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G20 AFRICAN UNION MEMBERSHIP AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

In the construction of global governance the entrance of the African Union (AU) as the permanent member of the Group of Twenty (G20) in September 2023 is a significant institutional development. For instance the African states have argued for decades that the economic institutions inefficiently and inadequately reflect the developmental, demographic, and the economic realities of the global south. The participation and the entry of African Union in the G20 introduces Africa with collective representation in a forum that has influence in the exercise of discussion in concerning global economic growth, financial stability, trade, climate finance, debt, taxation, development financing, and in the representation of the developing countries. The article provides with the argument that the membership of the African Union can enhance the representation and the decision making of the G20 and will also provide with strength to Africa's collective positioning in bargaining. However, policy influence cannot be guaranteed alone on institutional membership. The African union's capability and effectiveness will also depend on how well can it coordinate the interest of its other 55 member states, formulating a common negotiating position, the strengthening technical capacity, and translate G20 commitments into reforms in the institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). World Bank, and broader architecture. As of January 2025, the evidences suggests that African Union constitute an important opportunity for global governance and is also significant when it comes to reform- oriented global governance.

Keywords: African Union, G20, Global Economic Governance, Global South, International Financial Architecture, Debt Governance, Climate Finance, Africa

INTRODUCTION

The institutions and the decision-making arrangements has historically shaped the global economic governance in which the economies which are industrialized have exercised disproportionate influence in the agenda setting. The post second World War saw the emergence of the international financial organizations such as International Monetary fund (IMF), World Bank, etc. in the world economic order, at the other hand the G20 became one of the most influential informal forum for the international economic coordination. Despite the developed and emerging economies have gained greater importance in the world economy and representation, these decision-making power within global economic institutions have not reflected these changes. Therefor the under representation of Africa has remained a consistent issue in debates that are concerning the legitimacy and effectiveness of global governance.

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The inclusion of the African Union (AU) as the permanent member of the G20 at the New Delhi Summit in September 2023 shows the institutional response to this lack of representation. The African Union was formally welcomed as the permanent member of the G20 and this recognized the importance of Africa at global economy. The AU membership was also linked with the support for Agenda 2063, The G20 compact with Africa, and the initiative for Africa in the sphere of Industrialization in the New Delhi leaders declaration G20. (2023).

The importance of this development is much extended beyond institutional symbolism. The 55 other countries are represented by the African Union and therefor it also ensures the mechanism through which the continent can participate together at a platform where it can influence the economic policies through its discussions. It emphasizes that the participation of the African union could elevate the issues important to the continent which includes the climate change, migration and debt sustainability International Monetary Fund. (2023).

Thus the central question of the article is: How has the African Union's permanent membership in the G20 affected, and how can it further affect global governance?. The article argues that the AU has the potential to provide with strength to the representation of global governance through creating a collective African voice within the influential economic forum but it is also important that the impact should not be overstated. Institutional access and voice is created by membership but that influence requires institutional capacity, negotiation, consensus building and its implementation. The analysis is limited to developments available up to January 2025 deliberately. This temporal boundary is significant because the article is designed for submission in January 2025 and therefore does not incorporate subsequent development. This Study examines the period from the African Unions Admission in September 2023 through the G20's Brazilian presidency and Rio de Janeiro Leader's Summit in 2024.

THE G20 AND THE EVOLUTION OF GLOBAL ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE.

The Global economic management could no longer be effectively conducted through a narrow group of advanced economies so this led to the development and recognition of the G20. It's transition can be understood as a part of a wider shift towards more decentralized and plural form of global economic governance Kathuria and Kukreja (Eds.). (2019), Luckhurst (2017). Following the Asian financial crisis, the AU was established in 1999, initially it brought together the finance minister and central bank governors. It developed into a leader level forum after the global financial crisis in 2008 and became increasingly important for international economic coordination.

Unlike the IMF and world bank the G20 does not have the treaty- based institutional structure of organizations. The economic weight of it's members, political coordination, agenda setting, and peer pressure that derives its influence Ray et al. (2023). It largely operates through political coordination, consensus building, ministerial process, working groups, and the commitments made by it's members.

G20 was described as the premier for international economic cooperation, emphasized multilateralism, consensus and equal participation among the members G20. (2023) in the New Delhi Leader's declaration. The forum therefore occupies the reputation position, the entire economy is not formally governed by it , but it's political agreement can shape the priorities of institutions that do. The agenda of G20 has expanded substantially because the issues such as financial stability, development, climate change international taxation, digitization, health, food security, and energy have increasingly become the part of the G20 discussion. Likewise the members generate the opportunity to influence not only narrow economic policy but also the wider rules and the norms that construct global development.

Before the permanent membership of the African Union, the African interest were represented primarily by the individual members of the G20, particularly South Africa which also included the African states and institutions which were invited. Even if the individual African countries could raise the issues of the continent, their representation was fragmented. The institutional arrangement was changed by creating a formal collective African actor by the membership of the African Union.

AFRICAN UNION MEMBERSHIP: A NEW INSTITUTIONAL POSITION

The decision to include the African Union was taken in the G20 New Delhi Summit in September 2023. The G20 declaration welcomed the AU as the permanent member and also recognized that it's inclusion could lead to addressing the challenges of the contemporary global challenges. The declaration also connected AU membership to Agenda 2063 and existing G20 initiative that concerned Africa G20. (2023). The importance of this decision lies largely in the AU's collective character. Africa is not a single economic system; it's states are different to one another in terms of income, political system , economic structure, natural resources, trade relationship, debt positions, and monetary arrangements, yet there are several structural concern within the international economic system that they share. These concern include the high borrowing costs, limited fiscal space, vulnerability to external shocks, dependance on the commodity, inadequate infrastructure, difficulty in accessing developmental finance, and the concern of representation within the international financial institutions. The AU has an opportunity to convert individual national concern not a collective negotiating positions. The African Union itself used this opportunity in 2024 .

The officials of the African Union argues that permanent G20 membership could provide with stronger voice in global governance to Africa and emphasize the importance of coordinated African position on the reform of the financial architecture, multilateral development banks, international taxation and the illicit flow of the finance African Union Commission. (2024a), African Union Commission. (2024b). This clearly suggests that the membership of the African Union should not only be understood as inclusion in representation but as an institutional platform for sustained collective bargaining.

AU MEMBERSHIP AND THE REPRESENTATION OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

The representation of the global south is one of the most influential implication of the AU membership. The G20 already includes several emerging economies, but the inclusion of the African Union gives African continent a collective identity within the forum.

Through the international financial market, monetary policy, commodity prices, trade rules , climate policies, and debt condition the African economies have been affected indirectly which shows how important was its inclusion at world forum. Yet the African governments have historically had limited influence over some of the institutions through which these policies are shaped. The participation of the African Union can potentially reduce this existing representational gap. The AU can collectively coordinate the common priorities and advocate them together rather than 55 countries attempting to independently communicate their position through multiple channels. However representation should not be seen as similar to influence. The AU must reconcile differences among its member states, for example: The commodity- exporting states may have different priorities as compared to the diversifies economies; highly indebted states may prioritize debt restructuring differently from countries with stronger fiscal positions; and oil producing countries have different perspective on energy transition as compared with the countries that relies heavily on imported energy.

Consequently, the effectiveness of representation of African union depends on the ability of the organization to establish sufficiently common positions without excluding the national differences.

DEBT GOVERNANCE AND THE INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL ARCHITECTURE

On of the areas in which the African Union membership could have important effects is Debt Governance. For the African economies the debt vulnerability have become a major concern. The IMF reported in 2024 that at the end of 2023, 19 of 35 low-income countries in sub- Saharan Africa were either in debt distress or high risk of debt distress. Several African countries were also involved in restructuring process under the G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatment International Monetary Fund. (2024a).

Through initiative such as the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) and the common framework the G20 has already played an important role in international debt discussion. However, implementation challenges have shown the difficulty of coordinating credits with different creditors with different interests including traditional bilateral creditors, private creditors, and newer lenders. To participate in shaping more systematical discussion about the international debt architecture, the AU permanent membership creates a strategic opportunity for African governments. This can allow Africa to move from primarily recipient of debt- related policy decisions to become a participant in shaping the rules and mechanism through which debt problems are addressed.

As on of the areas in which the African Union intends to develop common positions the African union Commission has explicitly identified reform of debt-management mechanism. In 2024, AU leadership argued that the G20 could provide a platform for African countries to formulate common position that concerns the reform of global financial institutions, debt management, climate finance and international taxation African Union Commission. (2024a).

The potential outcome is therefore two folds. First: AU's membership can strengthen Africa's bargaining position in immediate debt negotiation. Second: It can contribute to longer-term reforms of the financial architecture.

Nevertheless, the constrains remain. The G20 cannot unilaterally determine the policies of the private creditors or international financial institutions. The cooperation among the creditors with different geopolitical and commercial interest is required in debt restructuring. Therefore, AU membership provides a negotiating platform but cannot by itself resolve structural debt vulnerability.

REFORM OF THE IMF AND THE BRETTON WOODS INSTITUTIONS

The IMF and World Bank remains at the center of the pillar of the finance system but their voting structure and arrangement of the institute have generated long debates about representation. The IMF recognized in 2024 that in the world economy , reforms concerning quota share were important for better reflecting changes in the relative positions of countries. It also highlights the creation of a third chair for sub- Saharan Africa on the IMF Executive Board as a development complementing the AU's new permanent G20 status International Monetary Fund. (2024b). G20 and Bretton Woods institutions are interconnected so this relationship is important. The members of the G20 posses considerable influence over global financial governance, although the G20 does not control the IMF formally. Political momentum for reform within international financial institutions can be created within the G20 discussions.

To advocate for reforms that increase African representation in international financial decision- making , the African Union can use its G20 position. African officials called for deeper reforms and argued that existing financial arrangements were not sufficient to meet the continent's development challenges African Union Commission. (2024b).

The key question is that whether the African Union can convert political advocacy into durable institutional change. That process will likely be slow because major reform require broader agreement among powerful shareholders. The presence of AU in the G20 strengthen the political legitimacy of African demands.

CLIMATE FINANCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

On of the major area where AU membership could affect global governance is the Climate finance. Despite having contributed relatively little to historical global emissions the African countries remain particularly vulnerable to climate change. Climate- related droughts, floods, desertification, food security, and infrastructure damage place additional pressure on already constrained public finance. The transition to low carbon economies require large scale financing thus climate policy is increasingly linked to economic governance. The issue is especially challenging to the developing economies that need to pursue economic growth while parallelly adapting to climate change.

The G20 has highly addressed climate finance and sustainable development. The IMF observed in 2024 that climate vulnerabilities weight disproportionately on Africa and emphasized the need for multilateral actions to address climate risk and support Africa's growth potential International Monetary Fund. (2024c).

AU participation can give strength to Africa's collective demand for predictable, accessible, and affordable climate finances. It also provide with a forum where the African government can argue that climate policies should take the accountability of development needs. This is important because the climate related policies in advance economies can have indirect affect on exports of Africa. Measures such as carbon pricing, environmental standards, and green industrial policies can create new opportunity but this may also create trade barrier if African producers lack the financial and technological capacity to adapt.

The African union can thus advocate a development- oriented approach to climate governance. Such an approach would connect climate finance with technology transfer, infrastructure investment, industrialization, and employment rather than treating climate policy as an issue that should be untouched.

INTERNATIONAL TAXATION AND ILLICIT FINANCIAL FLOW.

Another area in which AU membership strengthen African participation is International Taxation. The African countries face challenges associated with limited domestic revenue mobilization, avoidance of the tax, illicit financial flows, and the activities of the multinational corporation.

Dependence on external borrowing and aid can increase vulnerability to external economic conditions because the capacity to mobilize domestic resources is particularly important. Greater domestic revenue can support public investment in infrastructure, health, education and social protection. AU officials in 2024 emphasized the need for coordinated African positions on international tax architecture and the reduction of illicit financial flows African Union Commission. (2024b).

G20 participation provide such a platform through which Africa can influence discussions regarding global taxation standards. It can also enable the AU to advocate for tax arrangement that takes account of the interest of the economies that are developing. However, the effectiveness of this strategy depends heavily on technical expertise . International tax negotiation are complex and require substantial legal, economic, and institutional capacity. It is required for the African union to strengthen its technical teams and closely coordinate the finance ministries of African, regional economic communities, and the institutions such as the African Development Bank and African Export-Import Bank.

TRADE, INVESTMENT, AND AFRICAN INDUSTRIALIZATION

Trade and investment together form another important dimension of AU participation in the G20. In global value chain Africa has occupied a weak value chain historically, with many economies depending heavily on exports of primary commodities. The African Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides with an important framework for changing this structure by promoting continental trade integration and industrialization. The G20's New Delhi Declaration ensured support for Africa's development aspiration under Agenda 2063 and specifically referred to initiatives supporting industrialization of Africa G20. (2023). With the objective of AfCFTA membership of AU can strengthen efforts of connect G20 economic initiatives which includes attracting investment into African manufacturing, infrastructure, digital services, logistics, renewable energy, and value-added production.

The potential developmental goals are considerable. Reduction in commodity dependence, increase employment, and improved integration can lead to great investment in African productivity into global supply chain. It can also make Africa a more important participant in global trade rather than primarily a supplier of raw material At the same time the African government should ensure that investment demonstrably contribute to development rather than simply reproducing extractive patterns. By emphasizing infrastructure, industrialization, skills, transfer of technology, and sustainable investment, G20 can support this process. The G20 along with Africa also provides an existing mechanism through which investment related reform can be discussed. The World Bank documentation of the compact indicates that its institutional framework operates through the G20 Finance and an Africa Advisory Group World Bank. (2024).

African union's membership could therefore provide political coherence between continental African priorities and G20 investment initiative.

DEVELOPMENT FINANCE AND MULTILATERAL DEVELOPMENT BANKS

The central to financing infrastructure and development is multilateral development bank (MDBs). However, The African countries have frequently argued that the scale and terms of available financing remain inadequate related to the needs of development. The AU has repeatedly advocated reforms aimed at creating stronger, more effective, and better capitalized multilateral development institutions. African officials have emphasized the importance of securing greater concessional financing and reforming the financial architecture African Union Commission. (2024b).

A significant platform is provided by G20 for this discussion because many major shareholders of the World Bank and other MDBs are G20 members. Therefore the G20 can generate political support for change in in MDBs capital structure, lending instruments, risk framework and financing priorities. One particular issue is the cost of borrowing.

The African countries often face higher borrowing costs than advanced economies because investors see them as riskier. This can result in a cycle in which expensive borrowing reduces fiscal space and constrains development investment. Within the policy debates, African participation in the G20 can help make these structure financially inequalities more visible. However, addressing them requires more than political advocacy. It may require reforms to credit- rating system, guarantees, risk sharing mechanism, concessional lending, and MDB capital adequacy frameworks.

FOOD SECURITY AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

Food prices are affected by international trade, climate conditions, energy costs, conflict, and supply chain disruption thus this has lead to food security importance in global governance. African countries have become vulnerable because many countries remain dependent on food imports while facing agriculture pressure due to climate. The G20 has recognized the food and energy security as significant global economic challenge. Particularly for the developing and least developed countries the New Delhi Declaration emphasized food and energy security and highlighted the importance of ensuring access to food and fertilizers G20. (2023).

African Union's participation can contribute an African perspective to this discussion. Rather than just chasing the food security exclusively through emergency assistance, Africa can advocate for investment in agricultural productivity, irrigation, infrastructure, fertilizer production, regional trade, transportation and storage.

The G20 can potentially support such an approach by connecting African development priorities with the international investment and financing mechanism.

DIGITAL ECONOMY AND TECHNOLOGICAL GOVERNANCE

One of the increasingly consequential components of the global governance is the digital transformation. The growth of the artificial intelligence, digital financial services, digital trade, and date based economies create both opportunities and risk for the developing countries.

Due to the young population of the African countries, they have significant potential to benefit from the digitization and expanding digital market. However, digital divides in infrastructure, skills, financing and connectivity remains important.

The growing attention of the G20 towards the digital transformation and artificial intelligence provides with an opportunity for the AU to advocate effectively for greater technology access, digital infrastructure investment, capacity building and inclusive digital governance.

From the perspective of an economic governance this is important because competitiveness is highly influences by the increasing technological rules. The developing countries may become rule takers than the rule makers in emerging technological regimes if they are excluded from the development of international standards. African Union can therefore contribute to more inclusive approach to technological governance. Nevertheless, to take the advantage of this opportunity the continent will require investment in digital infrastructure, education, cyber security, data governance and research capacity.

INSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL CHALLENGES

Several structural limitations must be acknowledged despite the potential benefits of the African Union.

1) Diversity within Africa

The African Union represents 55 countries which have significant differences in economic structure , political priority, and development levels. Building a common position on highly technical economic questions can therefore be difficult. For Example: The countries dependent on fossil-fuels exports may have different position on climate transition from countries that are heavily dependent on climate finance. Similarly, creditor and debtor state may have different priorities that concern to debt governance.

The African Union's challenge is to develop positions that reflect continental interest while also allowing with sufficient flexibility to individual state.

2) Limited Institutional Capacity

Specialized expertise is required for effective G20 participation. Complicated issues such as financial regulation, taxation, trade law, climate economics, debt restructuring, development finance, and monetary policies are involved in global economic negotiation. The AU must therefore invest in technical capacity. The permanent membership without sufficient analytical and negotiating can limit its influence.

3) The Implementation Gap

Another major challenge that is concerned is the implementation. The declaration of the G20 are generally political commitments rather than binding treaties. Thus their effect depends on national implementation and cooperation with other international organization.

Consequently, The African Union must develop mechanism for monitoring G20 commitments and evaluation whether they generate concrete benefits for African Economies.

4) Fragmentation of African Interests

Diverse relationship is prevalent with external powers by African states. China, The European union, The united states, India, Gulf state, and other actors pay important role in African trade and investment. Sometimes these relations can produce different national priorities.

The African Union will therefore need to preserve strategic autonomy and avoid allowing external geopolitical competition to fragment its position in G20.

THE BRAZILIAN G20 PRESIDENCY AND THE AU'S FIRST FULL YEAR

The AU's permanent membership was initially tested during the Brazilian G20 Presidency in 2024. The Rio de Janeiro Leader's Declaration welcomed the AU as a full member and stated that Africa's voice should be amplified within the G20 and the other international forum. It also ensured supports for African development, the compact with Africa, industrialization and Agenda 2063 G20 Brazil. (2024).

This development is important because it indicates that AU membership was not limited to the symbolism of the New Delhi Summit 2024. During 2024, African representation became involved in the regular functioning of the G20. The IMFs analysis similarly treated the AU as an important participant in discussion regarding global economic stability, climate change, governance reforms, and Africa's growth prospect International Monetary Fund. (2024c). The first year depicted that institutional inclusion should be understood as process rather than a complete transformation.

The African Union influence depends on whether African priorities become a part of G20 policy commitments and subsequently influence international institutions.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The African union should consider several policy measures to maximize the benefits of G20 membership.

First, linking the AU commission, member states, regional economic communities, African financial institutions, and technical experts, AU should establish a strong and permanent G20 coordination mechanism.

Second, before the major G20 meetings the African states should formulate common negotiating positions. This would allow the African to negotiate from a collective rather than fragmented positions.

Third, the AU should prioritize sustained reform of the financial architecture, particularly debt restructuring, concessional finance, MDB reform, and African representation in international financial regulations.

Fourth, the AU should strengthen its technical expertise in international taxation, climate finance, trade, digital governance, and financial regulation.

Fifth, the AU should establish a mechanism for monitoring G20 commitments affecting Africa. Such a mechanism could assess whether political declarations produce measurable outcomes.

Sixth, the Au should strengthen the institutional connection between G20 engagement and Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA. G20 commitments should contribute directly to continental objectives relating to industrialization, infrastructure, intra- African trade, employment and sustainable development.

Finally, African governments should use G20 membership to not only seek additional assistance but to advocate for changes in the structure so that it can increase Africa's capacity to generate investment, mobilize domestic resources, participate in global value chain, and shape international economic rules.

CONCLUSION

In the evolution of the global governance the African Union's permanent membership in G20 constitutes a significant development. The decision which was taken in the 2023 New Delhi Summit changes the institutional position of Africa within one of the world's most influential forum for economic cooperation. Rather than relying only on the African states to articulate continental concerns, the AU now possess a permanent collective platform.

The importance of this development is evident in the sphere such as debt governance, reform of the financial architecture, climate finance, taxation, development finance, trade, industrialization, food security and digital transformation. These are the exact areas in which African economies face structural challenges and in which the international decisions can have major domestic influences.

The evidences available by January 2025 suggests that AU membership has already improved Africa's collective representation in global discussion. The 2023 New Delhi Declaration connected AU membership with African development priorities while the 2024 declaration ensured that Africa's voice should be amplified in the G20 and the international forum.

However, representation should not be confused with transformation. The AU's permanent membership creates a strategic opportunity rather than guaranteeing an outcome. The influence of the institution depends on its capacity to coordinate 55 members states, formulate common position, develop technical expertise, negotiate effectively and ensure implementation.

The most important long term implication is not that the AU has obtained a seat at the table, but now Africa has an institutional opportunity to participate more systematically in shaping the rules of the global governance. If it is efficiently utilized, G20 membership can contribute to a more representative and inclusive international economic order. If the coordination and implementation remain weak, the membership may remain primarily symbolic.

As of January 2025, it is therefore more appropriate to characterize AU membership as an important institutional opening rather than complete institutional transformation of global governance. Its ultimate significance depends upon whether Africa can convert representation into bargaining power and from this to institutional and reform in the policy.

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