

Common African positions on global issues

Achievements and realities

Bankole Adeoye



The African Union's (AU) use of common African positions promotes collective African interests especially on development. This report identifies lessons from the process of developing these common positions, including guiding principles, consultations and the role of AU member states, regional economic communities and other key partners. If Africa speaks with one voice to articulate common positions, the achievement of AU strategic goals becomes feasible.

Key findings

- ▶ Negotiating common African positions (CAPs) in the African Union (AU) system is convoluted, politically stressful and difficult.
- ▶ The lack of ownership of CAPs by AU member states is a weak link. Many states struggle with the preparatory and post-adoption work required.
- ▶ An overdependence on external partners to provide resources during the CAP process is counterproductive. Some partners may be a stumbling block even though they finance technical support processes.
- ▶ Limited participation by regional committees and intergovernmental bodies makes the CAP process incomplete.
- ▶ The continent-wide consultation process leading to the adoption of CAPs is often inadequate.
- ▶ Acceptance of CAPs lead states and champions can be lacking. This dampens the enthusiasm of the lead states in the steering group or technical committee and reduces engagement with other members.
- ▶ There is a gross lack of resources in the technical and financial area. Human skills and knowledge of CAP themes are lacking.
- ▶ Inadequate institutional capacity in some countries on CAP themes reduces the effectiveness of consultations.

Recommendations

- ▶ An inclusive, participatory and representative process in negotiating CAPs requires the three Cs: consultation, coordination and communication.
- ▶ A more robust show of African solidarity, unity and cooperation by member states, in the spirit of pan-Africanism, would make CAPs more effective.
- ▶ Structured negotiations on balancing national and regional interests by AU member states and regional economic communities would foster greater synergy and ensure African ownership and leadership of each CAP.
- ▶ Ideally, the CAP consultative process should entail the AU Commission organising regional consultations in the five AU regions.
- ▶ An issue-based approach and a standard operational framework should be developed to attract the full range of key institutional actors. CAPs would be enriched by increased collaboration within the AU system.
- ▶ The consistent articulation of CAPs by AU leaders to the international community will strengthen Africa's ability to speak as one.
- ▶ The AU Commission should have adequate resources to serve as the hub of consultation, coordination and communication in the CAP process.

Introduction

The African Union (AU) is founded on the core principles and shared values of African unity, solidarity and consensus, driven by the ideals of Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance. From the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in May 1963 to the formal launch of the AU in July 2002, African states have worked for closer cooperation and cohesion among themselves. The aim is to address common development challenges and, on the global stage, to speak with one voice. As Article 3 of the AU's Constitutive Act defines it, the goal is 'to promote and defend African common positions on issues of interest to the continent and its people'.¹ This common commitment is reflected in all African initiatives, the objectives of which generally bemoan the marginalisation of the continent in global affairs and governance.

The adoption of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in 2001 served as a continental blueprint for Africa's renewal. It highlighted the continental commitment to part with its history of marginal roles in the global economy and position itself as a full participant in world affairs. NEPAD was a bold attempt by Africans to extricate themselves from the malaise of underdevelopment and exclusion in a globalising world.²

The AU's Agenda 2063 is the latest symbolic expression of Africa's commitment to 'One Africa, one voice, one message'. It reaffirms the vision of 'an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena'.³ Aspiration 7 affirms Africa's goal to be 'a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner'.⁴

Agenda 2063 reinforces the provision of the AU's Constitutive Act regarding Africa's quest to promote and defend its collective aspirations. It emphasises the need to enhance the continent's united voice and collective action in global negotiations, through pooled sovereignty, integration and the development of common African positions.⁵ Agenda 2063 is Africa's pledge to:

... continue the global struggle against all forms of racism and discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerances; advance international

cooperation that promotes and defends Africa's interests, is mutually beneficial and aligned to our Pan-Africanist vision; continue to speak with one voice and act collectively to promote our common interests and positions in the international arena.⁶

With Agenda 2063 as a grand forward-looking strategy for Africa's transformation, the interface of AU member states in global diplomacy is more pressing given emerging threats to multilateralism. The multilateral system built after World War II is being eroded by right-wing populist nationalism, trade protectionism, terrorism and violent extremism. Weak multilateral responses to the impact of climate change and environmental degradation also play a role. Africa cannot afford to be a bystander or an inconsequential player in this global environment.

The AU cannot be united and act collectively if member states speak with discordant voices

It is imperative for AU member states to present a united front in the global arena. The challenges posed by extreme poverty, political instability and threats to peace and security as well as the COVID-19 pandemic are enormous and require international cooperation and joint action. More than ever, the AU desires to be more united, cohesive, and act collectively in a manner that reflects Africa's specific needs. This cannot happen if member states speak with discordant voices, or in hushed tones.

This report draws lessons from Africa's efforts to achieve common positions on major global issues, the challenges encountered and how they have been managed. It offers policy options for greater progress towards achieving Africa's goals.

Crafting common African positions

The crafting, promotion and defence of African positions, by means of diplomatic negotiations and consensus-building, has become a vital practice in the relationships between member states and the AU. The AU uses the position papers developed from CAPs processes as

policy instruments and guidelines to serve as rallying points to push Africa's development agenda and strategic priorities on global platforms.

In the AU system and for advocacy purposes at the international level, a CAP reflects a consensus reached in the form of a negotiated text on a specific thematic or policy subject of continental or cross-regional interest. CAPs are shared policy priorities for member states to champion. Regional economic communities (RECs) and other regional mechanisms promote this convergence of strategic goals domestically and externally for wide-ranging buy-in.

A CAP is developed through diplomatic practice and informed by AU Assembly decisions, declarations and resolutions. CAPs come in many formats: consensus papers, joint statements, declarations or joint strategy and could be specific to guide African participation at international events or processes.

Developing a CAP is laborious, but the process is required to get buy-in by states and has come to be seen as a political asset

In addition, some strategic AU policy frameworks have continental positions reached for advocacy at all levels embedded in them. Paramount in this category is Agenda 2063, with its seven aspirations, targets, indicators, flagship programmes and projects, and its First Ten-Year Implementation Plan. AU Assembly decisions endorsing African candidates for top posts in the international system help to mobilise unified support for such candidates thereby adding African voices to global governance policy formulation and decision making.

The AU's development of a CAP is painstaking, laborious and time-consuming, but the process is required to increase buy-in by member states, and has come to be seen as a political asset. This participatory scope embraces input from AU organs (especially the AU Commission, the African Union Development Agency and the New Partnership for Africa's Development or AUDA-NEPAD, and the specialised technical committees) and experts from member states and regional bodies, civil society and professional groups.

CAPs are vetted by the AU Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC), with due consideration by the Executive Council. They are recommended to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government for endorsement, dissemination and advocacy.

The AU has produced many common African policy positions that have made a significant impact on the global stage. Table 1 itemises some of the most impactful CAPs, their thematic focus and impact on its intended global audience.



CAPS PROVIDE A GUIDE
FOR AU MEMBERS'
ENGAGEMENTS IN THE
UN SYSTEM

Table 1: Thematic focus and impact assessment of selected CAPs

Common African Position (adopted by AU)	Year of AU adoption	Thematic focus area	Targeted global platform / impact assessment*
The Ezulwini Consensus and Sirte Declaration on the proposed reform of the UN Security Council	2005	Reform of the UN Security Council	UN system and in particular UN Security Council / slow and work-in-progress
The African Mining Vision	2009	Natural resource management with emphasis on the mining sector	All stakeholders i.e. African governments and investment community / work-in-progress
The African Consensus and Position on Development Effectiveness	2011	South–South cooperation, financing for development and capacity development	Aid Effectiveness Forum, OECD, G7/G20, UN / highly impactful
The Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda	2014	UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and its SDGs	UN system / highly impactful
The Common African Position on UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the World Drug Problem	2016	Transboundary organised crime particularly the drug abuse and trafficking	UN system / fairly impactful
The Common African Position on Humanitarian Effectiveness	2016	Humanitarian relief action arising from forced displacement	UN system / fairly impactful
The Master Roadmap on the implementation of Silencing the Guns	2016	Peace and security	International community and non-state actors / slow and work-in-progress
The Common African Position on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration	2017	Migration	UN system / highly impactful and resulted in AU assembly decision to set up AU Humanitarian Agency
The Common African Position on Asset Recovery	February 2020	Stemming illicit financial flows (IFF)	International community including UN system (UNODC) / work-in-progress

* Note: Impact assessment is the projection of the author based on attributable success of the CAP

Other CAPs approved by the OAU and AU include positions on Africa’s external debt (1987), human and social development (1994), food security (1996), biodiversity (1997), weapons proliferation and trafficking (2000), digital inclusion (2001), youth development (2010), climate change (2015), peace operations (2015), and sustainable development and poverty eradication (2015).

Lessons learned

Lessons from the drive towards a strong and coherent African voice have been acknowledged worldwide. In its article ‘Africa speaking as one’, the UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) concluded:

Africa’s increasing ability to speak with one voice on global issues is one of the recognized

hallmarks of its growing transformation and strengths as a global player. OSAA further indicated that Africa is on an upward trend and seeks mutually beneficial relations with other regions and continents.⁸

This recognition is a result of the political will and collective commitment by AU member states to use CAPs as guidelines for their engagements in the UN system and other global forums. CAPs have continued to be promoted and popularised by member states, RECs and other technical institutions at the national and regional level.

AU member states have continued to speak with one voice on areas of common African interest including: the maintenance of international peace and security; the transition in 2015 from the millennium development goals (MDGs) to the sustainable development goals (SDGs); climate change and environmental sustainability; information technology and digital inclusion; poverty eradication and economic development; the external debt crisis; and the imperative to create a new, effective global development cooperation architecture. Two particularly important CAPs are discussed below.

Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda

'The post-2015 development agenda is a critical milestone towards the realization of Agenda 2063, and provides a good opportunity for Africa to complete the unfinished business of the MDGs,' said the then chairperson of the AU Commission, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma.⁹

This position, published in March 2014, is one of the most impactful continental position papers to have been adopted by the AU Assembly. It received worldwide recognition for influencing the global discourse on the transition from the MDGs to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This helped achieve widespread acceptance within the UN system and with African groups in multilateral forums.

The inclusive methodology, preparatory process, central structure, extensive networking and consultations, as well as the engagement and advocacy plan that characterised the development of this common position, remain a commendable practice in the crafting of AU

positions. The process adhered to the principle of African ownership and leadership.

The high-level committee (HLC) was chaired by the former president of Liberia, Ellen Sirleaf Johnson, and included the heads of state of Chad, Guinea, Namibia, South Africa, Mauritius and Ethiopia. The HLC focused on the delivery of this CAP, with technical support from the AU Commission and partner institutions. AU member states and the RECs were fully on board, taking firm ownership of the common position.

The SDGs' reflection of AU inputs shows the impact of the Post-2015 Development Agenda CAP

The CAP was based on the premise that the realisation of Agenda 2063 would require transformation in critical priority areas:¹⁰

- Structural economic transformation and inclusive growth
- Science, technology and innovation
- People-centered development
- Environmental sustainability, natural resource management and disaster risk management
- Peace and security
- Finance and partnerships

That the CAP on the Post-2015 Development Agenda made an impact is shown in the way the SDGs reflect the inputs of the AU Assembly. AU leaders and stakeholders served as champions for the outcomes achieved.

Common African Position on Asset Recovery

The 33rd AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, held in Addis Ababa in February 2020, endorsed the Common African Position on Asset Recovery (CAPAR) as a critical step towards combating and reversing illicit financial flows out of Africa. It developed out of the AU's 2018 annual theme, 'Winning the fight against corruption: A sustainable path to Africa's transformation'. This landmark CAP was spearheaded by the president of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, the

champion of the 2018 theme. Four priority areas were identified as pillars for asset recovery in Africa:

- Detection and identification of assets
- Recovery and return of assets
- Management of recovered assets
- Cooperation and partnerships

CAPAR received broad support from member states and stakeholders in the development of its content. CAPAR embodies collective efforts and strategies to recover and return African assets, which it contextualises in the broader historical, political, economic and social perspectives of the continent. It was a follow-up to the July 2018 AU Assembly Nouakchott Declaration on the African Anti-Corruption Year,¹¹ which, among other things, called upon international partners and allies to agree on a transparent and efficient timetable for the recovery and return of stolen assets to Africa.¹²

Its approach is that of a mixed structure, with political support from the AU Anti-Corruption Champion and the AU/UNECA (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa) High Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows (IFF), chaired by the former president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, and a CAPAR technical unit to drive the process. AU member states, through the Executive Council and PRC, also supported the process of crafting the CAPAR. Further, a CAPAR Working Group to drive the process was established under the auspices of the country serving as champion (Nigeria).

Many CAPs are no more than diplomatic papers that don't go further than the AU's offices

The AU Advisory Board on Corruption (AU-ABC), the AU Commission, UNECA, the Coalition for the Development of Africa (CoDA) and the African Development Bank (AfDB) played various active roles. These bodies and the championing member state, represented in the Working Group on CAPAR, consulted extensively with stakeholders. This contributed to the AU Assembly's decision to approve the recommendation of the Executive Council. The council commended the Nigerian

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Geoffrey Onyeama, for the leadership in delivering the CAPAR.

Challenges to crafting and promoting CAPs

Despite the successes of preparing, promoting and defending CAPs as AU policy tools, several challenges can be identified. The AU continues its efforts to ensure that common positions serve the achievable purposes intended by the AU Constitutive Act and reinforced by Agenda 2063. Careful study of the inner workings of the AU system and its interaction with international processes reveals challenges to the CAP process, as discussed below.

Negotiating CAPs under the AU system

The process is convoluted and sometimes politically stressful and time-consuming to obtain aggregation and achieve convergence of viewpoints on the thematic subjects. One cause of this is some member states' expediency in asserting national geostrategic interests over continental objectives. There is also no standard AU negotiation process that is uniformly acceptable to member states, though there are some best practices that have evolved from lessons learned over the years.

Lack of ownership of CAPs by AU member states

This is the weakest link. Few African states are in the driving seat when it comes to steering the preparatory work in defining common positions, or in working with them after adoption. Some states take a lukewarm attitude towards full ownership of the crafted CAP, implying that their support for the promotional effort and defence at the national, continental and global levels is weak or vague. In fact, many CAPs are no more than diplomatic papers that go no further than the AU offices in Addis Ababa, or they languish in multilateral outposts. The relevant government departments and agencies are often unaware of the CAP's objectives.

This particular challenge is further exacerbated by the CAPs' quasi-statutory nature. Common positions are diplomatically agreed texts with no legal standing. Their only support is the legitimacy of intergovernmental processes under the umbrella of the AU. Member states are encouraged to defend them individually and collectively at the international level, but there is no compulsion or enforcement. The promotion and

defence of CAPs remain difficult to enforce, given the nature of multilateralism.

One example is the African Mining Vision (AMV) adopted by the AU in February 2009, in collaboration with UNECA. It aims to promote the transparent, equitable and optimal exploitation of mineral resources in a way that boosts broad-based, sustainable growth and socio-economic development in Africa.¹³ It forms part of efforts to create a knowledge-driven African mining sector that is safe, healthy, environmentally friendly, gender and ethnically inclusive, socially responsible and appreciated by surrounding communities.

Yet many of Africa's resource-rich countries have only half-heartedly engaged, or not engaged at all, with the international community and investors in the sector.¹⁴ The AU is still far from achieving the AMV's agreed goal which would have helped 'catalyze[d] broad-based growth and full integration into a single African market that will become a key component of a diversified, vibrant and globally competitive industrializing African economy'.¹⁵

Over-dependence on external partners

CAP preparatory and negotiation processes are usually heavily dependent on the support of development partners and institutions, which is counterproductive. Influential development partners usually help fund the technical backstopping and convening of sessions to validate the African Experts from member states who participate in the Specialised Technical Committees (STCs). In some cases, the 'seen and unseen hands' of non-African partners come into play, signifying a lack of political will and full support by African states and institutions themselves. This in turn limits the efficacy of the CAP and thus of the AU as a fully-fledged actor.

Non-inclusion or 'lightweight' participation by RECs

The lack or limited participation of RECs, regional mechanisms and relevant intergovernmental bodies, in both the CAP decision-making phase and the implementation phase, hobbles the process. Without policy inputs reflecting a full understanding of the regional dimensions of the themes of a specific CAP, there can be no progress towards regional integration. This allows individual AU member states to only pay lip service to the importance of CAPs and continue to overlook the RECs

as the building blocks of regional integration in line with AU strategy.

Complex and inadequate continent-wide consultations

Consultation is required in the development of CAPs, but often it is inadequate, and this compromises the final position as presented, making it contestable by experts from member states. Several factors make wide consultation difficult, including: the lack of funds; a crowded calendar of AU meetings; short invitation notices to national experts by conveners; and tight timelines in which to fashion the AU's key messages before presentation at a global event.

CAP preparatory processes are heavily dependent on the support of development partners

This means the convening party (in many cases the AU Commission) is unable to attract the requisite number of participants, such as civil society, professional bodies, technical experts and ministerial-level participants. The role of these participants is to interrogate the zero draft of CAPs and its technical validation for consideration by the AU policy Organs. The ideal standard operating procedure in the CAP consultative process is to organise regional consultations in the five AU regions, but this can be too time-consuming and costly.

Limited acceptability of lead states and champions

The acceptability of a particular CAP champion is often challenged. This dents the enthusiasm of that leading member state in the steering group or technical committee to spearhead the drafting process and subsequent engagements with the AU. A further knock-on effect is a reduction in the level of expert participation in the validation of the common position. This is usually attributed to regional competition for lead roles, and lack of trust and confidence in the AU system.

The High-Level Committee (HLC), which successfully steered the work of the Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2014), was a notable exception. All AU leaders, policy organs and RECs rallied

around the HLC during the process, and the outcome gained universal acceptability by AU member states.

AU Commission's overbearing technical support role

Given the gaps identified above, the technical supporting role of the AU Commission often fills the vacuum and sometimes becomes overbearing. The design of such a CAP ends up becoming too technical and usually fails to reflect the aggregated interests of member states. It also does not effectively serve as a policy orientation tool for national, continental and global dissemination.

In the absence of policy focus on the position and intergovernmental cross-regional interests in the CAP, positions reached are not really owned by member states. Instead, AU bureaucracy technical advisers take over the ownership of the CAP process. This is not sustainable as the African voice is not loud enough for impact when member states are relegated to the background.

Gross lack of resources

The dearth of technical, financial, human skills and knowledge of the specific thematic subject for the CAP ruins the drafting process. On many occasions, bilateral and multilateral development partners have come to the AU's aid to sponsor the crafting process for CAPs. This is the case even though the CAP process deals with very sensitive diplomatic strategy to be considered by the African side at international forums.

Many CAPs have enhanced the AU's stature and its soft power in world affairs

Poor financial support for the complete CAP process from the AU's statutory annual budget militates against AU principles of self-reliance and sustainable financing. It is also contrary to the AU's ownership and leadership principles. External technical consultants with little knowledge of the collective interests of AU member states and the AU's unique negotiating styles are occasionally retained for a process that should be driven by the AU system. Many strategic development partners have had to bail out the AU and facilitate efforts to ensure that Africa speaks as one on world affairs.

Disconnect between AU in Addis and diplomatic centres

A huge gap in the negotiations, acceptability and defence of CAPs is due to the disconnect between the AU headquarters and relevant multilateral diplomatic centres. Addis Ababa, through the AU PRC, plays the leading coordinating and deliberative role in monitoring progress towards the approval of CAPs. But often the relevant African groups based in multilateral diplomatic hubs such as Geneva, Vienna, New York, Brussels and Nairobi are left behind or their agendas are incompatible.

The AU is then viewed as dysfunctional or polarised when differing 'New York or Addis Ababa' positions are supported, rather than a common position for the continent. Sometimes experts and delegates from the capitals of AU member states openly disagree or disown specific agreed texts in finalised CAPs to the chagrin of other participating parties.

Lack of capacity on specific CAP themes

The absence of experts from capitals and within AU organs tends to affect the quality of the drafting of the CAP. Participating technical experts from national ministries or agencies and their counterparts at the AU occasionally lack the requisite expertise to deal with themes of a position, which delays the drafting process. This results in a weak sense of ownership of the CAP by member states because all the possible African voices for the common positions cannot be aggregated.

Notwithstanding these challenges in formulating common positions, many CAPs have enhanced the AU's stature and its soft power in world affairs. In this, the AU has recorded modest accomplishments, such as the contributions to shaping the SDGs of the post-2015 development agenda and, decades prior to that, debt relief for low-income African countries. The process of developing positions and the post-adoption promotion of CAPs still have obstacles to be overcome. More should be done to prepare, consult, create and advocate consensus on CAPs in the AU system, because common positions are pivotal to the realisation of African development as outlined in Agenda 2063.

Policy actions and opportunities

Increasing and consolidating the African voice on global matters by means of CAPs requires concerted efforts by all stakeholders in the AU system. The question is how best to enable the African voice to resonate at the multilateral level. The following ideas could assist this process.

Inclusive, participatory and representative course of action

The CAPs process should be premised on the three Cs: consultation, coordination and communication. The goal is to make common positions more systematically impactful and achievable. There needs to be engagement with all segments of African society and, where necessary, Africans in the diaspora, in the process of formulating CAPs. Greater attention must be paid to the RECs, African civil society, academia, professional bodies, think tanks and, importantly, women, youth and children. This is in order to give a true common voice to issues of profound concern in the development of Africa.

The role of African groups in multilateral diplomatic centres and the AU observer missions and offices worldwide in the contribution to common positions should be enhanced. A bottom-up approach in the process of formulating the positions will ensure that member states, as governments and societies, drive CAP process.

Robust show of African solidarity and cooperation

In the spirit of Pan-Africanism, member states should develop a more unified African voice and more consistent messaging on the world stage. This would give greater legitimacy to the CAP process. A designated leader or champion of a position, along with the efforts of a high-level steering group guided by the Assembly, would inspire participation and ensure policy coherence.

Negotiations on national and regional interests

Interactions by AU member states and RECs, at regional as well as national level, would foster synergy and give impetus to the reaffirmation of African ownership and leadership of each CAP. Inputs

from statutory bodies such as the African Group of Negotiators (in the case of global efforts to combat climate change, for instance) is a good model.

CAPs need to be placed in the context of Africa's historical, political and socioeconomic priorities. They need to be linked to flagship programmes and policy frameworks that can do justice to the CAP aims of peace, stability and sustainable development of the continent. The ideal standard operating procedure for the CAP consultative process should be for the AU Commission and its organs to organise regional consultations in the five AU regions. This is time-consuming and costly for the AU, but inclusive consultations can drive greater buy-in at national, regional and continental levels.

Issue-based approach and standard operational framework

Scaling up collaborative work on common positions would attract the full range of key institutional actors and enrich the CAP process. Best practices that have been effective in the CAP process should be replicated. The major AU specialised agencies, AUDA-NEPAD and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), should be fully involved.

An intergovernmental joint secretariat encompassing the AU Commission, UNECA and the AfDB to support member states and RECs is necessary to ensure the coherence of CAP thematic issues. For example, the interface between the Africa Three (A3) in the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council in forging stronger partnerships to deal with Africa's peace and security issues should be strengthened.

An approach to CAP formulation and promotion centred on Addis Ababa alone will not achieve the goals of the OAU or AU. The links between Addis Ababa and other multilateral diplomatic centres are fundamental to the development of a more robust CAP system.

Consistent articulation by AU leaders

AU leaders need to provide consistent messaging in their calls to the international community to act on CAPs, so that they speak as one with better effect and coordination.

Adequate resourcing for AU Commission

Resources are needed to ensure the AU Commission serves efficiently as the hub of consultation, coordination and communication on CAPs. As AU institutional reform takes place, AU policy organs must be proactive and timely on the delivery of CAPs. The experts on particular themes should be properly trained in diplomatic negotiations and coordination, coalition-building procedures and the dictates of multilateral interaction in, for instance, the various UN agencies.

AU member states' representatives in Addis Ababa must own their positions and champion them

The technical capacity of the commission's experts will be inadequate if AU observer missions are poorly staffed and professionals based in Addis Ababa lack financial resources or the time to attend global events in multilateral diplomatic centres. Having the right people, adequately resourced, at the commission will dramatically improve advocacy at the international level.

A foreign policy unit?

Some have proposed the setting up of a foreign policy unit in the AU Commission headquarters to handle CAPs. But until the AU has a unified, common African foreign policy, this will be counterproductive. Such a unit in the AU Commission placed for instance in the Bureau of the Chairperson, will be redundant in the long term. This is because technical skills related to specific themes are needed to address CAPs globally, and thematic experts, not generalists, should drive the CAPs process. Staffing such a unit with various experts would lead to the duplication of functions with the commission's line departments.

AU member states' representatives in Addis Ababa must own their positions and champion them robustly on targeted platforms. A foreign policy unit of bureaucrats at the continental level will have little or no voice in international forums. Member states, by contrast, have a recognisable voice at the UN and other multilateral platforms. The role commission staff should be mainly to

offer technical advice on the CAPs' design, development and advocacy strategies.

Conclusion

CAPs can continue to serve as effective continental policy and advocacy tools to strengthen the African voice globally. Much has been achieved. CAPs are no longer merely the wishes of the AU's Constitutive Act, but are practically fast becoming the embodiment of an African voice.

The AU Assembly should continue to encourage the active participation of member states in the CAP process. As the late Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie said at the formal launch of the OAU in May 1963, 'History teaches us that unity is strength.'¹⁶ The African voice is stronger when Africa is united.

In spite of the gloomy picture of global realities and the erosion of multilateralism, as well as the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the vision of the AU serving as a dynamic force in the international arena can be achieved. Agenda 2063 offers the goal of a strong, united and influential global player, and the CAPs process, if enhanced by the AU, can serve as a regional, continental and international effort for the good of all.

Notes

- 1 African Union Constitutive Act, signed in Lomé, Togo, July 2000, https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/34873-file-constitutiveact_en.pdf.
- 2 UN Department of Public Information, AU NEPAD Programme of Action (base document).
- 3 AU Agenda 2063, The Africa we want (popular version), May 2016 edition.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 UNOSAA, Africa speaking as One <https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/advocacy/onevoice.shtml>.
- 6 Agenda 2063, https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-01-background_note.pdf.
- 7 AU archives and resources.
- 8 UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (UNOSAA), Africa speaking as one, <https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/advocacy/onevoice.shtml>.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 AU, The Common African Position on the Post 2015 Development Agenda, March 2014.
- 11 AU Assembly, Declaration 1 (XXXI).
- 12 AU Assembly, Declaration 1 (XXXI), Declaration on the Anti-Corruption Year, Nouakchott, Mauritania, paragraph 8.
- 13 African Mining Vision, 2009, <https://www.uneca.org/publications/africa-mining-vision>.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
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This report is funded by the Hanns Seidel Foundation and the government of Denmark. The ISS is also grateful for support from the members of the ISS Partnership Forum: the Hanns Seidel Foundation, the European Union, the Open Society Foundations and the governments of Canada, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the USA.

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