



World leaders gather to talk tough issues at G20 summit in Osaka Japan Photo: AP/Susan Walsh

SAVING GLOBALIZATION: AFRICA'S FUTURE IN THE G20¹

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The rise of right-wing nationalist movements across Europe, US President Donald Trump's sustained anti-free trade rhetoric and the Brexit pose an existential threat to globalization. As the Group of Twenty (G20), which concluded its 14th Summit in Japan on June 29, 2019, is well-equipped to save globalization. A bilateral meeting on the margins of G20 summit between Chinese and US leaders has rekindled hope renewed talks to end trade wars. But the G20 has to look beyond its membership, recognize Africa's great potential and afford it a greater role in its agenda in the efforts to revamp and reform globalization.

Undoubtedly, the Fourteenth Summit of the Group of Twenty (G20) in Osaka, Japan on June 28–29, 2019 that ended yesterday is perhaps the “most high-stakes summit” in recent decades. Unfolding against the backdrop of the tit-for-tat US-China trade wars, the summit signals a deepening crisis of globalization. Expectedly,

the meeting between President Donald Trump and his Chinese Counterpart Xi Jinping on the

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sidelines of the summit on June 29 was awaited with bated breath. Trump's reported statement that America "Won't be raising tariffs for time being" has rekindled hope for the revival of trade talks that collapsed in early May 2019 after the United States accused China of renegeing on its pledges.

ANTI-GLOBALIZATION

Since 2016, globalization has faced a three-pronged backlash: US President Donald Trump's sustained anti-free trade rhetoric; the rise of right-wing nationalist movements across Europe; and Brexit or UK exit from the European Union (EU). Compounding globalization's woes are deadlocks in multilateral trade negotiations and trade restrictions. According to the World Trade Organization (WTO), the top G20 countries erected 20 new trade restrictions covering trade worth \$335.9 billion between October 2018 and May 2019.

The trade wars are a lose-lose scenario for both the US and China, disrupting global supply chains and slowing down the world's economic growth. The trade wars are also hurting Africa. In February 2019, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) lowered the continent's growth projections from 3.3 percent to 3.1 percent for 2019, citing rising trade tensions, Brexit and slowing Chinese growth. It further warned that the trade war could alone cause up to a 1.5 percent cumulative drop in Africa's GDP growth by 2021. As the machinery of global governance appears to be stalling, countries are turning to bilateralism and unilateralism. But this cannot provide a viable substitute. Global problems today require coordinated global solutions.

SAVING GLOBALIZATION

That said, pundits and activists blame globalization for its deepening crisis. It is responsible for rising income inequalities and poverty, which are

hurting the world's poorest and weakest people in developed and developing countries. But globalization is worth saving. In a policy brief titled, "[*Can the G20 Save Globalisation?*](#)" (April 14, 2018), Amrita Narklika argues that the G20 is well-equipped to save globalization. She proffers three arguments why G20 is best suited to rescue globalization, and reform it. First the G20 was created in 1999 to foster sustainable economic growth and stability worldwide. Its success in responding to the financial crisis of 2008 proved its mettle as an effective rapid-response, crisis-management group.

Second, its structure is flexible and its mandate relatively less regimented compared to other formal organizations, making it a viable rapid and improvised reaction force despite not having a permanent secretariat.

Thirdly is its 'troika' framework where the Presidency (Japan) works with the former presidency (Argentina) and incoming presidency (Saudi Arabia) in setting and implementing the agenda and addressing the most pressing problems of the time.

Added to this is the face-to-face contact among the leaders. In this regard, in 2019 Xi and Trump met in a leader-level diplomacy, which is key to trust-building and the exercise of collective leadership.

INCLUSIVITY

Inclusivity is key to saving globalization. The G20, more than any other global outfit, reflects the shift of economic power to the emerging world in the twenty-first century. The G20 provides a critical mass, constituting over 80 per cent of world trade and two-thirds of the world's population.

But the G20 still has a serious inclusivity deficit. Globalization has to be more than a preserve of the global elite in powerful countries. It has to work on its own legitimacy and bring on board a critical

mass of marginalized sectors and economies in the Global South, which lack agenda-setting power in shaping globalization.

Indeed, the G20 forum reflects Africa's marginality in global governance and policy processes. South Africa is the only African country of the club. The African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) are invited as guests. Pretoria is expected to be the continent's voice and defender of its interests.

The continent need to be included in new multilateral bargains to reform globalization, including rethinking the agenda of international cooperation in a multi-polar world.

Laudably, key powers are providing global public goods likely to spur Africa's recovery and integration into a globalized world. A case in point is Japan's Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) and China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

G20 AFRICA CORPORATION

The previous presidencies of the G20 have tried to incorporate Africa. From the outset, the G20 created the Africa Advisory Group (AAG) as its regular working group, currently co-chaired by Germany and South Africa. When China held the presidency of the group in 2016, the G20 made industrialization in Africa a high priority.

Moreover, in March 2017, the German presidency initiated the G20 Compact with Africa (CWA), as the central pillar of the G20 Africa Partnership and its mission to support private investment, sustainable infrastructure, and employment in African countries.

The G20 Africa Partnership seems to be working. In its *Second Compact Monitoring Report* (April 2019), the World Bank concluded on a positive note that: "after two full years in existence (there are) positive trends in economic growth and slow but encouraging progress in investment generation".

Argentina devoted its presidency in 2018 to improving cooperation with the continent through people-to-people diplomacy. And in 2019, the Osaka Summit, which focused on new technology such as artificial intelligence and digital trade, has underlined the need to support Africa in bridging the digital divide and leapfrogging it to the fourth industrial revolution.

As a force of globalization, the G20 has to look beyond its membership, recognize Africa's great potential and afford it a greater role in its agenda.

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