



# Africa Needs its own 'G-Club' to Meet the Challenges at Home and Globally

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Africa's major powers should form a club to exchange views on continental challenges, develop a common understanding and agree on initiatives and policies.
- The most important criteria for membership are effectiveness and capability but each region should be represented by at least one country.
- To achieve the necessary flexibility, the club should have no more than six members. South Africa and Nigeria should definitely be included, with Angola, Ethiopia and Kenya. If North Africa must be represented, then Egypt should be the sixth.
- South Africa and Nigeria should take the lead in forming the club. A first step would be to invite other leading African powers to a side-event at the next meeting of the Nigerian–South African Bi-National Commission.

Stefan Mair<sup>1</sup>

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Forming 'clubs of states' to resolve common problems is proving an effective global alternative to the multilateral institutions of yesteryear. Organisations with labels like G20 and G8 are developing solutions that have eluded their formal, ineffective and reform-resisting counterparts.

So far Africa has not followed suit. But it is time that it dropped its commitment to equality among states and did so. South Africa and Nigeria are the two countries that should lead the move for an A5 Club that will help the continent to meet its own challenges and present a more powerful voice internationally.

### INTRODUCTION

The ineffectiveness and resistance to reform of formal multilateral institutions is encouraging a boom in informal 'clubs of state'. These clubs — usually identified by the letter 'G' and a number — have become increasingly significant in recent years and are fulfilling functions that their formal counterparts can seldom achieve. Thus there was a G20 summit in Pittsburgh in September 2009 and a G8 meeting in L'Aquila in June and an earlier G20 in London.

These clubs flourish because they provide the flexibility and informality that enables participants to exchange views on developments and challenges, develop common understandings, and build consensus on initiatives and policies. They operate under conditions a multilateral institution could hardly accept. Being exclusive means they can be small enough to encourage informality. And because they are not seeking formal negotiated outcomes, consensus is easier to reach. Their emergence has

been spurred by the inability of multilateral institutions, established after the Second World War, to adapt to the emergence of new powers in the 1970s and 1980s (Japan and Germany) and at the end of the Cold War (China, India and Brazil). Neither the United Nations Security Council nor the International Monetary Fund board reflect actual power configurations today. Finally, countries prefer forming clubs of the like-minded. The original G7 represented not just big economies but democratic, market-oriented nations.

### AFRICA'S NEED FOR CLUB GOVERNANCE

Considering why state clubs are thriving world wide, it is surprising that Africa has none. The challenges confronting the continent call for informal and flexible exchanges and joint initiatives. But rivalries between its major powers and ineffective consensus-building encourage weak compromises in the African Union (AU) and regional organisations, delaying important action on political and economic challenges. Though the AU is to a degree a post-Cold War institution, it nevertheless fails to reflect the power relations on the continent. It still tends to prioritise equality among states over effectiveness. It created a Peace and Security Council that provides for semi-permanent membership but fell short of ensuring that the most powerful country, South Africa, was continuously represented.

The idea of club governance is not alien to Africa. The five countries that pushed the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) forward were nothing but a club of like-minded countries. They failed because this exclusive club was forced to subject itself to the inclusive AU and because they were not like-minded enough to carry them through the challenges Nepad began to face after its adoption. The enormous differences between the political systems of the major powers will also define narrow limits for an African club of like-minded countries in the near future. Yet a club based on effectiveness and capabilities would be more likely to succeed. What Africa

desperately needs is a group of countries that can take joint action to end violent conflicts, stabilise failing states, fight warlords and organised crime and agree on regional economic initiatives.

Moreover, such a group could steer political processes in the AU and represent Africa globally. The question of who represents Africa in an expanded G8 or in the G20 has become more pressing — at least for Africans. For other members of these clubs the answer has been easy so far: Let's invite South Africa. Though it is not as big and influential as most of the members, it is at least the biggest economy in Africa, has a democratically elected government and an administrative capacity which promises at least a minimum of effectiveness. But such a solution is hardly acceptable to other African governments. They still see South Africa as a hegemonic power whose interests and values are closer to the Western world. But exclusive clubs will be unlikely to accept more than one or two African members — at least as long as the continent's relevance in world affairs is negligible. One solution would be to have a single representative from a club backed by other regional powers — a country that can rightfully claim to represent leading states and effective forces on the continent.

### POTENTIAL MEMBERS

Coping with the challenges of Africa and giving Africans a voice in international affairs is a huge agenda. It means that the most relevant criteria for membership of this club should be effectiveness and power resources — not democratic legitimacy. Nevertheless, the members of such a club have to be acceptable to other powers and state clubs in the world. They must have a certain degree of legitimacy. One factor that provides for that is output-legitimacy, i.e. effectiveness in creating transnational public goods. Of course such a club lacks democratic legitimacy — its members are not elected. But it could compensate for that by ensuring fairly equal regional representation.

The need for an effective club of African states is obvious and the formula for its composition is clear: It has to incorporate the most powerful

and capable states and at least one country in each region. But it also has to be small enough to allow for informal consultations and flexibility. The difficult task is to reduce a short-list of 12 more-or-less plausible candidates — Egypt, Algeria, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Angola and South Africa — to a maximum of six members. An easy first step is to exclude the two North African countries. Though they are powerful and more effective than most, there are good reasons to discard them. They operate in an historic, cultural, political and economic context very different from that of sub-Saharan Africa. Historically and culturally, it is the Arab world that counts for them, economically the Mediterranean Basin and politically the Middle East. It will be difficult enough to build consensus among sub-Saharan states; almost impossible if it has to include North Africa. Nevertheless, if North Africa must be represented, two countries would be too many. So the size and stability of Egypt should count Algeria out.

Another two countries that are — at least for now — easy to exclude are Sudan and the DRC. Sudan has the image of a pariah state, which might make it difficult for other powers and state clubs to accept it. And the DRC is a sleeping giant that controls substantial resources of soft and hard power but will not be able to use them for the foreseeable future. It is too early to tell whether that is the case for Côte d'Ivoire. In recent years the country has been preoccupied with internal conflicts rather than building an effective state. These conflicts have seriously undermined the effectiveness it once possessed. Gone are the days when it could claim to be the leader of the West African francophonie. Senegal and Ghana have the effectiveness that Côte d'Ivoire lacks. But both are short of hard-power resources. Their biggest asset is soft power — a resource which sometimes makes them attractive to non-African countries but not on the continent.

Changing the focus, there are two obvious choices for membership: South Africa and Nigeria. South Africa is certainly the most economically powerful and politically stable country in Africa,

and its capacity to lead and implement policies is not in doubt. Reservations are based on the fear that it might lead in the wrong direction. These fears could be mitigated if its power was embedded in a club. Despite the fact that Nigeria has misused its power more often in the recent past, it is less subject to general mistrust. It might help that it is seen by some as a real African power and has rarely tried to veil its ambitions. If there are doubts, they are more about its limited state capacity. It suffers from several domestic conflicts and its administration is famous for corruption and ineffectiveness. On the other hand, this has rarely hindered it from projecting power beyond its borders.

So the intermediate balance sheet shows two definite members and five countries that can be excluded for one or other good reason. What about the other three: Angola, Ethiopia and Kenya? Much of what has been said for Nigeria is also valid for Angola. A resource-rich country, it was almost torn apart by internal strife and poorly governed by a corrupt elite. But it is able to project power far beyond its borders. It is a key state not only for Southern Africa but probably even more for Central Africa where hardly anybody else can play a stabilising role.

Three regions — West, Central and Southern — and three key powers. Things are different in East Africa where four countries operate on roughly the same level of power politics: Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The first two have significant advantages. Ethiopia has by far the biggest population in the region, is an established military power, does not hesitate to deploy troops beyond its borders and can claim an historic leadership role. Kenya has a fairly developed and dynamic economy and an open-minded society. It has always been the gateway to the region and enjoys significant goodwill internationally and continentally. Together, they represent East Africa and the Greater Horn of Africa better than any other combination.

South Africa, Nigeria, Angola, Ethiopia and Kenya could constitute an African Five (A5) that could play the role for Africa which the G8 and the G20 play globally. They would be able

to define an economic and political agenda and speak for African countries internationally. In the end, it will be up to one or two governments to take the initiative to form such a club and decide on its composition. South Africa and Nigeria would be the natural candidates to take the lead. It can only be hoped that the African inclination for inclusiveness and egalitarianism does not bring the attempt to an early end.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Stefan Mair is a senior fellow at the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. He holds a PhD from the University of Munich and has worked on African issues for 20 years.

The South African Foreign Policy and African Drivers Programme is funded by the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA), the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) and the Finnish Embassy in Pretoria, South Africa. SAIIA gratefully acknowledges this support.

© SAIIA 2010 All rights reserved. Opinions expressed are the responsibility of the individual authors and not of SAIIA.