



# Recalibrating South Africa's Role in Global Economic Governance: A Nigerian Perspective on Some Strategic Challenges

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Nigerian perspective on South Africa's position in global economic governance, particularly in relation to its role in the BRICS grouping and the G-20, provides critical insights into the potential benefits of a reinvigorated Nigerian–South African partnership. The partnership is important in addressing the challenge of transforming Africa's marginal role in global economic governance. This policy briefing explores how South Africa, by repositioning its strategic partnership with Nigeria, a continental economic power outside of BRICS, stands to strengthen Africa's role and global position, and how such a partnership might lead to developmental dividends. It concludes by looking at the potential benefits of a strengthened Nigerian–South African co-operation and urges both countries to move beyond rivalry and take steps towards implementing a developmental partnership.

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## INTRODUCTION

This policy insights paper draws attention to the need to critically examine the role of South Africa in projecting Africa's voice and interests at global economic forums and groups. It also looks at South Africa's effectiveness as Africa's sole member of BRICS and the G-20.

Bohler-Muller notes that 'South Africa, Brazil, India, China and Russia have increased their joint political and economic activism in forums such as IBSA, BASIC [Brazil, South Africa, India and China] and BRICS'.<sup>1</sup> Despite South Africa's presence in BRICS, IBSA and the G-20, it is important not to lose sight of the challenges of such evolving groupings. South Africa is seen in some quarters as 'punching above its weight' given the small size of its economy relative to those of emerging powers. Related to this is the observation that the 'limited number of assured African participants in the G-20 increases the risk of the latter's members paying insufficient attention to issues of concern to Africa, or to the potentially adverse effects on Africa of their decisions and actions'.<sup>2</sup>

How then does South Africa ensure that African issues get the attention they deserve in global economic forums? And how does South Africa reconcile the tension between its own foreign policy imperatives and those of its regional and global strategic partners?

In seeking answers, one should consider the point made by Alden and Schoeman, raising doubts about whether South Africa can conduct a foreign policy that is commensurate with its regional and global ambitions. Citing a combination of domestic weaknesses and 'a divided continental reaction to South African leadership', these authors argue that it would be difficult for South Africa to translate its aspirations into 'foreign policy achievements'.<sup>3</sup>

## SOUTH AFRICA AND AFRICA: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The growing recognition of Africa's importance can be gleaned from how the world's traditional and emerging powers are increasingly engaging with the continent. An increasing number of informal groups are being established around mutual interests, and meetings with African states are held by powers seeking resources, trade and influence in a rising Africa. Examples include the Franco-African Summit, Tokyo International Conference on African Development, South Korea-Africa Summit, Malaysia-Africa Summit, EU-Africa Summit, US-Africa Leaders' Summit, Canada-Africa Business Summit, Turkey-Africa Summit and the Organization for Economic Cooperation (OECD) Economic Forum on Africa.

This growing list also includes multilateral forums organised by Asia's emerging powers, such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the IBSA Dialogue Forum and the India-Africa Forum summit. These Southern partners are of critical importance 'as a catalyst for Africa's political, economic and global revival'.<sup>4</sup>

Whereas some observers point to the implications of the competing attempts by global powers to court Africa in the quest for investment opportunities, markets, natural resources and influence, others focus on the developmental spin-offs accruing to the

continent from increased trade, aid, investment and influence. And there are others who interpret the trends in terms of how emerging powers are making inroads into the continent at the expense of traditional Western partners.

The challenge is to seek ways in which Africa's strategic engagement with other powers will strengthen its representation in the decision-making forums of global economic governance. To achieve this, Africa must seek better strategies for partnering with emerging powers and reform global economic governance institutions along lines that are more favourable to the continent.

South Africa's status as the sole African voice in certain global groupings is significant with regard to the country's history, the vision of its leaders, and its position as a semi-peripheral node of the global capitalist system with a fairly advanced industrial base and an economic elite who can negotiate with their global peers to help integrate the continent into global markets. South Africa is also recognised by global powers as a 'very important regional influence as a result of the size of the economy, power of its state and capital-state interactions'.<sup>5</sup> Adebajo notes that South Africa is the 'largest single investor in the rest of the continent',<sup>6</sup> while Grant Makorera alludes to the country's 'geographical representation ... integration into the global economy ... and its capacity to participate in high-level debates'.<sup>7</sup>

While the jury is still out on South Africa's role compared with that of other emerging African powers – such as Nigeria, Angola, Kenya and Egypt – some analysts argue that South Africa is bound to play the role of Africa's leader.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, such optimistic readings of South Africa's role as continental leader have to take into account how the country's influence and profile compare with those of other traditional and emerging global powers. The notion that South Africa 'punches above its weight'<sup>9</sup> has implications for the kinds of alliances and partners that may give the continent more weight on the regional and global stages.

A critical point when exploring South Africa's ability to reposition itself and Africa as a 'swing continent'<sup>10</sup> is the country's relationship with Nigeria, the most populous African nation and the continent's largest economy. Although Nigeria and South Africa at some levels are continental rivals for influence, they need each other. Nigeria is also a necessary partner in projecting a meaningful African agenda for engaging with global powers. Any analytical exploration of this partnership would have to address the competition between both countries on the one hand, and, on the other, the opportunities and benefits of recalibrating a strategic partnership, which would enable Africa to 'avoid merely prolonging its post-independence trajectory of marginalisation and underdevelopment'.<sup>11</sup>

## **SOUTH AFRICA–NIGERIA RELATIONS: FROM APARTHEID TO THE POST-APARTHEID ERA**

Much has been written on the history and nature of South Africa–Nigeria relations.<sup>12</sup> More recently, such reflections have taken place against the background of what Adebajo refers to as the 'Pax Nigeriana'.<sup>13</sup> However, the prospects for relations between the

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two countries cannot be understood outside the context of their political economies, histories and positions in the international system.

South Africa–Nigeria relations can be conveniently approached from a historical perspective. Shortly after it gained independence in 1960, Nigeria declared its opposition to the apartheid policy of the minority regime in South Africa. In the early 1960s, officials of South Africa's liberation movements visited Nigeria to seek support for their struggle. Nigeria led the campaign in 1961 to suspend the apartheid South African regime from the Commonwealth, chaired the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid and was considered a front-line state. Some anti-apartheid activists of the liberation movements were given refuge and provided with (Nigerian) documents for international travel.

The Nigerian people were mobilised to support the anti-apartheid struggle. Nigeria's National Committee Against Apartheid established branches at universities to raise awareness of the evils of apartheid. Nigerian students organised rallies and protests in solidarity with the liberation struggle, and a South African Relief Fund was established in 1976. This fund granted scholarships to South African students in exile at Nigerian institutions<sup>14</sup> and provided material support for the liberation struggle in South Africa. Several popular Nigerian musicians, such as Sonny Okosuns, Onyeka Onwuenu and Majek Fashek, recorded hit songs in support of the liberation struggle or eulogising Nelson Mandela. Support for the liberation struggle formed an important aspect of Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy, particularly in relation to its African leadership claims and credentials.

When apartheid collapsed and South Africa was ushered into the international community following the democratic elections in 1994, won by the ANC, Mandela visited Nigeria after his release from prison, where he received a hero's welcome. For many Nigerians, the expectation was that having contributed so much to freedom in South Africa, the ANC-led government would both acknowledge Nigeria's contributions and leadership and work closely with the country to jointly promote African interests in the international community. Thus, when the effects of the economic crisis and structural adjustment began to take its toll on Nigerians in the 1990s, South Africa was one of the places to which some of them went in search of economic opportunities.

Nigeria, then under a military dictatorship, was grappling with a legitimacy crisis following the annulment by the military regime – led by General Ibrahim Babangida – of presidential elections held in June 1993, which were widely believed to have been won by Moshood Abiola. At that point, the pro-democracy movement in Nigeria sought to pressurise the military regime into respecting the results of the elections. They organised protests in Nigeria, and lobbied international civil society and foreign governments to put pressure on the Nigerian authorities to respect the democratic rights of Nigerians. When the pressures overwhelmed the rickety Interim National Government another military regime – headed by General Sani Abacha – took over, followed by another round of protests and demands for the restoration of the June election mandate.

The military responded by repressing the protests and arresting and detaining the leaders of the pro-democracy movement or forcing them into exile, in spite of mounting

pressure from the international community. When the then-president Mandela sought to use 'quiet diplomacy' to urge Abacha to release the presumed winner of the elections from detention and commute the death sentence placed on a former military head of state, retired general Olusegun Obasanjo, his efforts met with limited success. Obasanjo's sentence was commuted to a jail sentence, but Abacha was not released – ostensibly for refusing to renounce his claim to the presidential mandate after the elections in June 1993.<sup>15</sup>

During the same period, Nigeria was also under a lot of pressure from the international campaign by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), led by charismatic writer and minority-rights campaigner Ken Saro-Wiwa. He had mobilised sections of the international community to campaign against the quashing of the rights of the Ogoni ethnic minority group, indigenous to the oil-producing Niger Delta, through the alliance of the Nigerian state and the oil multinationals, particularly Shell. MOSOP's campaign lobbied for autonomy and self-determination, and resource control for the Ogoni people. The military under Abacha had repressed the Ogoni uprising and was now facing international embarrassment and growing isolation on account of its poor human rights record, as well as for annulling the elections, which could have marked the end of military dictatorship and ushered in democratic rule.

Matters came to a head when a tribunal set up by the military returned a guilty verdict against Saro-Wiwa and eight other MOSOP members on counts of inciting a mob to murder four allegedly pro-government Ogoni chiefs. The way in which the trial was conducted was considered unfair and reportedly influenced by the desire to put an end to MOSOP's campaign, which had embarrassed both the government and Shell at an international level. Given the circumstances of the trial (combined with MOSOP's international connections and campaigning) an international appeal to spare the lives of the so-called Ogoni nine gathered strength after the defendants had been pronounced guilty and sentenced to death by hanging – a verdict confirmed by the military ruling council.

Mandela joined in the appeal to the Abacha regime for clemency. However, he failed to dissuade Abacha from hanging the Ogoni nine in November 1995. A disappointed and upset Mandela condemned the executions amid international uproar; he pushed for sanctions to be imposed on Nigeria, including the country's suspension from the Commonwealth in 1995. Mandela was quoted as warning that 'Abacha is sitting on a volcano, and I am going to explode it under him'.<sup>16</sup> Shortly after, Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth and limited sanctions were imposed on Abacha and top officials of his military regime, but those were the only severe punitive steps the international community took against Nigeria.

However, although many countries recalled their ambassadors, the South African position drew anger and some retaliatory acts from Nigeria. South Africa's condemnation also achieved limited traction among other African countries. According to Siko, 'The OAU [Organization of African Unity] dismissed Mandela's call for sanctions as "not an African way to deal with an African Problem"'.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, a December 1995 SADC meeting to discuss the problem determined that the regional organisation would take no further action against Nigeria.

This incident was one of South Africa's earliest lessons in the need to 'soft-pedal' its pursuit of an activist foreign policy towards the rest of the continent. However, in spite of this, it was significant that this period also coincided with South Africa's rising profile at a global level.

South Africa was enjoying international acclaim for having ended apartheid, successfully holding landmark elections that marked the transition to democratic rule that ended the country's pariah status and propelled it into the warm embrace of the international community. The elections also marked a moral victory for Mandela, who had dedicated his life to the struggle and had become a global icon for human rights and the promotion of reconciliation and democratic values.

While South Africa was enjoying growing international prestige and was welcomed as Africa's leading pivotal state and representative in global affairs, conversely, for Nigeria, the mid-1990s marked its growing isolation as an international pariah state, ending in its expulsion from the Commonwealth. This favourable perception of South Africa contributed to the leadership status that the international community conferred on it. It also gave the country's ruling elite the impetus to live up to such expectations.

### **SOUTH AFRICA–NIGERIA RELATIONS SINCE 1999**

Relations between the two countries normalised after Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, when elections brought Obasanjo into power. As Nigeria's former military head of state, Obasanjo had played a significant role in the struggle against apartheid. Scholars and analysts agree that relations with South Africa improved after 1999, when both countries established the Bi-National Commission (BNC), jointly chaired by the vice president of Nigeria and deputy president of South Africa. To advance mutual economic interests, the countries signed a bilateral trade agreement, a reciprocal promotion and protection of investment agreement. Since 1999, the BNC has had at least eight sessions, which have reflected the fluctuating state of relations between the countries.

The Nigeria–South Africa Chamber of Commerce was established in 2001 to promote trade. It is estimated that by 2014 more than 100 South African companies had invested in the Nigerian economy. Daniel, Southall and Lutchman note that following its launch into Nigeria in 2001, 'MTN's entrance into the Nigerian market was the company's single biggest investment outside of South Africa and by the end of 2003, it had spent more than US\$1 billion in infrastructure and other start-up costs in Nigeria'.<sup>18</sup>

Agbu *et al.* also note that by 2013, MTN had 'over six million Nigerian subscribers'.<sup>19</sup> More South African companies followed MTN, making inroads into the Nigerian market. Landsberg observes that 'during the time Mbeki and Obasanjo held sway, both countries openly attempted to play a bridging role between Africa and [the] Global North', and 'Nigeria and South Africa saw themselves as "problem solvers" in world affairs, particularly with regard to advancing African development, peace and security'.<sup>20</sup>

The same point is echoed by Games, Bello and Hengari, and Otto, among others.<sup>21</sup> Obasanjo's Afrocentric ideology and then-president Thabo Mbeki's vision of

transforming South Africa into a leading African and global power worked well together, and contributed to the establishment of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the reform of the AU.

In spite of the good working relationship Obasanjo and Mbeki enjoyed, the evidence suggests that the good relations between the two countries did not outlive their tenures as heads of state. It would appear that the good relations were dependent on the personalities of these two presidents, rather than the result of commonly shared priorities, values, interests or aspirations. As Landsberg notes: 'After Mbeki and Obasanjo left office, the relationship between the two African giants went from bad to worse'.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that these highly respected statesmen were unable to create autonomous institutional frameworks that would endure in their absence. In the absence of such a legacy, relations between the countries slipped into ad hoc responses to particular events.

Certain incidents have underlined the deterioration in relations. For example, there was rivalry over which country should be put forward as Africa's permanent representative in the UN Security Council. The countries also disagreed over how best to handle the post-election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010, during which South Africa appeared to back Laurent Gbagbo and worked towards a political settlement, while Nigeria backed the stance taken by ECOWAS and the AU, urging Gbagbo to step down in favour of the winner of the election, Alassane Ouattara. South African mediation in the subregion failed to make headway, leading to its withdrawal.<sup>23</sup>

Another rift occurred after both countries had voted in favour of UN Security Council Resolution 1973, which provided legitimacy for NATO to attack Muammar Gaddafi's forces following its efforts to crush a rebellion that was sparked off by protests in Benghazi in February 2011. South Africa accused NATO and Western nations of using humanitarian intervention as a pretext to carry out regime change, and initially refused to recognise the anti-Gaddafi coalition united under the banner of the National Transitional Council (NTC). Nigeria, on the other hand, fell in line with the P-3,<sup>24</sup> after initially making some feeble protests, and recognised the NTC.<sup>25</sup> South Africa had justified its opposition to the NATO campaign, in favour of AU mediation, on the grounds that the UN resolution it had originally supported had authorised a no-fly zone and NATO intervention in Libya. South Africa believed that such measures were originally designed to help save lives, and not facilitate an agenda of regime change pursued by the military alliance.<sup>26</sup>

In 2012 tensions flared up again over the contest for the position of the president of the AU Commission. Nigeria opposed what it considered South Africa's violation of the AU's informal rule that none of the leading contributors to the body should run for high-level positions in the organisation.<sup>27</sup>

However, South Africa defied opposition by some African countries, including Nigeria and Egypt, and put forward its minister of home affairs, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, as candidate for the chair of the AU Commission (challenging the incumbent, Jean Ping). After protracted voting and politicking, Dlamini-Zuma emerged victorious, marking a major diplomatic victory for South Africa.<sup>28</sup>



Also in 2012, relations deteriorated sharply after South Africa deported 125 Nigerians on grounds that they did not have verifiable yellow fever vaccination certificates. This drew immediate retaliation from Nigeria, and led to an apology from South Africa.<sup>29</sup>

In 2014, there were two incidents that reflected the poor state of diplomatic relations between the countries. The first was the seizure of \$15 million in two instalments – \$5.7 million found in suitcases in a private jet carrying two Nigerians and an Israeli; and \$9.3 million which was wired to a South African bank. The cash was ostensibly for the Nigerian government to purchase arms to fight Boko Haram extremists wreaking havoc in north-east Nigeria. While South African officials were of the view that the transactions were in violation of South Africa's laws and therefore illegal, Nigerian officials responded that the transactions were legitimate.<sup>30</sup>

The second was the furore over the deaths of 116 South African nationals in the tragic collapse of the guest house of the Synagogue Church of All Nations at Ikotun, near Lagos.<sup>31</sup> Tempers flared following reports that Nigerian officials had prevented South African officials from gaining direct access to their citizens receiving treatment in Nigerian hospitals, and delaying the repatriation of corpses to South Africa. However, the situation was saved from deteriorating further after a high-level delegation was dispatched to Nigeria and the presidents of both countries exchanged calls, followed by the repatriation of 85 bodies to South Africa.<sup>32</sup>

However, it is not just tension and rivalry that have attended South Africa–Nigeria relations; much has been happening on the economic front. South Africa's trade with Nigeria increased between 1999 and 2008 from ZAR<sup>33</sup> 174 million to ZAR 22.8 billion, accounting for a quarter of South African trade with the continent.<sup>34</sup> Over 100 South African companies operate in Nigeria.<sup>35</sup> These include telecommunications giant MTN; retail chains Shoprite, Woolworths and Mr Price; hotel groups Protea, Sun International and Tsogo Sun; SAB Miller, Sasol; banks Rand Merchant Bank, Stanbic IBTC, Standard Chartered and Nedbank; South African Airways, Multichoice-DSTV, Tiger Brands, Nando's, Chicken Republic and St Elmos.<sup>36</sup>

Nigerian companies operating in South Africa, however, are relatively few in proportion. They have complained about 'regulatory restrictions on equity ownership and moving money in South Africa'<sup>37</sup> as factors limiting investments by Nigerian companies in the country, with the most visible being the Dangote Group and Oando Oil plc. Nigeria's main export to South Africa is oil. The balance of trade between the two countries is in South Africa's favour.

The news in 2014 that Nigeria had overtaken South Africa as Africa's largest economy – growing at a rate of 7% which is more than twice South Africa's growth rate – has certain implications for South Africa's claims to African leadership and its continental representation at global forums. It also suggests that both countries need to reappraise and realign their African policies, as they stand to gain a lot – both at the bilateral and informal levels. With Africa's largest economy and market, Nigeria will for the foreseeable future be a leading destination for investment. It will also be buoyed by its inclusion alongside Egypt as one of only two African countries in the global

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NEXT 11 – a grouping of 11 countries identified as the next generation of the world's emerging markets after the BRICS countries.

Despite Nigeria's impressive gross domestic product and growth rate, the country faces serious domestic and foreign policy challenges.<sup>38</sup> There are security issues in the north-east of the country where Boko Haram militia have seized control of communities, abducted scores of girls and killed many people despite the state of emergency in place there. Then there have been simmering tensions in the Niger Delta, where a full-blown insurgency was recently brought to an end after an amnesty was extended to ethnic-minority militias. The country also has high levels of unemployment, and reports of corruption pose challenges to political stability and democratic governance. Falling global oil prices draw attention to the risks associated with an oil-dependent mono-cultural economy, and the possible impact this has on governance, including security and social cohesion. This challenging domestic context suggests that Nigeria will face constraints in its ability to go it alone and accomplish its African leadership aspirations.

South Africa and Nigeria, as pivotal African states in a rapidly globalising world, have no option other than to rise above petty rivalries and unhealthy competition. They must prioritise mutual interests and benefits for their people and the continent. The cost of not co-operating will be high and detrimental to both economies – and to the continent.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: TOWARDS A NIGERIA–SOUTH AFRICA PARTNERSHIP

Although South Africa has established its presence in global forums, ostensibly as 'Africa's representative', the country has to respond more proactively to its domestic challenges (such as high rates of unemployment, low economic growth and productivity, growing inequality, etc.), and build a strategic partnership with other dominant states on the continent. As Alden and Le Pere argue, 'Without resolving the multiple contradictions for realising growth and development at home, it is unlikely that South Africa will ever rise to the challenges of building a "consensual hegemony" in Africa.'<sup>39</sup>

The same argument can be made about Nigeria, although many will agree that the country has a stronger domestic base from which it can transform putative into actual power. But both countries will be in a better position to address their challenges by co-operating and partnering to achieve goals at the national, regional and global levels.

For South Africa to play a stronger role in global economic governance it has to recalibrate its foreign policy in a way that emphasises mutual respect and new forms of co-operation with other African states and regional organisations. It is likely that South Africa's interests will be advanced in a framework of laying down fundamental principles for engaging and co-operating with other African leaders, particularly Nigeria. This view coincides with the concluding part of President Jacob Zuma's speech at a meeting of the South Africa–Nigeria Business Forum during a visit by Nigeria's president, Goodluck Jonathan, in which he said: 'Our two countries need to work together and complement each other, to push an African agenda which puts regional integration, economic and infrastructural development at the forefront.'<sup>40</sup> This it appears was a positive response

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to Jonathan's speech at a state banquet held in his honour during the same visit, when Jonathan enthused: 'As a nation, we see the special relationship between Nigeria and South Africa as a necessary building block towards the vision of a new Africa'.<sup>41</sup>

These words point to an awareness at the highest levels in both governments of the potential benefits of co-operation to advancing an African agenda. However, without a clear process for moving from rhetoric to concrete action, Africa's voice among emerging global powers will be drowned out by other countries or alliances with more economic and strategic muscle. This view finds resonance in Landsberg's assertion that 'South Africa and Nigeria need to restore their African Concert, for if they are strong Africa is strong, and conversely, if they are weak so is Africa'.<sup>42</sup>

Several issues are important here. South African and Nigerian policy research institutions and universities should promote evidence-based research and knowledge production on a countrywide and comparative basis. Constructive dialogue involving official, civil society and private sector actors on strategies and goals that feed off knowledge on relations, as well as opportunities linking this to African regionalism and multilateralism, should also be explored.

Games identifies some of the impacts of 'biased and often emotive media coverage' and 'ignorance of each other's country's history and business culture', which undermine an appreciation of the benefits that both countries enjoy, including a shared focus on a pan-African agenda.<sup>43</sup> It is important therefore to review the role of the media on both sides, paying attention to highlighting information about the historic and cultural ties, people-to-people relations and strategic commonalities that bind Nigeria, South Africa and Africa.

Finally, the agenda of a Nigerian–South African partnership should prioritise the developmental spin-offs of a mutually beneficial partnership between South Africa and Nigeria. An African bloc in the BRICS or a BRIC–aligned Nigerian–South African partnership will be a much stronger prospect for projecting Africa's interests on to global economic governance. Leaders in both countries should communicate a clear vision, demonstrable political will and capacity to craft the connections between national, regional and global interests and aspirations as steps towards aligning national interests with a more equitable developmental engagement with the processes and institutions of global economic governance.

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