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THE IJR WEEKLY LENS

07 March 2025 Column

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HOW SA IS PUTTING AFRICA ON TOP OF THE G20 AGENDA

South Africa's historic G20 presidency marks a significant milestone as the first African nation to assume this influential role during the year-long presidency under the theme "Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability".

The G20 bloc is a multilateral trade bloc constituted of the fast-emerging economies, as well as the European Commission and the African Union. The G20 includes 19 other countries, including Germany, France, Indonesia, Brazil, China, Japan, the US, and Russia, among others. Countries represent 85% of the global economy and 75% of world trade.

The country will host around 130 working group and 23 ministerial-level meetings this year. However, geopolitical and economic tensions loom large over this year's presidency and are may impact in

its effectiveness. Despite facing antagonism from the US, the country is making a strong effort and has demonstrated resilience and determination in advocating for a more inclusive global dialogue.

**SOUTH AFRICA'S G20
PRESIDENCY CHAMPIONS
AFRICA'S PRIORITIES, ,
PUSHING FOR DEBT
RELIEF AND ECONOMIC
EQUITY ON THE GLOBAL
STAGE.**



The country has also been at pains to emphasise that this G20 is also about putting African issues like the crippling debt crisis on the agenda.

SA diplomats are also downplaying this antagonism and arguing it's Africa's time to discuss issues that impact the continent. On a global scale, Africa's impact remains understated, often overshadowed by larger nations in the West but South Africa is determined to ensure the continent's voices are amplified and its contributions are recognised and valued in shaping international and economic policies. As South Africa navigates its role in this influential forum, the country says its determined to advocate for a more equitable representation that reflects Africa's potential within these global conversations.

Putting Africa on the agenda...

South Africa sees the G20 presidency as an opportunity for the country to influence global economic policies and promote sustainable development across the continent and wants to leverage this platform to address issues such as global trade, UN reform, and debt relief. South Africa took over from Brazil before handing it over to the US in November 2025.

However, the country's presidency has already been overshadowed, firstly, when the US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, said he won't be attending the Foreign Ministers meeting in Johannesburg in February. Rubio has described South Africa's theme for the year as a "diversity, equality, and inclusion framework"—one that the new Trump administration strongly opposes. Rubio boycotted the meeting after an executive order by President Donald Trump that stopped aid to the country over a law that the White House claimed amounts to 'discrimination against the country's white minority'. However, the reality is that the Trump administration is unhappy and displeased with South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice.

Despite Rubio's absence, the foreign ministers meeting went ahead and the US sent their most senior diplomat in the country, the acting ambassador Dana Brown. She has since resigned from her diplomatic posting. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi all attended the Nasrec gathering alongside representatives from the European Union, United Nations, and African Union.

African priorities

In his opening address to the Foreign Ministers meeting, Ramaphosa said that while Africa is home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies, it faced unique challenges, such as the impact of climate change, development needs, and the effects of global trade dynamics.

‘The Summit's location underscores the need for African voices to be heard on critical global issues, like sustainable development, the digital economy, and the shift toward green energy. It is a great opportunity to promote greater collaboration between African nations and the rest of the world’.

Ramaphosa added that ‘geopolitical tensions, rising intolerance, conflict and war, climate change, pandemics and energy and food insecurity threaten an already fragile global coexistence’.

Africa’s Debt crisis...

Ramaphosa further outlined the priority areas, including reform of the global financial system. and the debt issues that many African nations and countries in the global south face. ‘We must enhance multilateral coordination on debt, drawing in the private sector.

South Africa supports the call for the strengthening of the multilateral trading system and WTO reforms. We want to urge that the WTO must move towards reforms so that the trading system in the world is fair for all’ Ramaphosa said during the closing address in Brazil in December.

According to the African Development Bank, it estimates that Africa’s total external debt, which stood at \$1.12 trillion in 2022, had risen to \$1.152 trillion by end-2023. The bank says with global interest rates at their highest level for 40 years and as multiple bond debt securities issued by African countries reach maturity, Africa will pay out \$163 billion just to service debts in 2024, up sharply from \$61 billion in 2010.

At the opening of the G20 Finance and Central Bank Governors’ meeting in March in Cape Town, Ramaphosa again highlighted the debt crisis and called for a ‘fresh approach to tackle Africa’s persistent debt crisis.’

African leaders' debt relief initiative

Several former African heads of state seized the opportunity to meet Ramaphosa in Cape Town during

the G20 Finance meeting, advocating for comprehensive debt relief for the continent. The gathering of the former African heads of state with Ramaphosa highlighted a united front in addressing this pressing concern.

The former leaders also launched the African leaders' debt relief initiative, led by the former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, Senegalese Macky Sall, Tanzania’s Jakaya Kikwete, Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, Malawi’s Joyce Banda, the former president of Mauritius Ameenah Gurub-Fakim, and Yemi Osinbajo (former Nigeria VP).

The global data group, One Data Analyses, says African nations owe about US 685 billion to external creditors as of 2023; this year they will pay close to US 89 billion in external debt service alone with 20 low-income countries in Africa at risk of debt distress.

Obasanjo said, ‘The money that should have gone into essential areas of human welfare and human development, education, and health and nutrition is given to pay the debt that seems to be interminable. And we believe very strongly that if we can get debt relief, which is not charity, it will augur well for countries and the creditors’.

Malawi's Joyce Banda said the debt has to be forgiven and that, in addition to countries in the G20 cutting down millions of dollars in aid to developing nations, debt relief is urgent.

‘ For me it's the more reason why this initiative should move aggressively with the same countries because African countries are saying we're not looking for charity; we understand, and we are ready to fight, to build our capacities in our countries, to move our economies for that to happen, we need debt relief. We understand there is not going to be a free lunch anymore and are willing to turn our economies around’.

The former heads of state have proposed a two-pronged approach that includes a predictable, fair, and inclusive debt restructuring process involving all creditors—private, bilateral, and multilateral. The former leaders also want the cost of capital for all developing countries, which includes credit enhancements through multilateral institutions

to unlock affordable financing. They also want debt suspension mechanisms to create fiscal space for development.

Given the precarious geopolitical forces playing themselves out at the moment, there may be little appetite for large-scale debt write-off for Africa but Ramaphosa is determined to make this a cornerstone of the country's G20 presidency, using the meetings to drum up support and it will be a key issue at the heads of state meeting in November.

With the upcoming heads of state meeting in November set to spotlight these vital discussions, Ramaphosa aims to galvanize international commitment and counterbalance any waning interest from the US in Africa's progress. Through these strategic efforts, he is not only advocating for Africa's developmental needs but also positioning the continent as an essential player in global dialogue and cooperation.

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