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G20 AND AFRICA: CHINA'S TURN

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While the G20 originated with the aim to be more representative of developing countries' interests than other existing global alliances, such as the G7, and the G20's agenda has considerable importance in the development of Africa, South Africa remains the only permanent African member of the institution, the only African voice within the group. This under-representation of Africa is partly an internally-driven problem, i.e. African leaders' inability or unwillingness to contribute to global decision-making, and partly an externally-driven issue, i.e. a generalized attitude by great powers and institutions to exclude Africa from such processes. These trends are not specific to the G20 but rather concern, more broadly, Africa's position in international relations and development, often considered irrelevant. With the increased presence of China since the early 2000s, things have started to shift. This change is not solely a consequence of China's development model – which emphasizes economic development and political non-interference, arguably preferred by African leaders – but also of new possibilities, for Africans, to choose among different development models, i.e. most notably generalized as the 'Eastern' and the 'Western'. Such possibilities

translate into an enhanced ability by Africans to leverage negotiations and best interests. How so in the context of the G20?

China's leadership emphasises the importance of the role played by financial institutions such as the BRICS New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, created and dominated by large emerging economies. These exist, among other things, to counterbalance the dominance of the 'usual suspects', i.e. the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and World Trade Organization, where advanced economies dominate in votes, leaders, financing and effective policies. Some believe this diversification is evidence of a rising new global order, multipolar by nature. Within this world, China, as the largest developing country, is often considered the bearer of developing countries' interests and rights on the global stage. Others, such as senior reporter on Sino-African issues, Lovemore Chikova, argue that, "given its status, China can successfully act as a 'broker' to leverage both political and economic power between developed and developing countries". The theme of the 2016 China-led G20 Summit seems to adhere to this latter stream of argu-

ments with the goal of acting together “towards an innovated, invigorated, interconnected and inclusive world”. Chinese State Councillor Yang Jiechi, who is in charge of preparations for the summit, said: “what we advocate is innovation in the broad sense. We call for innovation in science and technology and, beyond that, in development concepts, institutions and mechanisms, business models and a whole range of areas”.

More specifically to Africa, China intends to encourage G20 members to help Africa and Least Developed Countries to speed up industrialization, reduce poverty and pursue sustainable development by means of capacity building, increased investments and infrastructure improvement. China’s Foreign Minister, Wang, Yi, at the Hangzhou Summit in May 2016, announced ten major objectives for China’s G20 leadership, one of which focused on Africa. This explicit emphasis on the continent is a first in the history of the G20 and clearly signals the importance of Africa’s industrialization for China. Even more, to show the desire to push Africa’s case at the summit, China has invited more African countries than ever before. This may be seen both as a strategic move and as a clear message, to development actors, that the continent has been left behind and it is about time to work with it to achieve industrialization. While Africa is under-represented at the G20, and thus its issues may not be fully incorporated into the G20

agenda, some note that, with the help of China, issues concerning the continent are bound to become permanent subjects of G20 meetings. Ensuring that Africa is represented permanently is not only an exercise in public relations but most importantly, as ODI and SAIIA put it in a joint publication in 2011, a way to improve the G20’s legitimacy among excluded groupings. Moreover, according to SAIIA expert Grant Makorera, “Africa can play an important role in global rebalancing, for example by promoting capital flows from surplus countries to profitable opportunities in sustainable infrastructure and climate finance opportunities”.

For African leaders industrialization is the explicit goal of Agenda 2063. As a consequence, the pledges of the Chinese to push for support of Africa’s industrialization represent the hope that developed countries within the group will finally pay more attention to Africa. This G20 may thus become an opportunity not to strengthen specific alliances such as the BRICS, or the G7, but rather to discuss, as suggested by ISS Jakkie Cilliers, “an emerging global consensus on a range of development and sustainability issues [which] is underpinning all groupings and creating unexpected synergies”. What remains to be seen is the extent to which African leaders will actively engage in actual decision-making processes and potentially contribute to bridging existing alliances, or the creation of new ones.