multilateral bodies. In addition, by avoiding fragmentation and helping national governments look beyond narrow national agendas, the AU could play a significant role in advancing African interests in a G20 informal dialogue on the future of multilateralism.

On the European side, the European Commission has re-launched the EU's commitment to protect and enhance a rules-based global order and has acknowledged the AU as another outspoken promoter of multilateralism (European Commission and External Action Service 2020). In 2020, the two organizations are restructuring their relations. This could be an appropriate moment for a reinvigorated AU-EU alliance working as a major driver for multilateral reform.

The case for an Africa–Europe caucus in the G20 to address consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic

The global development agenda has been a crucial part of the G20's objective after the 2008 financial crisis to ensure "inclusive growth", especially in the developing world. The EU and its member states are significant actors in this terrain. The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated the imperative of ensuring development for all, as transnational health challenges do not acknowledge borders and require a coordinated global response. As major donors will experience severe economic recession as a consequence of the global COVID-19 pandemic, it is likely that they would opt for reducing foreign aid budgets, reversing a positive trend that lasted for more than two decades (Kumar 2020). This may particularly impact European resources allocated to low-income countries, especially in basic services, such as health and education, that represent only 14% of the total EU aid budget (Manuel and Manea 2019).

Hence, a new multidimensional approach to development is needed. The European members of the G20 and South Africa could work together with the two African observers (AU and AUDA) on developing a G20 framework that more effectively evaluates its development agenda. They must aim for poverty eradication (the ultimate goal of EU's cooperation as well) and inequality reduction. Such a policy shift is even more urgent as a consequence of COVID-19, whose effects may exacerbate the pre-existing levels of poverty and inequality by further affecting the human development conditions of several states in the region. In this context, collaboration within the G20 could act as a legitimating and catalyzing coalition, possibly with other developing economies inside both formal and informal G20 meetings.

With this goal in mind, African and European stakeholders participating in the G20 could convene those actors still formally excluded—as the AU itself or the African Development Bank—from the forum. Thus, they would gather their proposals, especially on public health capacities, to allow for debt relief, and the exchange of best practices and expertise to cope with the pandemic. A first step could be for African and European stakeholders to push for the adoption of recommendations by President Cyril Ramaphosa, currently the Chairperson of the AU. These recommendations call for the mobilization of the international community to ensure a global guarantee on access to an effective vaccine, with particular attention to the needs of developing countries (UNAIDS 2020). Such a caucus, also involving representatives from the EU and the AU, could prove important in supporting regional governance structures. The AU would greatly gain in terms of recognition, not least within the G20. A similar enhanced dialogue developed during emergency could then be a fertile ground for broader future engagement on human development.

Within this new setting, the two Unions should follow up on the measures adopted so far, to coordinate a transformational response to the pandemic (Shiferaw and Mucchi 2020). The AU has adopted its own African Joint Strategy Against COVID-19 Outbreak, a set of guidelines for African governments. These guidelines concern strategies to cope with the health-related effects of COVID-19, coordinating their responses, and ensuring fair and affordable access to a future vaccine. The EU should increase its engagement on this matter. Increased coordination between the EU, its G20 members, South Africa as the only African G20 member, and the AU, could then drive the further incorporation of African (and other developing countries) interests in the G20 agenda. For example, debt relief measures could be extended into 2021, rather than the current agreement set to end in 2020. This would boost the G20's capacities to act as a pivotal platform setting the global agenda.

A new lifeline for G20 governance?

The severity of the current transnational challenges risks undermining the ability of multilateral institutions to cope with them. Furthermore, while the G20 as a club of systemically important countries was intended to be more capable to respond to global issues, this is now at stake, as G20 members face considerable challenges to come to a consensus on some of the issues. Despite these challenges, the G20 should take efforts at several levels. First, it is crucial to strengthen the G20's input legitimacy by expanding its reach toward a more structural engagement of non-member states and regional organizations. Second, it is essential to boost its role as a pivotal institutional platform, thus consolidating a hub-and-spoke structure with the G20 at its center. Finally, to ensure greater input legitimacy, the G20 must develop a more structured approach to engage on global public goods with a broad range of actors who fall outside the G20 membership (these could be both state and non-state actors). In this context, the G20 could become a platform for organizing informal dialogues bringing together experts from the engagement groups, the G20, and African policy-makers, to discuss reforms. A similar inclusive approach with a broader range of actors would also positively contribute to enhancing the G20's input legitimacy.

African and European partners hold a key position in facilitating these developments. They share key global challenges such as climate change and public health. Their cooperation could also be turned into a driver of reform within the G20 by facilitating broader participation in a forum that maintains a significant influence on decisions concerning global public goods. A stronger role for African countries in multilateral fora will be crucial to support governance structures and coordinate a response to the pandemic that includes sustainable social and economic models. In conclusion, a renovated "agency" for African countries in multilateral fora (de Carvalho, Gruzd, and Mutangadura 2019), eventually driving the involvement of other developing countries from other regions, will prove to be crucial. This would avoid past mistakes, increase the legitimacy of such institutions, and provide a more integrated and effective response to global crises.

Disclaimer

This policy brief was developed and written by the authors and has undergone a peer review process. The views and opinions expressed in this policy brief are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the authors' organizations or the T20 Secretariat.



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