

## T20 AFRICA HIGH-LEVEL POLICY DIALOGUE

Strengthening African Agency in the G20 within the Emerging Global Order

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### CONCEPT NOTE



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associated with  
**UNISA**



**IPATC**  
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THOUGHT AND CONVERSATION



## 1. Introduction

The concept note aims to develop an indicative thematic and topical agenda for high-level African dialogue among concerned representatives from the continent. Africa's participation in the G20 offers the opportunity to amplify the voices of Africans and reiterate its commitment to reform the institution of global governance and international financial architecture. The meeting seeks to strengthen the African Union's (AU) role within the G20 and enhance Africa's influence in global decision-making by examining the strategic and normative challenges and opportunities presented by a rapidly changing global order. By stimulating robust policy dialogues, this initiative seeks to generate well-informed, Africa-centric policy recommendations that address the continent's priorities, including economic growth, sustainable development, and global governance engagements. Bringing together leading African think tanks, academics, policymakers, and international experts ensures that Africa's voice is unified, strategic, and impactful in shaping G20 discussions. This collaboration will facilitate knowledge exchange, bridge policy gaps, and ensure that Africa's development agenda is integrated into global policy frameworks for inclusive and sustainable growth. This dialogue will be informed by certain contextual factors and substantive considerations in this concept note.

## 2. Context

The African Union (AU) was admitted to the G20 as a regional organisation and African agency at the leaders' summit in Delhi, India, in 2023. As such, and after the European Union (EU), the AU becomes the second regional representative in the G20. This membership offers great strategic and diplomatic opportunities as well as political, institutional, policy and normative challenges since the AU will be representing the collective interests of its 55 membership states in an informal forum that has become the quintessential steering mechanism for issue areas affecting the global commons. How the AU projects African interests and navigates its way through shifting topical emphases and power configurations in G20 deliberations will be tested in the crucible of divergent ideological orientations and divisive geopolitical dynamics in the group's membership.

This is compounded by a multilateral and global governance landscape that has become more volatile, uncertain, fragmented, and complex, characterised, inter alia, by rising military tensions; disruptive trade and commercial relations; growing protectionism and new forms of neo-mercantilism; insidious environmental degradation due to climate change; and increasing inequalities between rich and poor countries. Hence the question of how Africa can strategically engage in this emerging global order that is upending conventional wisdom and approaches.

These geopolitical features and dynamics directly affect the functional anatomy of the G20. Besides the two regional organisations, the G20 membership is made up of the seven industrialised and developed Western countries of the geographic and conceptual Global North made up of the G7 and 12 countries of the geographic and conceptual Global South that represent a mix of emerging and rising powers and others which would be generally classified as developing countries. The BRICS nations—Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa—form a key bloc within the G20, where South Africa remains the only African member. As the

2025 summit host, South Africa must strategically align with the AU to strengthen its voice in the G20. This requires harmonization of policy and institutional linkages. The November 2024 summit in Brazil presented a crucial opportunity to define Africa's tactical and strategic positions, shaping the 2025 agenda to advance the continent's growth, democracy, and security in global decision-making.

Since its initial convening to address the structural imbalances in the global economy due to the 2007/2008 financial crisis, the G20's ambit of concerns has become more diverse and complex over the status of its 18 summits of leaders. Thus, G20 proceedings and deliberations have expanded and become more heterodox to include climate and energy, poverty and hunger, trade equity, development finance, food insecurity, global economic governance, debt sustainability, and digital transformation. Most of these issues, which are the focal points of the AU's Agenda 2063, are ingrained in South Africa's theme – Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability – as the country assumes the Presidency of the G20.

### 3. Africa's Development Challenges in a changing global order

Africa faces an increasingly unpredictable global landscape that challenges its growth, development, and integration under Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). Structural vulnerabilities in global economic governance—marked by erratic systems, weak regulations, and unequal institutional outcomes—further complicate progress. The continent's development has been slowed by erratic SDG implementation, compounded by COVID-19, the Russia-Ukraine war, and climate change. Without urgent action, 492 million Africans could face extreme poverty by 2030. Currently, 35.5% of Africans live below the international poverty line of \$1.90 per day. Reducing illicit financial flows—estimated at \$90 billion annually—could significantly improve domestic resource mobilization, ensuring more stable fiscal and financial liquidity. Strengthening governance, enhancing economic resilience, and curbing financial leakages are critical to securing sustainable development and poverty reduction across the continent. Thus, how can Africa strengthen domestic resource mobilization to secure stable fiscal and financial liquidity, advancing SDG and Agenda 2063 goals through strategic policies?

### 4. Specific Themes of Discussion

- i. **Africa's Role in the Global order:** African countries, inspired by the ambitious goals of AU Agenda 2063 to achieve continental unity and strengthen their global influence, are well positioned to leverage their G20 membership to drive global governance reform in an age of transformational change. Against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving global order, this session will examine how Africa can leverage its strategic objective of accelerating Agenda 2063's implementation, including through South Africa's G20 presidency, to actively engage and shape the emerging global order guided by the themes of inter alia solidarity, equality, and sustainability. Drawing on the experience of African ambassadors and senior policymakers, the discussion will explore how Africa can strategically shape the global order in the twenty-first century.



- ii. Multilateralism, International Trade and Investment:** The AU's engagement with the G20 is crucial for strengthening global economic governance and enhancing the AU's institutional coherence and effectiveness. Crucially, this must be related to reforming international financial institutions, improving the efficacy and reliability of multilateral development banks, and seeking relief from an onerous debt burden to drive continental growth and development. It is imperative to examine the role of Africa in global governance and the impact of multilateral policies on the continent. How can Africa shape the reform of global governance institutions and advocate for trade and investment policies that support its development goals?
- iii. Democracy, Governance, and Economic Development:** African countries continue to experience governance deficits and democratic reversals, manifesting in resource mismanagement, poor economic performances and military coups. Most of Africa's economies are comprised of 35 least-developed countries suffering major macroeconomic dysfunctions of constrained growth. This is mainly due to low factor accumulation in physical and human capital exacerbated by poor productivity and labour absorption due to the rentier nature of the economic activity. These challenges point to the importance of macroeconomic stability and the mobilisation of domestic and external sources of finance as prerequisites for growth and employment. It becomes pertinent to devise effective strategies for sustainable democratic governance, economic growth and development in Africa.
- iv. Social Cohesion, Inclusive Development and Employment:** Africa has the world's youngest population, with over 400 million youth aged 15–35. However, women and youth face persistent exclusion, limiting economic opportunities and increasing social risks. Wealth inequalities are even more pronounced, with the 10% richest accounting for almost 70% of total wealth, more than double that of the bottom 90%. High levels of inequality negatively impact employment and job creation, hindering poverty reduction efforts in the context of the SDGs. For instance, while the AfCFTA promises significant economic opportunities for African countries, those in the informal sector, small-scale farmers, women and labour groups—a large portion of the population in many African countries—are not adequately protected within the free trade framework. Thus, in what ways can Africa promote solidarity and sustainable practices to ensure equitable growth and social stability across Africa?
- v. Digital Transformation:** Digital technology is vital for Africa's growth, impacting all SDGs and offering less developed countries (LDCs) a path beyond traditional development. However, a widening digital divide hinders progress. The 2020 SDG-9 target for universal, affordable internet access in LDCs remains unmet, while 70% of Africa's manufacturing still relies on analogue technology. New digital-driven green technologies, expected to grow from \$1.5 trillion to \$9.5 trillion by 2030, present significant opportunities. Fast-tracking the WTO-World Bank Digital Trade for Africa initiative and strengthening the AU's Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030) will be key to attracting investment and accelerating Africa's transition into a digital economy. How can Africa leverage digital technology (4IR and AI) while building capacity to implement the International Labour Organisations' (ILO) Future of Work recommendations for sustainable development?
- vi. Debt and External Development Finance:** Africa remains heavily reliant on primary commodities for exports, making it vulnerable to market fluctuations, price volatility, and declining global demand—particularly from China's economic shift. Limited access to

finance, inefficient transport networks, and weak private sectors further hinder Africa's participation in global and regional supply chains. High transaction costs, poor infrastructure, and non-tariff barriers exacerbate these challenges. It is crucial to leverage the G20 to address these trade inefficiencies, promoting AfCFTA, a trade bloc uniting 1.3 billion people with a \$3.4 trillion gross domestic product (GDP). The AfCFTA's Guided Trade Initiative and Adjustment Fund aim to drive economic diversification, boost private sector engagement, and mitigate short-term disruptions, strengthening Africa's role in global trade.

**vii. Peace and Security:** Five of the 11 UN peacekeeping operations are in Africa. Conflicts and insecurity in Africa have worsened since 2024, with escalating wars in Sudan, rising Rwanda-DRC tensions, expanding terrorism and resource conflicts, and increasing military coups and militancy in the Sahel. The Ethiopia-Somaliland deal has heightened Ethiopia-Somalia tensions. These crises, which have led to alarming losses of lives and property, have impeded on developmental initiatives across the continent. Both global and regional peace and security frameworks have failed to ensure global peace and security. The AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC) needs recalibrating to deliver regional stability, prevent conflicts, and ensure sustainable peace across the continent, which aligns with the 'Silencing the Guns' initiatives of the AU. What are the pathways to global and African sustainable peace and stability?

**viii. Rethinking Africa's Agency:** Taking stock of the preceding themes and discussions, this theme will consider a forward-looking African approach to shaping the emerging global order. It will provide an opportunity to rethink Africa's agency in addressing the continent's challenges and global agenda. As such, the session will explore how Africa can engage in a world that is undergoing significant structural transformation across multiple domains. This has increased the level of complexity in multilateral cooperation, particularly in response to key global challenges including pandemics, governance of new technologies, climate change, underdevelopment, peace and security. For Africa, the growing complexities and the exponential pace of change pose distinct policy questions in shaping the continent's future and achieving its developmental aspirations captured by marquee policy frameworks epitomized by the Agenda 2063. As more conventional approaches to multilateral cooperation shift toward more competition, Africa must position itself to develop more endogenous capabilities to play a significant role in shaping multilateral cooperation while also simultaneously building the structural conditions necessary to realize its developmental aspirations. This panel will thus examine the influence of increasing complexity in multilateral cooperation and explores innovative strategies that Africa can develop and adopt to strengthen its endogenous capabilities to better navigate these dynamics.

**ix. Climate Change Responses and Sustainability:** Climate change threatens Africa's ability to achieve the SDGs, drive economic growth, and maintain peace and security. The G20 must urgently address climate-induced challenges, particularly in food security, housing, and climate mitigation, adaptation and finance. Endemic poverty, weak infrastructure, and conflicts leave the continent ill-equipped to respond effectively. The G20 has called for accelerated green industrial strategies backed by financial reforms, as Africa requires \$13 billion annually for climate action. Since G20 nations contribute 80% of emissions compared to Africa's 3.8%, effective climate financing and sustainable solutions are critical. How can the G20 platform be leveraged to realise this lofty objective, particularly in the existing

environment where multilateral responses to climate are under strain? How, in turn, can the G20 climate agenda be leveraged to promote successful outcomes for Africa and the world at the 30th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be hosted in November 2025 by Brazil?

The event will convene a Futures Literacy Panel as part of the T-20 African Dialogue event, which aims to generate and support high-level African dialogue among concerned representatives from the continent.

The Futures Literacy Panel will play a pivotal role in the T20 African Dialogue by amplifying African voices, stimulating robust policy discussions, and generating well-informed, Africa-centric policy recommendations. This panel will address Africa's priorities, including economic growth, sustainable development, and global governance reforms. Futures Literacy is a valuable approach for acknowledging and addressing the complexity of current global environments and their implications for Africa. It facilitates a participatory dialogue that broadens options for strategic planning, decision-making, and action by considering multiple futures possibilities for the African continent. The panel will offer insights and reflections on emerging opportunities and challenges, inspiring fresh thinking and new ideas for achieving the African futures we envision.

Given the critical importance of 2025, with South Africa hosting the G20 and the AU as a newly admitted G20 member since 2023, the Futures Literacy Panel provides an opportune platform to advance the continent's growth, democracy, and security in global decision-making. The objectives of the panel include convening multi-stakeholders to discuss Africa's role in addressing global challenges such as climate change, economic inequality, and technological transformations. It will utilize futures thinking and foresight methodologies to envisage multiple potential pathways for African futures, informing beneficial present-day decision-making and strategic actions. Additionally, the panel aims to support the AU and South Africa's strategic positioning within the G20 and broader multilateral frameworks, strengthening collaboration and enhancing partnerships among multi-stakeholders to support their strategic engagements in the shifting global order.

## 5. Objectives of the Dialogue

Addressing regional and global issues: Develop a strategic African approach to global and regional governance, outlining pathways to achieve continental objectives and policy recommendations for addressing global challenges impacting Africa

- i. **Amplify African Voices:** Ensure African perspectives are well-represented in global policy dialogues, particularly within the G20 framework.
- ii. **Promote Policy Dialogue:** Facilitate discussions among African think tanks, academics, and policymakers on key global issues affecting Africa.

- iii. **Enhance Collaboration:** Strengthen partnerships between African think tanks and international counterparts, fostering knowledge exchange and collaborative research.
- iv. **Support AU's G20 Agenda:** Provide intellectual and policy support for the AU's agenda at the G20, ensuring that African priorities are effectively communicated and advocated.
- v. **Strengthen South Africa's G20 Agenda:** Create the platform to enhance the attainment of South Africa's theme for G20.

## 6. Expected Outcomes:

- i. **Policy Briefs:** Comprehensive policy briefs that reflect African perspectives on key global issues.
- ii. **Policy Papers and Outcome Document:** Concrete policy recommendations for policymakers to address global challenges impacting Africa.
- iii. **Enhanced Collaboration:** Strengthened networks and partnerships among African and international think tanks and academic institutions.
- iv. **Increased Visibility:** Greater visibility for African think tanks and their contributions to global policy dialogues.

## 7. Format of the Policy Dialogue

The programme/sessions will include dynamic and interactive elements such as Keynote Addresses, Panel Discussions, and Networking Sessions.

