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## **Concept Note**

**A VIRTUAL Policy Roundtable on**

**AFRICAN UNION (AU) PERMANENT MEMBERSHIP  
TRANSFORMING G20 TO G21: BENEFITS AND  
CHALLENGES**

**16 November 2023**

# **AFRICAN UNION (AU) PERMANENT MEMBERSHIP TRANSFORMING G20 TO G21: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES**

## **1. Background**

The Group of 20 (G20), established in 1999, is an international cum inter-governmental organization, with the objective of bringing together the most important developed and emerging economies in the world. The G20 is a similar organization to the G7, comprising seven members of the most advanced economies in the world. Their decisions and actions influence the political, economic, and socio-cultural life of every member of the global village. No African country is a member of the G7. While the Russian Federation was invited in 2014 to the organisation, it left in 2017.

The G20 brings together, 19 countries including G7 members, European Union (EU), Russia, and South Africa, which is the only African country in the forum. The G20 has become an important interactive platform for multicultural and bilateral discussions to seek common ground on global issues, especially on financial and economic issues since 2008. In addition, the group invites countries as guests occasionally, which is the case with the African Union (AU), represented by the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD (AUDA NEPAD) as a permanent guest.

On 09 September, the AU became a permanent member of the G20 like the European Union (EU), transforming the organization to G21. The declaration of the AU as a permanent member by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi reflects the willingness of other G20 world leaders like the US, France, and Germany, to extend membership to the most decisive African agency in global affairs. Prior to its membership, the AU and other partners, such as India and the US, have called for the inclusion of the regional organization in the G20. During the 2022 meeting of the G20 in Indonesia, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, reinforced the importance of AU permanent membership.

It is worth noting that five (5) of the G20 members are also members of BRICS, which is strategically positioning itself as the voice of the Global South. The August 2023 BRICS Summit hosted and chaired by South Africa is crucial as many countries in the global South, some of which are members of the G20 have registered their wish to join the BRICS. The BRICS meeting in South Africa puts more pressure on the reform of global institutions of governance and the need to integrate Africa and the Global South into the mainstream of these organisations.

The G20's original focus was on financial, trade, and economic issues but has now delved into matters of climate change, environment, anti-corruption, migration, and security. Its work is divided into two tracks: Finance track and Sherpa track which has Thematic Experts working teams made of representatives from relevant Ministries and Agencies of member states, guest countries, and organizations. The group also established the Engagement Groups which is made up of civil society actors, parliamentarians, think tanks, women, youth, labour, businesses, and researchers of the G20 countries. These teams meet occasionally in line with the agenda set by the annual summit. These teams ensure institutional continuity as well as achieving the goals set by past Summits while preparing for the current summit. Extraordinary summits are also called by the current presidency when urgent issues arise. Thus, the African Union Commission (AUC), as a permanent member and future rotated Chair, must be ready to act as an effective member, and also be prepared to host the Tracks Meetings and Summits in the immediate future.

## **2. The Benefits of AU Joining the G20**

The main objectives of the G20 are to coordinate policies among its members in the quest to achieve global economic stability and sustainable growth; promote financial regulations that reduce risks and prevent future financial crises; and create a new international financial architecture. The G20 membership, which is broad and fairly representative, collectively accounted for 80% of the global GDP, 75% of world trade, and over 60% of the world population. This must have changed as the AU became a permanent member in terms of GDP and population. The Virtual Advisory Group meeting was initiated with Italy as host, for the endorsement of the Paris Summit of Financing African Economies. In early 2016, the G20 summit endorsed the Chinese initiative to support African industrialization, while Germany established the G20 Compact with Africa. The Senegalese President Macky Sall, one of the lead advocates for full permanent AU membership, will enhance G20 credibility, traction, and representativeness, and strengthen the governance of global issues.

## **3. Pitfalls**

Some commentators have raised the concerns of many EU member countries who fear that admitting the AU as a permanent member will open Pandora's box of new membership thereby making the Group unwieldy. Some also argue that AU member countries, unlike the EU members, do not share common norms and values and therefore will find it difficult to arrive at a common position on many of the Agenda of the Group. While this seems valid, the AU and African countries have demonstrated their common positions on issues such as climate change, peace and security, and the urgency to reform the global institutions. Others also foresee the possibility of a clash of interests between the AU and other global powers. Recent global events have underscored the validity of this perspective, revealing a lack of trust in Western countries, particularly those dominating the G20. However, countries like China and Russia have emerged as significant contributors, offering essential resources and expertise to help African nations overcome their developmental challenges without imposing restrictive conditions. This shift highlights a changing dynamic in international relations, emphasizing the importance of diverse partnerships and collaboration beyond traditional Western alliances.

## **4. The Need for a Policy Roundtable**

As the AU joins the G20, it becomes imperative for the roundtable to add innovative policy answers to:

1. What lessons can the AU learn from the EU experience in G20 for its effective participation?
2. How can South Africa and AUDA-NEPAD experience in the G20 provide a solid foundation for AU permanent membership?
3. How will the AU innovate the present and future policy coordination mechanism, with RECs and member states towards presenting a common voice on the two tracks and at the summit?
4. How might the AUC organize itself to ensure its effective and meaningful participation in the G20?
5. Which Institutions and officials will take the lead at the Summit in terms of continuity?
6. How will the AU maximize its interests and agenda at the G20 for the benefit of its 55 member countries?
7. Can this membership help to fast-track AU integration, including strengthening the African free trade agreement?

## **5. Objectives of the Roundtable**

The objectives of the Roundtable are to:

1. Provide a platform for regional actors, including policymakers, civil society organisations, think tanks, academia, and stakeholders involved in African peace and development, to share their insights on AU membership. This includes discussing potential benefits and challenges associated with AU's participation in the G20.
2. Extract valuable insights from the experiences of the EU, South Africa, and AUDA-NEPAD as current members and observers of the G20. Understanding these experiences can provide practical knowledge and lessons for the AU's involvement in the G20.
3. Explore strategies for the AU to establish a policy coordination mechanism to unify positions on both tracks of discussion within the G20 and during the summit, ensuring a cohesive and influential African voice.
4. Propose specific and actionable priority issues to guide the AU's agenda at the G20 summit, ensuring that African interests are effectively represented and addressed on the global stage.

## **6. Outcome of the Roundtable**

1. Policy briefs and newspaper editorials, with recommendations for regional actors, including the AU President and AUC Chair. Second,
2. Establishing an ECOSSOC-led observatory on AU in G20.
3. Developing a mechanism for arriving at common positions on Global thematic issues.

## **7. Date of Roundtable**

The meeting is scheduled to be held on 16 November 2023.