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AMPLIFYING AFRICAN VOICES FOR STRATEGIC ACTION (AFSA) CONFERENCE REPORT 2025

“Africa in the G20: Advancing Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability”

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1. Introduction

The second annual Amplifying African Voices for Strategic Action (AFSA) Conference was held from 25 to 27 November 2025 at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. It was hosted by the African Centre for the Study of the United States (ACSUS) in partnership with a broad coalition of academic institutions, think tanks, civil society organisations, and research networks. The conference was convened under the theme *Africa in the G20: Advancing Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability*. This theme aligned deliberately with the G20 Summit theme set by the Republic of South Africa, which hosted the landmark twentieth G20 Summit in Africa for the first time, on 22–23 November 2025. It was the first G20 Summit to be convened on the African continent.

The conference programme extended beyond the main three-day event to encompass a series of pre-conference activities designed to deepen scholarly exchange and build capacity among emerging researchers. On 21 November 2025, world-renowned economist and Director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University, Professor Jeffrey Sachs, delivered a public lecture titled *Africa in the G20: Multilateralism in a Shifting Global Order* that set an intellectually stimulating tone for the week, addressing Africa’s development imperatives in the context of shifting global power dynamics. On 24 November, an Emerging Scholars Workshop provided a dedicated platform for early-career researchers to present their work, receive mentorship, and engage with senior scholars ahead of the main conference. Together, these activities reflected the AFSA mandate to not only convene established voices but to cultivate the next generation of African scholars and practitioners.

Building on the momentum of the inaugural AFSA conference held at Strathmore University in Nairobi, Kenya, on 31 October to 1 November 2024, the 2025 edition sought to deepen, broaden, and operationalise the conversations begun at that event. Where the inaugural conference established the intellectual architecture for thinking about African agency in a global setting, AFSA 2025 aimed to translate those ideas into actionable frameworks, leveraging the unique opportunity presented by South Africa’s G20 presidency to place African priorities at the heart of global multilateral discourse.

2. Conference Context

AFSA 2025 took place at a moment of profound and accelerating geopolitical flux, with consequences that disproportionately impact Africa more than other regions of the world. The continent continues to bear the brunt of climate change despite contributing comparatively less to global carbon emissions. The rapid advancement of digital technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence, threatens to widen existing inequalities, even as several African nations remain among the world’s foremost producers of the rare and critical minerals that underpin these very technologies. Meanwhile, the fraying of longstanding alliances between the United States and Europe has introduced new uncertainties into Africa’s external relations, while long-sought

reforms of the global governance architecture remain stalled as major powers retreat into self-interested unilateralism.

Within the continent, the picture is equally complex. An unsustainable debt burden, inequitable trade and financial frameworks, governance challenges, and heightened conflict in the Great Lakes region, the Sahel, and the Horn of Africa compound Africa's developmental vulnerabilities. The withdrawal of key global actors from multilateral health and development financing has placed millions of lives at risk and underscored the urgency for Africa to chart a more self-determined development path. The progressive "Pact for the Future," adopted at the United Nations Summit of the Future in 2024, faces significant headwinds from isolationist forces, further imperilling the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

It is against this backdrop that South Africa's G20 presidency acquired singular importance for the continent. The G20 Summit theme: Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability, offered a framework through which African nations, through their collective voice, could assert their interests and demand more equitable global arrangements. AFSA 2025 was conceived as a complementary platform: a space where scholars, policymakers, civil society actors, media practitioners, and private sector representatives could interrogate unfolding dynamics, challenge prevailing narratives, and generate knowledge and strategies.

Anchored in the concept of African agency, defined not as a passive response to external pressures but as proactive, self-determined leadership, the conference was structured around three thematic tracks. The first, "Conceptualising African Agency," explored how solidarity among African stakeholders and their global partners could move the concept from theoretical abstraction to practical policy action. The second track, "Geopolitics and Global Affairs," examined Africa's external relations, diplomatic strategies, and positioning within key multilateral institutions, including the G20, BRICS, the Global South, the United Nations, and the African Union. The third track, "Communicating African Agency," brought together media scholars, journalists, digital technology experts, and communications practitioners to explore how African perspectives can be amplified, framed, and projected on the global stage in ways that shift narratives and shape outcomes.

The conference brought together a diverse community of participants from across Africa and beyond. The proceedings were enriched by the participation of senior government and international organisation officials, enabling the dialogue to span the full spectrum from academic inquiry to policy application. In keeping with the AFSA vision of bridging disciplinary and sectoral divides, the conference also convened sessions specifically designed for the private sector, reinforcing the importance of connecting scholarship, policy, and business in the pursuit of African-led solutions.

3. Opening Remarks

The Programme Director, Mr Patrick Lonwabo Kulati, CEO of Good Governance Africa (GGA), welcomed all participants to the conference. GGA is an organisation that advocates, conducts research, and publishes on issues of good governance. He introduced the organisation's quarterly publication, *Africa In Fact* (AIF), and invited attendees to subscribe and contribute articles. Kulati drew a comparison between two historic firsts for the continent: the hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup and the upcoming 2025 G20 Leadership Summit. He used this comparison to highlight Africa's growing global influence and a shift from showcasing sporting excellence to shaping and leading discussions on major global issues such as AI, debt sustainability, and digitalisation. He emphasised Africa's increasing voice and agency on the world stage, urging participants to actively shape the continent's future as core contributors and architects of these conversations.

Dr Bob Wekesa, Director of the African Centre for the Study of the US, also welcomed participants to the second edition of the Amplifying African Voices for Strategic Action Conference. He extended gratitude to the planning committee that had been working since February to make the 2025 conference a reality. Emphasising Africa's role as an active participant rather than a passive observer, he also highlighted two forthcoming publications by the Centre: *Africa in the Global South: Advancing Agency, Amplifying Voices*, edited by Bob Wekesa and Edward Kaweesi; and *African Agency Towards Global Powers: A View from Regional Economic Blocs*, edited by Bob Wekesa, Kabaso Kabwe, and Job Allan Wefwafwa. He noted that the conference forms part of the Centre's broader project, "African Agency Towards Global Powers," supported by the Open Society Foundations.

Professor Jacqueline De Matos Ala, Head of the International Relations Department at University of the Witwatersrand, highlighted the significance of the G20 declaration, emphasising the consensus achieved and the role of multilateralism in addressing global issues. She then reflected on the recent G20 meeting, highlighting as significant the early adoption of the leaders' declaration, an unusual move that signalled prior consensus and a renewed commitment to multilateralism. While acknowledging its imperfections, she argued that sustained multilateral engagement remains essential for building agreement across diverse regions, including Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Central to her remarks was the concept of Ubuntu, which she framed as both a Southern African and broader continental value emphasizing solidarity, inclusion, and consensus-building.

In a fragmented global context marked by inequality, conflict, and division, she suggested the G20 demonstrated that collective solutions are still possible. Importantly, she underscored Africa's role in global geopolitics, arguing that the continent must be recognized as an active

agent in conflict resolution rather than sidelined by dominant powers. Durable peace, she noted, cannot emerge from unilateral or power-driven negotiations. Prof. Ala also emphasised that key G20 themes of solidarity, equality, and sustainability were global, and not uniquely African, concerns. She highlighted persistent inequalities, the marginalization of vulnerable groups, and the urgent need for more inclusive governance.

On sustainability, she critiqued short-term political cycles that undermine long-term climate commitments. Turning to political economy, she pointed to shifts in global trade and finance, urging Africa to diversify partnerships and rethink reliance on traditional Western institutions, which she described as outdated and rooted in colonial-era systems. Finally, she called for a critical engagement with AI, stressing its material costs, labor implications, and environmental impact. She concluded by urging a reimagining of Africa's place in international relations through cooperative, consensus-driven approaches.

(Link to session <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=momLT2DYs9w>).

4. Keynote Address- Brian Kagoro, Managing Director, Programmes, Open Society Foundations, South Africa

Brian Kagoro opened his keynote by situating Africa's development challenges within the broader context of the G20 Summit hosted by South Africa, and its significance for placing African agency at the centre of global economic discourse. Kagoro argued that despite Africa's vast resources, demographic strength, and growing geopolitical relevance, the continent remains trapped in a cycle of underdevelopment perpetuated by the very architecture of the global financial system. A central theme of his address was the scale of illicit financial flows. He noted that the illicit flows were draining the continent at between \$90 and \$150 billion annually. This, he said, was a conservative estimate of how the continent was bleeding money.

Critically, Kagoro noted that most of the outflows do not constitute corruption in the conventional sense; rather, they arise from transactions deliberately structured to exploit African nations through tax havens located in developed countries. Corruption, he pointed out, accounts for only approximately 5% of the continent's financial outflows. Nonetheless, Africa continues to bear disproportionately high borrowing costs premised on perceived risk, even as data show that African infrastructure loans default at lower rates than comparable investments in other regions. This contradiction, Kagoro argued, is not accidental. It reflects a global financial architecture originally designed during the colonial era, when Africa was conceived purely as a site for resource extraction, and which has since been reproduced through neo-colonial arrangements that perpetuate debt and dependency.

Kagoro was sharply critical of the tendency in international forums to discuss Africa through the lens of abstract themes: artificial intelligence, critical minerals, energy transition, and others,

without confronting the structural inequalities that underpin the continent's underdevelopment. He noted that foreign direct investment into African economies is driven by investors' strategic interests rather than by the ease of doing business or governance indices so frequently cited in development discourse. He argued that this dynamic must be named and challenged rather than accommodated. He also challenged the practice of sending African students abroad for education in countries that are not leading global innovation, arguing that this perpetuates intellectual dependency and drains human capital at precisely the moment when Africa needs to invest in its own knowledge ecosystems. The G20, he insisted, should be a platform not for polite multilateral dialogue, but for a frank reckoning with the systems designed to lock Africa out of equitable development.

A notable shift, Kagoro suggested, is underway in how South Africa positions itself globally. He described the end of what he termed South African exceptionalism, the historical tendency to seek preferential treatment from Europe based on its European-descended population. In its place, South African ministers at the G20 have increasingly embraced a Pan-Africanist posture, asserting the country's identity as both a rule-taker and a rule-maker in the international system. Given that over 60% of South Africa's economic activity derives from the broader continent, this reorientation is not merely symbolic; it is an economic and strategic imperative. One of the more striking propositions Kagoro advanced was what he described as a "polyamorous" approach to African diplomacy. Rather than binding the continent to any single geopolitical patron, Africa should leverage the competing interests of a diverse range of powers, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Turkey, South Korea, China, and Russia, to advance its own collectively defined interests.

This is not naivety about the ambitions of these actors; Kagoro explicitly cautioned against viewing China and Russia through a purely ideological lens, urging instead for a clear-eyed assessment of their interests and power projections. This approach requires Africa to develop what he called strategic regionalism, or the capacity to act collectively, even when individual African economies may appear small relative to major global players. Frameworks such as Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provide the architecture for this collective agency, but Kagoro stressed that they must be updated to reflect current geopolitical and economic realities. In an era where ideology has re-emerged as a central force in both Western and Eastern approaches to global governance, Africa cannot afford to remain merely pragmatic; it must develop and project its own ideological coherence.

Kagoro acknowledged Africa's significant demographic advantage through its large and growing youth population but cautioned that this potential remains unrealised. He observed that the continent is too often perceived through three reductive lenses: as a demographic threat, as a source of cheap labour for developed economies, or as a reserve of caregivers. Realising the true dividend of Africa's youth requires a fundamental transformation of educational and skills development systems to prepare workers for the industries and economies of the future, particularly in areas like technology, critical minerals processing, and green energy.

Moving from diagnosis to prescription, Kagoro called for a set of concrete, structural interventions. Chief among these was the creation of a Pan-African sovereign wealth fund, which he argued could serve as a transformative vehicle for mobilising and directing capital towards infrastructure and long-term development. He also called for a rethinking of the mandates of national and continental development banks to make them more effective at attracting private capital. Regarding industrialisation, Kagoro emphasised the centrality of critical minerals, not as commodities to be extracted and exported in raw form, but as inputs for domestic industrial development and the creation of regional value chains.

He warned against long-term resource deals that come with the risks of locking the continent into new forms of dependency and argued that Africa must insist on processing and beneficiation at source. This, he argued, is the path from enclave economies, which generate environmental degradation without commensurate local benefit, to integrated, sustainable economies that serve African communities. Kagoro was candid about internal obstacles as well, criticising the lack of urgency and transparency among political and social elites, and calling for greater accountability and collective will.

He closed his address with a personal reflection, a story about his grandfather's unfulfilled potential, as a reminder that the time for merely talking about Africa's potential has long passed. What is required now is action, grounded in self-reliance, mutual benefit, and a clear-eyed understanding of Africa's place and power in the world, he averred. (Link to address <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5wG2TrG7Fmo>)

Day One Proceedings

5. Panel on Technology and Critical Minerals

This high-level panel discussion was convened by Southern African Resource Watch (SARW) against the backdrop of the keynote session. It focused on technology, artificial intelligence, and critical minerals, with particular emphasis on value addition, governance, financing, and community impacts. The session was moderated by Dr Claude Kabemba, Executive Director of SARW. The discussion took place in the context of the G20 Summit, which had adopted a framework encouraging value addition of critical minerals at source and strengthening Africa's technological capacity and supply chain resilience. The panel interrogated whether this ambition was feasible, and under what political, economic, and institutional conditions it would be attainable.

The panel discussion unfolded as a fundamental reframing of Africa's critical mineral moment, not as a geological accident or a "resource curse," but as a question of governance, power, and agency. Ms Lauren Hermanus of Southern Transitions set the tone by rejecting the fatalism embedded in the resource curse narrative. "Our minerals are not cursed," she argued; outcomes

are the product of deliberate governance choices and global power asymmetries. For her, the real battleground is not what appears in legislation, but what she called “the real rules of the game.” Across the continent, fiscal systems are undermined by under-pricing, transfer mispricing, tax holidays, and weak regulatory enforcement. Extractivism persists not because Africa lacks policy frameworks, but because existing regulations are not enforced. She illustrated this through Guinea, where enclave-style bauxite extraction historically served private railways and ports disconnected from domestic development. Yet following the 2021 political transition, the state moved to close fiscal loopholes, expel non-compliant investors, and insist on commitments to local alumina refining. The lesson was stark: agency emerges when states enforce existing rules.

Building on this, Prof Mahlanyane Kenneth Mathe of the University of South Africa addressed the question of whether Africa can realistically achieve technological parity in mineral beneficiation. His answer was a cautiously affirmative “yes, but only with deliberate restructuring.” He identified structural constraints: declining STEM investment, insufficient geologists and industrial processing engineers, short political cycles that undermine long-term industrial planning, and persistent infrastructure deficits, particularly in energy and transport.

Industrialisation, he argued, must be anchored in energy independence and abundance; exporting hydrogen or green energy while domestic populations face shortages would reproduce dependency in new forms. Skills development must begin early, at primary and secondary educational levels, and regional cooperation—such as emerging DRC–Zambia battery corridor initiatives—offers a more viable path than isolated national efforts. Yet he cautioned against simplistic solutions: nationalisation without governance reform risks geopolitical isolation, and sovereignty must be matched with institutional competence and infrastructure capacity.

If governance and skills form the structural pillars, financing remains the circulatory system. Mr Deprose Muchena of the Open Society Foundation situated the debate within global capital flows, urging African stakeholders to develop “the intelligence to see where money originates, and where it accumulates.” He cited a \$500 million share acquisition involving Ivanhoe Mines and the Qatar Investment Authority, routed through Canada but ultimately targeting mining operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The example revealed how sovereign wealth funds and transnational capital structure extraction in such a way that they occur through layered financial channels. He challenged the dominant “Africa risk” narrative, noting that capital is not deterred by instability when extraction profits are high.

Meanwhile, Africa loses between \$20–40 billion annually through tax incentives and mispricing in mining, even as global spending priorities favour security—\$2.7 trillion in 2024—over closing a \$1.3 trillion development financing gap. His call was systemic: regulate capital inflows and outflows, pursue strategic public-interest litigation, build producer blocs akin to OPEC, and invest

in narrative and data sovereignty. Without confronting the global political economy, talk about beneficiation risks will remain rhetorical.

A sobering intervention came from Mr Davie Malungisa of Southern Africa Resource Watch, who grounded the discussion in lived realities. Environmental Sustainability Governance (ESGs) frameworks, he warned, increasingly frame communities as “risk factors” to be managed rather than rights holders. Critical mineral supply chains are often built on poverty, child labour, gender-based violence, and ecological degradation. The green transition risks becoming “extractivism with a green label” unless justice is embedded at its core. He posed a moral question that lingered over the discussion: Is industrialisation worth it if human dignity is sacrificed? Beneficiation cannot be meaningful if communities remain impoverished, ecosystems are degraded, and intergenerational justice is compromised.

Audience interventions sharpened the geopolitical and normative dimensions. Participants highlighted contradictions in the European Union’s engagement, promoting green transitions in global forums while pursuing bilateral extraction agreements and hydrogen initiatives in Africa, with limited public participation. The absence of coordinated continental mineral strategies weakens bargaining leverage, even as the rhetoric of unity proliferates. Students raised nationalisation as a pathway to sovereignty, prompting cautious responses that sovereignty without institutional capacity may deepen vulnerability rather than resolve it. A critical thread also emerged around data sovereignty: Africa often relies on external geological surveys and global institutions for estimates of its mineral wealth. Without owning its data, the continent negotiates from a structurally constrained position.

Across these exchanges, several themes crystallised. Africa does not lack policy frameworks; it lacks consistent enforcement. Infrastructure, especially energy, water, and transport, is foundational to beneficiation. Capital responds to regulatory clarity and power, not appeals. Narrative sovereignty matters because ideas shape bargaining positions. And most fundamentally, industrialisation must be community-centred, translating mineral wealth into improved livelihoods, gender equity, and ecological protection.

In closing, the panel emphasised the fact that Africa possesses the mineral base, intellectual capital, legal frameworks, and market leverage to transform its position in global value chains. What remains contested is political will, continental coordination, enforcement capacity, and sustained investment in science and indigenous data production. Universities were challenged to become activist institutions—producers of grounded research and practical solutions. Ultimately, Africa’s critical mineral moment is not merely technical. It is political, ethical, and structural. The question is not whether value exists in the ground, but whether that value will remain, circulate, and transform lives on the continent. (Link to session <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uA9RjGTdBBBA>).

6. Panel on Foreign Influence, Disinformation, and Democratic Resilience in West Africa

Convened by the Centre for Democratic Development, Ghana (CDD-Ghana), the session was framed around a newly released baseline study examining how global powers are shaping governance, security, and democratic consolidation across eight West African countries. But what began as an academic conversation transformed into a deeply personal and politically charged exchange about power, propaganda, and the future of democracy in the Sahel and beyond.

Dr Kojo Asante of CDD-Ghana opened by situating the discussion within a shifting geopolitical landscape. The study, he explained, examined the strategic interests and engagement models of actors such as France, Russia, China, Turkey, the Gulf States, and North African powers, and how these engagements carry both stabilising and destabilising consequences. The moderator, Mr Rabiou Alhassan, reinforced the stakes by citing research linking the spread of disinformation directly to instability across the continent. The central question, therefore, was not simply whether foreign actors are present, but how narratives are being weaponised to shape political outcomes.

Mr Mousa Kondo of the Sahel Institute, Mali, began the discussion by noting the intensification of disinformation campaigns following the 2020 military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. According to him, the arrival of Russian Wagner operatives marked a turning point—not merely in security terms, but in communication strategy. “They didn’t come only with the military side,” he explained. “They brought communication experts, political experts. They build narratives on the mistakes of other partners.” These narratives, he argued, capitalised on widespread frustration with France’s historical role in the region and reframed military takeovers as acts of liberation.

Kondo’s most provocative intervention challenged the romanticisation of current Sahelian leaders. “What you think is happening in Burkina [Faso] or in Mali is only what has been sold to you on the internet,” he told the audience. He described arrests of journalists, activists sent to the frontlines after criticising authorities, and shrinking civic space, realities he insisted are obscured by carefully curated social media imagery. “Propaganda is used to create fact-based action which never existed,” he warned. “It can solve today’s pressure, but it will not solve tomorrow’s problems.” His remarks became particularly pointed when an audience member framed Sahelian leaders like Ibrahim Traoré within a broader decolonial struggle. Kondo responded that symbolic defiance of France cannot justify repression at home, and he challenged listeners to actively seek alternative narratives rather than passively consuming viral content.

Ms Kessy Ekomo Soignet from the Peace and Development Watch, Central African Republic, expanded the discussion by highlighting how disinformation has become institutionalised and professionalised. She described how the Wagner Group’s presence in her country included training young people in digital tools, artificial intelligence, and online manipulation. “They

recruit young people. They train them. It's like going to school," she said. In contexts of unemployment and poverty, disinformation has become a source of income and even career advancement. She also challenged assumptions about limited digital penetration in fragile states, noting that even in regions officially reported to have minimal internet access, satellite connectivity has expanded access to online propaganda.

The result is a population deeply exposed to manipulated content, while civil societies struggle for funding and institutional support to counter it. Disinformation, she argued, is not just foreign interference; it is now a weapon used by governments to delegitimise critics and shrink civic space. She concluded that researchers must recognise that people have access to information via technology such as Starlink, which can promote disinformation. She made a fundamental point that what is happening is more documenting of the issues around disinformation instead of responding to the situation through developing a strategy.

Mr Paul Osei Kuffour of WADEMOS Network, Ghana, brought in a regional lens, emphasising that institutions like ECOWAS are themselves targets of narrative attacks. As democratic backsliding and constitutional manipulations increase, ECOWAS's credibility has been eroded in public discourse. Kuffour suggested that the regional body must reform and strengthen its human rights mechanisms and harmonise presidential term limits to restore legitimacy. Without such reforms, he implied, disinformation campaigns will continue to exploit perceptions of hypocrisy and ineffectiveness.

Joining virtually from Dakar, Mr Ibrahima Kane of Governance Expert and Advisor to the Special Envoy of the President of Senegal, offered a Senegalese perspective. While acknowledging that Senegal does not face the same level of foreign-backed destabilisation as some Sahel states, he expressed concern about domestic political actors' use of social media to bypass institutional channels. He cautioned that social media platforms are increasingly controlled by actors with their own agendas, making them fertile ground for manipulation. At the same time, he broadened the scope by naming multiple external players—Russian, Emirati, Turkish, French, and others—competing for influence and resources in West Africa. For Kane, the response must include stronger collaboration among civil society actors, particularly within the Global South, and more strategic use of platforms like the G20 to advance African interests.

The audience interventions revealed the ideological fault lines running through the debate. One participant questioned whether critics were "missing the forest for the trees," suggesting that leaders such as Traoré represent a broader decolonial awakening that should not be overshadowed by short-term governance concerns. Another raised the role of transnational influencers who travel across African countries, amplifying pro-regime narratives. These exchanges exposed a central tension: whether anti-Western rhetoric equates to genuine democratic transformation, or whether it risks masking authoritarian consolidation.

As the session concluded, the complexity of the issues discussed highlighted the magnitude of the situation in the region and beyond. Disinformation in West Africa is not merely about falsehoods circulating online; it is about power, legitimacy, sovereignty, and the contest over who defines reality. It is about young people trained to manipulate narratives, governments weaponising information against critics, regional bodies struggling to defend democratic norms, and citizens navigating a digital environment where perception often outweighs fact. In the end, the most resonant insight was that the struggle for democratic resilience in West Africa is increasingly a struggle over narrative control. The battle is not only over territory or resources, but over meaning itself, over whose story is told, believed, and amplified in an era where the line between liberation and repression is constantly being contested online. (Link to session <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDz7NDTNVgs>).

7. Panel on High-Level Panel on Financing for Sustainable Development: Reimagining Partnerships and Financing Models for Africa’s Sustainable Future

The session began by framing Africa’s sustainable development challenge as both acute and structural. While many regions struggle with implementation gaps, the moderator observed that Africa’s lag demands a fundamental rethink of how the continent funds its future. The central question was clear: how can Africa finance sustainable development in ways that enable leapfrogging rather than deepen dependency?

Mr Jamiel Carim, Partner at Africa International Advisors, began by situating Africa’s financing dilemma within the history of its engagement with global capital. Too often, he argued, these relationships have been structurally unequal, with “global capital privatising the gains and socialising the losses in Africa.” This shifted the debate away from aid dependency toward systemic reform. If the problem is structural, the solution must be structural. Partnership cannot remain rhetorical; it must become a systems-based framework integrating public–private partnerships, blended finance, concessional capital, and even community co-ownership. Sustainable finance is not merely technocratic. Africa’s development trajectory is inseparable from political economy realities, and financing models must reflect that interconnectedness.

Dr George Kararach from the African Development Bank anchored his contribution in governance and institutional design. Sustainability, he stressed, is not simply about raising more money; it is about structuring it properly. On climate finance, he noted that Africa receives only around 3% of global flows despite its disproportionate vulnerability. Referencing debates on the just energy transition, he warned against prescribing rapid decarbonisation without adequate financial backing. Transitioning away from hydrocarbons cannot come “without the element of justice.” Economies dependent on coal and fossil fuels cannot absorb destabilising shocks without compensatory resources. A question raised in G20 discussions lingered: are African countries being asked to transition immediately, without the money on the table? Solidarity, the panel implied, must be matched by substance.

The discussion took a global financial architecture turn. Dr Kararach argued that sustainability in Africa requires systemic reform, pointing to the allocation of IMF Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), the majority of which went to countries that did not urgently need them. The African Development Bank has advocated reallocating unused SDRs to Africa, potentially channelled through credit-rated institutions. Such reforms, he suggested, are matters not only of equity but efficiency. He also outlined innovative instruments: an African Financial Stability Mechanism, balance sheet optimisation, partial risk guarantees, local currency financing to reduce exchange rate exposure, and diaspora and green bonds. Innovation, however, must rest on institutional credibility.

A recurring theme was Africa's perceived risk profile. Dr Kararach questioned whether the continent is objectively riskier than other regions, or whether risk is mispriced. Mr Carim pointed to information asymmetries and data gaps that distort investor perceptions. Risk assessments often occur in distant financial centres, detached from local realities. He cited fibre infrastructure rollouts in townships: conventional spreadsheets may flag high risk, yet community co-ownership significantly mitigates it. The better question, he suggested, is not simply how to secure assets, but how to collectively own them with communities. Partnership thus shifts from transactional to participatory, embedding inclusion into infrastructure design.

The panel also explored diaspora capital as an underleveraged resource. Remittance flows already exceed official aid, and diaspora bonds illustrate how capital rooted in belonging can be mobilised. Unlocking this potential requires trust, governance credibility, and well-structured instruments. Diaspora investors must have confidence that their funds will be managed transparently and productively. Ultimately, both speakers agreed that external finance cannot substitute for domestic reform. Scaling domestic resource mobilisation, strengthening tax systems, and building institutional capacity are foundational. Sustainability does not reside solely in ministries of finance or central banks. Responsibility extends across governments, private sector actors, civil society, and communities.

During the audience engagement, one participant asked how African institutions and firms could compete when external actors mobilise hundreds of millions of dollars at speed. If large infrastructure projects are externally financed, how do local engineers and entrepreneurs avoid marginalisation? The intervention highlighted that financing models must not only mobilise capital but also localise opportunity and build domestic capability. Another audience member extended this concern to large-scale infrastructure projects. How can governments responsibly finance dams or energy systems without overexposing themselves to risk? If private investors rigorously assess risk, should states not do the same? The exchange underscored the delicate balance between ambition and prudence. Audience interventions deepened this critique. How can blended finance and de-risking mechanisms be structured without reinforcing dependency? Beyond financial closure, how should success be measured? Financing models, participants argued, must demonstrate resilience and socio-economic transformation, not merely capital mobilisation.

Debt sustainability emerged as another critical dimension. Dr Kararach stressed that “debt in itself is not necessarily a bad thing.” The issue lies in governance: how debt is contracted, how transparent terms are, and whether borrowed funds are invested productively. He posed an intergenerational question: are governments indebting future generations without their voice? Resource-backed loans were highlighted as especially problematic when negotiated without transparency. Civil society, he argued, must scrutinise agreements to ensure accountability. This led to a pointed question on illicit financial flows. If Africa loses close to \$90 billion annually, what concrete steps are being taken?

Dr Kararach acknowledged the magnitude of the loss, noting it exceeds official development assistance. He emphasised asset recovery cooperation, improved extractive industry contract design, and strengthened public financial management. Accountability, he insisted, must be enforced wherever collusion occurs. Civil society is not merely a watchdog but a critical research and intelligence partner. Mr Carim added that integrity must extend to private actors; accountability cannot be externalised.

As the session closed, the conversation moved beyond calls for “more money.” Africa’s sustainable future depends on redesigning partnerships, correcting mispriced risk, reforming global financial rules, and strengthening domestic governance. Financing must be scaled up but also localised. Risks must be mitigated but not exaggerated. Capital must flow, but leakages must be closed. Debt must be governed transparently. Illicit financial flows represent a major untapped source of capital. Diaspora finance and innovative instruments offer scalable alternatives. Integrity across public and private sectors is indispensable.

A key consideration going forward was that financing Africa’s sustainable development is not merely a technical exercise. It is a political, ethical, and institutional project requiring solidarity backed by resources and participation anchored in accountability. (Link to session https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6J8zc_H3xE).

8. Plenary on Technology, AI & Critical Minerals: Inverting the AI Stack: African Agency in the AI Supply Chain (Panel by Institute for Advanced Study, USA).

The final plenary session convened scholars and practitioners working at the intersection of science and technology studies, global governance, AI policy, and China–Africa political economy. Chaired by Professor Alondra Nelson of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University, the discussion reframed artificial intelligence (AI) as a material infrastructure embedded in extractive, energy-intensive, and labour-dependent systems rather than an immaterial domain of algorithms and cloud computing.

Nelson argued that prevailing governance debates remain overly concentrated on regulating AI models and large technology firms, while neglecting the upstream and downstream supply chains that make AI possible. Data centres, semiconductor fabrication plants, and battery storage

systems rely on copper, lithium, cobalt, gallium, germanium, and rare earth elements. Rising demand for these materials has contributed to what some analysts describe as a new critical mineral “supercycle,” reshaping global trade patterns and intensifying geopolitical competition.

Central to Nelson’s intervention was the concept of “inverting the AI stack.” Conventionally, the AI stack is depicted as a hierarchy in which data feeds into chips, chips power cloud infrastructure, and applications sit at the top. This representation, she argued, obscures the ecological and social foundations on which AI depends. Inverting the stack broadens the analytical lens to encompass mining sites, labour regimes, energy and water consumption, environmental degradation, and waste streams. It reveals the Global South not as a passive recipient of digital technologies but as an indispensable contributor through material resources and labour. Nelson posed pressing governance questions: can accountability be traced from algorithm to mine? Can value flows from South to North be recognised and renegotiated? And can AI expansion be governed within finite planetary limits?

Dr Tatiana Carayannis of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University extended this analysis by contrasting simplified industry depictions of AI infrastructure with what she termed the “full AI stack,” which includes extraction, infrastructure development, energy use, and recycling. Drawing on research conducted at the Institute for Advanced Study, she advanced three core arguments. First, AI governance requires a political economy perspective that acknowledges its material foundations. Second, AI expansion operates within an extractive global economic model in which weak labour and environmental protections in mineral-producing countries subsidise technological growth elsewhere. Third, governance frameworks must become more participatory and equitable, as many current initiatives risk reproducing donor-driven North–South hierarchies rather than restructuring global power relations.

Carayannis also highlighted intensifying geopolitical rivalry, particularly between the United States and China, over supply chains, infrastructure, and critical resources. Although numerous multilateral AI governance initiatives have emerged, many fail to recognise the historical and ongoing contributions of the Global South to the digital economy. Proposals such as global AI funds, while framed as supportive, may inadvertently reinforce dependency if they prioritise knowledge transfer and capacity building without addressing structural inequities in value distribution. By shifting attention to the entire supply chain, governance efforts can identify leverage points at local, regional, and global levels.

Marie-Therese Png of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University redirected the discussion from geopolitical structures to lived realities. Drawing on fieldwork in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chile, Malaysia, Taiwan, and South Africa, she illustrated the social and environmental consequences of AI-related extraction and infrastructure expansion. In mining regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo, civil society actors have linked the global digital and energy transitions to conflict, displacement, and ecological harm. For affected communities, the issue is not simply revenue distribution but the definition of value itself. Where governments and

corporations measure value through exports, taxes, and growth, communities emphasise health, environmental integrity, livelihoods, and intergenerational continuity. Grassroots coalitions have therefore demanded community co-ownership, local value addition, and sustained investment in regenerative infrastructure as conditions for development.

Png also underscored that environmental and social pressures extend beyond extraction. Semiconductor manufacturing in Malaysia and Taiwan has generated water stress due to the highly water-intensive nature of chip production. In South Africa, submarine cables—seemingly minor yet critical components of global connectivity—expose the physical vulnerability of digital infrastructure. Across these contexts, she argued that labour protections, ecological sustainability, data sovereignty, and community accountability must be central to AI governance frameworks.

Christian-Géraud Neema China-Global South Project introduced a strategic political economy perspective, cautioning against treating Africa as a homogeneous actor in the critical minerals debate. Only certain countries occupy pivotal positions in global supply chains. He examined policy tools such as export bans and quotas, which some producing states have used to assert leverage and promote local processing, but warned that such leverage is technologically contingent. Downstream innovation can rapidly shift mineral demand, eroding upstream bargaining power. The transition from cobalt-intensive batteries to lithium iron phosphate and emerging sodium-ion technologies illustrates how technological change can reduce reliance on specific minerals.

This creates a strategic dilemma for mineral-producing countries: should they prioritise domestic processing and value addition, or negotiate preferential access to downstream products such as electric vehicles and advanced technologies? While local processing promises industrialisation, it carries substantial environmental and infrastructural costs. In some cases, securing discounted access to end products may generate greater developmental returns. Neema further highlighted the challenges of regional cooperation. Although collective bargaining could strengthen negotiating power, divergent national interests and domestic political economy constraints complicate coordination. Regional integration thus remains both necessary and difficult.

Audience interventions broadened the debate. Participants questioned the durability of mineral leverage in a context of rapid technological change, shifting the focus from resource nationalism to anticipatory industrial strategy. Others expanded the discussion beyond minerals to include data governance, linguistic inclusion, and large language models, raising concerns about digital sovereignty and epistemic marginalisation. One intervention challenged the premise of integrating Africa into an existing AI stack, suggesting that the stack itself may require reimagining to avoid reproducing structural dependency.

In response, the panellists agreed that upstream mineral production provides only temporary leverage if downstream design, innovation, and application remain concentrated elsewhere. Long-term value lies in technological development, standards-setting, and control over

applications. African countries must therefore diversify strategies beyond extraction toward infrastructure partnerships, regulatory influence, and negotiated access to end technologies.

Sovereignty was emphasised as an important aspect in the AI era since it extends beyond minerals to encompass data governance, linguistic inclusion, digital labour protections, and AI safety frameworks. Ethical AI requires robust data stewardship, safeguards against epistemic bias, and accountability for environmental and labour impacts across supply chains. Returning to the central theme, Nelson and Carayannis clarified that “inverting the AI stack” is not about inserting Africa into existing hierarchies, but about reshaping them by redefining value, restructuring governance frameworks, and building institutional capacities that enable African actors to influence the trajectories of the AI age.

The session concluded with a call for strategic imagination: moving from reactive participation in global supply chains toward proactive system design in the evolving political economy of artificial intelligence. (Link to session <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bH3sYold0CM>).

9. Panel on Africa and the World: Global Relations and Partnerships: Africa and the G20: Lessons and Forward-thinking: Reflections on South Africa’s G20 Presidency (Panel by Institute for Global Dialogue)

The final session of the day unfolded as a candid, reflective conversation rather than a formal panel presentation. Moderated by Ms Sanusha Naidu of the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD), the discussion brought together participants deeply embedded in South Africa’s Think20 (T20) process to assess what had been achieved and what remained uncertain for Africa in global governance. From the outset, the tone was informal but substantive. Ms Naidu framed the conversation as an insider reflection on how African voices were amplified, or constrained, within the G20 architecture. The key question hovering over the discussion was simple but profound: *What does it mean for Africa to be visible in global economic governance?*

Mr Mikatekiso Kubayi of the Institute for Global Dialogue began by demystifying the T20 process. Describing it as the “ideas bank” of the G20, he outlined its structured yet political nature. Task forces are created around presidential priorities, policy briefs are solicited globally, and recommendations are distilled into concise communiqués aimed at influencing the Sherpa track and ultimately the Leaders’ Declaration. South Africa deliberately limited its output to around 100 short, digestible policy briefs prioritising impact over volume. As he put it, there was little point in producing intellectually rigorous documents “that no one is going to digest or read.” The objective was to deliver high-impact, implementable recommendations at the right political moment.

Dr Siphumelele Duma of the Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation shifted the discussion to substance, particularly financing for sustainable development and African structural transformation. Across five task forces and 120 contributors, a recurring theme emerged: Africa

must be reintegrated into the global economy on fundamentally different terms. The conversation repeatedly returned to structural change, moving beyond extractive economic models toward sustainable industrialisation. He noted that language around industrial policy and structural transformation appearing in a G20 Leaders' Declaration would have been "next to impossible" a decade ago. For him, this signalled a significant ideological shift, even if implementation remains voluntary. The emphasis on tackling illicit financial flows — estimated at tens of billions of dollars annually — and addressing the SDG financing gap demonstrated a deliberate attempt to place African development constraints at the centre of global economic cooperation.

However, symbolism alone was not sufficient. Dr Arina Muresan introduced a sharper critique from the trade and investment track. She pointed to the destabilisation of the WTO dispute settlement system and the silence of the Leaders' Declaration on that issue. The paralysis of the Appellate body, she argued, disproportionately harms developing countries that rely on predictable multilateral dispute mechanisms. Alternative plurilateral arrangements risk increasing legal complexity and excluding countries without technical capacity. At the same time, while there is growing enthusiasm around regionalisation and supply chain reconfiguration, Africa risks remaining locked into extractive roles or consumer markets if hyper-regionalisation consolidates production elsewhere.

The panel repeatedly returned to whether it was "enough" that Africa was mentioned over fifty times in the Leaders' Declaration. Mr Kubayi's response was pragmatic: important for what? G20 declarations are voluntary; no member state is legally compelled to implement them. Yet visibility matters because it embeds African concerns into the global agenda. It creates a reference point for future negotiations. Dr Duma reinforced this, arguing that South Africa's presidency consolidated four consecutive Global South presidencies — Indonesia, India, Brazil, and South Africa — sustaining a developmental narrative that may not continue under future leadership. In this sense, the frequency of reference to Africa was less about rhetoric and more about anchoring issues within the multilateral conversation.

Audience interventions deepened the discussion. Questions were raised about the African Union's (AU) engagement approach within the G20. While the AU became a permanent member in 2023, it has yet to articulate a structured participation mechanism comparable to that of the European Union (EU). Participants queried whether South Africa should spearhead the development of such a framework. Others asked about the lifespan of T20 task forces, highlighting the presidency-driven nature of the G20 architecture. Indonesia had twelve task forces, Brazil six, South Africa five. Each presidency recalibrates priorities, and continuity is not guaranteed. The flexibility that allows responsiveness to global crises also produces institutional fragility.

Another concern focused on knowledge accessibility. With hundreds of meetings and a proliferation of documents, how can researchers and policymakers meaningfully navigate the

output? While official websites archive policy briefs and communiqués, the question pointed to a broader challenge: without sustained institutional memory, intellectual production risks fragmentation. In closing reflections, Ms Naidu referenced the G20@20 Review, which recommends streamlining working groups, limiting priorities per presidency, and preserving the G20's role as the premier forum for international economic cooperation. The implication was clear: the G20's future is contingent on addressing global crisis, political will, and shifting geopolitical alignments.

The session ended not in idealistic triumphalism but in sober realism. South Africa had succeeded in front-loading African priorities, embedding industrial policy discourse, highlighting financing constraints, and amplifying structural concerns. But implementation remains voluntary. AU engagement mechanisms remain underdeveloped. Multilateral trade governance remains unstable. And continuity under future presidencies is uncertain. The overarching sentiment was captured in one understated reflection: in a time when multilateralism itself is under strain, South Africa's presidency helped "keep your foot on the ground in a spinning room." Whether that grounding translates into durable structural change remains the unanswered question that carried into the next day's deliberations. (Link to session <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJKulzdOc8>).

Day Two Proceedings

10. Panel on African Agency: Africa and the G20

The session, moderated by Dr Arina Muresan of the Institute for Global Dialogue, interrogated the urgency and complexity of "African agency" in a rapidly shifting global order. Although framed by South Africa's recent hosting of the G20, the discussion quickly moved beyond symbolism to deeper structural questions about sovereignty, state capacity, digital transformation, and global power.

Dr Kebepetsa Lotshwao of University of Botswana opened with a provocative challenge. While acknowledging the symbolic significance of the African Union's admission into the G20 in 2023, he questioned whether this development genuinely enhances Africa's agency or merely embeds the continent more firmly within a neoliberal global system. Continental representation, he argued, does not automatically translate into material gains for citizens. The central problem lies in the design of the African state itself. In his assessment, many African states function in predatory ways, serving sectional political and business interests rather than advancing the common good. Without structural reform driven by excluded constituencies—especially Africa's youthful majority—membership in elite global forums risks remaining symbolic.

Drawing comparisons with East Asian developmental states such as South Korea, he emphasised that foreign direct investment alone does not generate transformation. In Asia, investors interact with states capable of directing growth toward national development objectives. In much of

Africa, by contrast, investment often reinforces elite capture. The challenge, therefore, is not simply external marginalisation but internal institutional weakness. Celebrating AU inclusion in the G20 may obscure the uncomfortable reality that many African states are not institutionally configured to convert global representation into broad-based development. For Dr Lotshwao, meaningful agency requires state reform.

Dr Muresan expanded the conceptual terrain by questioning the very meaning of “African agency.” In international relations discourse, agency is typically state-centric, yet Africa comprises 54 diverse states with distinct capacities and historical trajectories. There are, she suggested, as many forms of African agency as there are African countries. The key challenge is how the continental voice in global forums filters down into domestic governance and lived experience.

The conversation then shifted to artificial intelligence as a new frontier of agency. Dr Scott Timcke Research ICT Africa cautioned against reducing AI to surface-level applications such as large language models. Instead, he drew attention to the full “AI stack”: software systems, hardware infrastructure, semiconductor supply chains, cloud storage, and above all, compute power. In the digital age, agency is inseparable from control over these material foundations. Africa, however, remains a net importer of computational goods, with limited capacity in high-performance computing, chip fabrication, and cloud infrastructure. This structural dependence places the continent downstream in global AI value chains and materially constrains its leverage.

Within this context, Dr Timcke identified two core debates. The first concerns data governance. Should African data be commodified through licensing regimes, or treated as open source? Challenging the popular metaphor of data as the “new oil,” he argued that in a saturated global data environment, its marginal financial value is declining. Rather than commodifying data as extractive capital, he proposed conceiving of it as a public good embedded in collective benefit frameworks. This re-framing shifts attention from ownership alone to governance, access, and equitable use.

The second debate involves digital sovereignty versus data residence. Hosting servers domestically does not guarantee sovereignty if infrastructure remains owned or governed by foreign corporations. Referencing the implications of extraterritorial legislation such as the U.S. Cloud Act, he underscored that data stored locally may still be subject to foreign jurisdiction. Genuine digital sovereignty, therefore, requires African-owned and operated systems rather than dependency-entrenching public–private partnerships.

These technological concerns intersect with a fragmenting geopolitical landscape marked by digital mercantilism and competing AI “world models.” Africa risks integration into externally designed systems through infrastructure agreements and trade dependencies, echoing earlier debates on dependent development. AI thus represents not a rupture from history, but a new terrain through which asymmetrical integration may be reproduced.

Dr Mutinda Mutisya of the University of Nairobi grounded the AI debate in African policy practice. He noted that African states are not passive observers. Countries such as Rwanda and Kenya are experimenting with AI governance frameworks in diplomacy and public administration, and the African Union has begun sketching a continental AI architecture. These initiatives reflect growing recognition that AI will shape economic competitiveness, diplomatic leverage, and governance capacity.

Yet structural vulnerabilities persist. The global digital divide constrains Africa's ability to define AI norms autonomously. Infrastructure, computing power, and platform ownership remain concentrated outside the continent. Foreign dominance of digital platforms raises concerns about data control and algorithmic influence, while data extractivism risks replicating historical resource dependency in digital form.

Dr Mutisya also stressed the political dimension. AI tools are not neutral. While capable of enhancing service delivery and coordination, they can equally expand surveillance and reinforce authoritarian tendencies. Referencing recent youth mobilisations in Kenya, he highlighted the possibility that digital systems may be deployed to monitor or suppress dissent. The issue is not simply the adoption of AI, but how it reshapes state–society relations. He conceptualised African agency across three dimensions: voice, influence, and structure. Africa has increasingly secured a voice in global forums and occasionally exercises influence. However, the structural dimension—democratic accountability, institutional coherence, and governance capacity—remains fragile. Without strengthening these foundations, technological adoption may amplify governance weaknesses rather than resolve them.

Ashraf Patel offered a critical appraisal of the G20 itself. As a non-treaty forum lacking binding authority, it often reflects the interests of dominant blocs. Comparing Brazil's presidency with South Africa's, he argued that Brazil foregrounded poverty, hunger, and sustainability more assertively, whereas progress on debt relief and international financial reform during South Africa's term appeared limited. Structural inequalities in global finance remain deeply entrenched. For meaningful reform, he urged renewed engagement with multilateral processes anchored in the United Nations, particularly in areas such as digital governance and global tax cooperation.

A recurring tension throughout the session concerned solidarity versus sovereignty. Continental initiatives such as a digital single market require regulatory harmonisation and cross-border data flows, implying partial surrender of national autonomy. Yet without integration, Africa's bargaining power remains fragmented. The debate crystallised between continental institutionalists advocating AU-led harmonisation and techno-nationalists prioritising state control.

Audience interventions sharpened these tensions. Questions were raised about the AU's financial dependence on external funding and the failure of some member states to meet assessed

contributions, challenging the credibility of claims to continental sovereignty. Others warned against treating “Africa” as a unitary actor, noting internal diversity and uneven development.

The generational dimension proved particularly salient. Young participants described how recommendations in G20 and Y20 processes are often diluted in final communiqués. At the same time, digitally savvy youth mobilisations challenge assumptions of disengagement. The issue is whether state and continental institutions can respond to new forms of political expression. The session concluded without consensus on a singular definition of African agency, but with greater clarity about its complexity. Agency cannot be reduced to symbolic representation in elite forums. It requires structural reform of the state, financially autonomous continental institutions, material foundations for digital sovereignty, and meaningful engagement with a young and demanding population. Without these conditions, Africa may occupy a seat at the table yet remain constrained in its capacity to reshape it. (Link to session <https://youtu.be/wmqbCFzYWU4>).

11. Panel on Geo-politics: Critical Minerals and Energy

The session, moderated by veteran journalist Ms Duduzile Josephine Ramela, opened with a clear proposition: Africa stands at a decisive moment. Reflecting on South Africa’s historic G20 presidency—the first hosted on African soil—Ramela argued that the core question has shifted. It is no longer whether Africa will be present in global governance forums, but how it will exercise influence within them. After more than 130 preparatory meetings, the G20 process produced a communiqué structured around four priorities, three of which—climate justice, climate finance, and critical minerals—directly shaped the panel’s deliberations. These were not abstract categories but lived developmental realities. Ramela framed the discussion around agency rather than dependency, insisting that Africa’s growth trajectory ultimately rests in African hands.

Dr Enoch Sithole of the Institute for Climate Change Communication opened his presentation with a sobering assessment of climate science. Drawing on recent findings associated with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; he warned that the global community is likely to overshoot the 1.5°C target set by the Paris Agreement. Africa, he noted, is warming faster than the global average. A two-degree global increase could translate into nearly three degrees across parts of the continent. This disproportionate exposure reflects structural injustice: although Africa contributes roughly four percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, it bears an outsized share of the impacts. These include widespread food insecurity, intensifying floods and droughts, hydropower disruptions as rivers dry, and mounting migration pressures. Zambia’s recent drought—devastating agriculture while crippling hydropower generation—illustrated how climate shocks cascade across interconnected systems.

For Dr Sithole, the response requires what he termed “radical realism.” While mitigation remains essential, adaptation must become urgent and central. He identified two imperatives: strengthening adaptive governance capacity and expanding climate literacy. Citing

Afrobarometer data showing that only 43 percent of Africans demonstrate climate literacy, he posed a critical question: how can communities meaningfully engage adaptation strategies without accessible knowledge? The climate crisis, he argued, is not only infrastructural but epistemic. Without inclusive communication and public understanding, adaptation risks becoming a technocratic exercise detached from lived realities.

Dr Siviwe Odwa Malongweni of Sol Plaatje University shifted the focus from vulnerability to opportunity, positioning ecological restoration as both resilience strategy and economic pathway. Using South Africa's Northern Cape—one of the country's most climate-exposed provinces—as a case study, she described how invasive species, drought and wildfires are degrading ecosystems and livelihoods. A single invasive plant can consume up to seven litres of groundwater per day, compounding scarcity in arid regions. Yet Malongweni emphasised the transformative potential embedded in degraded landscapes. Through partnerships with the International Union for Conservation of Nature and local research institutions, her work combines invasive species eradication with the repurposing of biomass into low-carbon construction materials and sustainable products. Ecological restoration thus becomes a vehicle for job creation, carbon sequestration and community resilience. Sustainability, she stressed, is inherently intergenerational: stewardship today safeguards future livelihoods.

Dr Paul Mukoki of University of the Witwatersrand University located climate justice within the architecture of global finance. Reflecting on outcomes from the Johannesburg G20 Summit, he argued that Africa has moved “from appeal to negotiated outcomes.” Rather than petitioning for support, African leaders increasingly shape the agenda. The Leaders' Declaration acknowledged that two million Africans die annually due to lack of access to clean cooking fuel—an intersection of climate injustice and development deficits. Dr Mukoki highlighted the operationalisation of the Loss and Damage Fund, alongside instruments such as debt-for-climate swaps, blended finance and expanded IMF Special Drawing Rights allocations.

The “Mission 300” initiative—aimed at providing electricity access to 300 million Africans by 2030—symbolised this ambition. The inclusion of Ubuntu, “I am because you are,” within the declaration reframed climate justice as shared responsibility rather than charitable concession. Yet Mukoki cautioned that symbolism must yield to implementation. Institutional coordination, continental strategy, and sustained diplomatic leverage across future G20 cycles will determine whether rhetorical gains translate into material change.

Dr Kennedy Manduna of University of the Witwatersrand University deepened the geopolitical analysis by interrogating the discourse of critical minerals. He challenged prevailing terminology, arguing that “most critical minerals are not energy transition minerals, and most energy transition minerals are not critical minerals.” Criticality, he suggested, context-specific definitions. Some minerals may be strategic for some states, and peripheral for others. He mapped the contemporary scramble for African mineral resources, including Chinese investments in rail and lithium, and US–EU partnerships in Central Africa. He gave the examples

of export corridors such as Lobito and TAZARA. The central question was whether these developments represent an African renaissance or a renewed phase of extractive imperialism. Do the corridors enable industrialisation and regional integration, or simply accelerate the export of unprocessed raw materials?

Manduna argued that governance choices will determine the answer. Technology transfer should be non-negotiable; equity participation embedded in agreements; sovereign and critical mineral funds established; regional industrial clusters strengthened; and traceability standards enforced. Drawing on Indonesia's nickel beneficiation strategy, he questioned why African states do not more assertively demand value addition at source. The issue is whether Africa will become a rule-maker in global mineral governance or remain confined to rule-taking.

Audience interventions highlighted critical issues. One participant questioned whether South Africa's Just Energy Transition funding is genuinely reaching intended beneficiaries, asking, "How just is this transition?" The query exposed the persistent gap between global climate finance commitments and local impact. Another intervention raised an epistemological challenge: communities may interpret climatic shifts through distinct linguistic and cultural frameworks. Are such perspectives recognised within formal policy design? This concern echoed Sithole's emphasis on inclusive climate literacy. A further question addressed local business integration. When mineral and climate finance flows enter domestic economies, are local firms incorporated into procurement chains, or do external actors dominate? This is connected directly to debates over beneficiation and structural dependency.

By the session's closure, three tensions crystallised. First, diplomatic gains must now be matched by implementation capacity. Second, mineral and infrastructure corridors may either entrench extractive patterns or catalyse industrial transformation, depending on governance. Third, global climate frameworks must be translated into locally intelligible and culturally inclusive processes to secure legitimacy.

The discussion yielded no simplistic resolutions. Instead, it illuminated a continent navigating structural constraints while incrementally asserting agency. In her closing reflection, Ms Ramela observed that sustainability resembles planting a tree whose shade one may never personally enjoy—a commitment extending beyond electoral cycles and immediate returns. The enduring question is not whether Africa possesses leverage in global governance forums, but whether it can coordinate, institutionalise and strategically deploy that leverage beyond its G20 presidency. (Link to session <https://youtu.be/1VSkzg2EIV0>).

12. Panel on Research for Impact: Strengthening Africa's Capacity (Panel by Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa- CARTA, Kenya)

The session opened with a clear and urgent framing: Africa's public health systems must be capacitated not only to respond to crises, but to lead through research-driven innovation.

Moderated by Ms Angelene Zwane from the University of the Witwatersrand School of Public Health, the discussion situated itself in the wake of COVID-19 and shifting global funding priorities, which exposed two central realities: Africa must pursue greater self-sufficiency, and its health systems, infrastructure, and human capital are not yet fully fit for purpose. The core theme was “capacity strengthening research for impact.”

To ground the conversation, a video introduced the CARTA Evidence platform, an AI-powered system designed to make African research more visible, accessible, and policy-relevant. Developed by CARTA, the platform consolidates thousands of research outputs, aligns them with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and tracks their real-world policy influence. Examples from Nigeria and Kenya illustrated how African-led research influenced hospital practices and national malaria procurement policies. The message was clear: African scholarship exists and is impactful, but too often remains fragmented, invisible, or underutilised. The panel featured two CARTA fellows working in public health research: Prof Nomfundo Moroe and Dr Nkosiyazi Dube both based at the University of the Witwatersrand. The two presenters grounded their work in local realities and emphasised research that is community-centred and contextually responsive.

Professor Moroe discussed her work on informal social security systems, particularly stokvels (rotating savings and credit associations) in South Africa. Rather than importing external models, she examined how these existing community networks could be leveraged for public health interventions such as hypertension screening. Her approach emphasised meeting communities where they already gather, rather than extracting data and leaving without change. She highlighted harmful practices such as medication sharing within communities and argued for embedding health promotion within trusted social structures. Her work exemplifies research “in Africa, by Africans, for Africa.”

Dr Dube focused on occupational audiology and noise-induced hearing loss among mine workers, an often-neglected population in South African society. He emphasised that hearing loss is irreversible and disproportionately affects historically marginalised workers. His research revealed that interventions often fail because mine workers are excluded from their design. Without training, explanation, or voice, compliance is superficial. He reframed his research work not as a personal credential but as “a tool for change,” insisting that researchers must translate knowledge into tangible improvements.

A recurring theme across both presentations was the importance of asking the right questions. Professor Moroe stressed that impactful research begins with questions that are measurable and socially relevant. Dr Dube emphasised asking communities themselves what works “for whom, under what circumstances, and with what resources.” Both speakers highlighted the dangers of “helicopter research”- externally driven, extractive studies disconnected from lived realities. The discussion expanded to institutional and structural gaps. The panellists reflected on early academic journeys marked by limited mentorship, insufficient skills training, and institutional cultures focused more on outputs than impact. They argued that mentorship should begin at the

undergraduate level and that supervision must include capacity building, not merely administrative oversight.

Dr Dube noted that instead of exporting African scholars abroad (with many not returning), CARTA builds capacity locally while bringing expertise into Africa. Professor Moroe emphasised the power of continental networks and cross-country collaboration fostered through the program.

Audience engagement deepened the conversation. Participants questioned whether African researchers are conducting the “right” kind of research or primarily chasing citations under “publish or perish” pressures. When asked what constrains African research most—financing, human capital, or infrastructure—the consensus leaned heavily toward funding, though human capital and infrastructure challenges remain significant. Both panellists credited CARTA for addressing key gaps. They highlighted three critical contributions:

1. Validation and confidence that high-impact research can be done within Africa.
2. Structured mentorship beginning at proposal stage.
3. Protected time and financial support for doctoral completion.

A community member raised concerns about environmental degradation, municipal failure, and corruption at local levels, reminding the panel that public health is inseparable from governance, infrastructure, and climate vulnerability. As the session closed, the central thesis emerging from the discussion was that Africa does not lack knowledge, talent, or lived expertise. Instead, the continent lacks sustained financing, early mentorship, institutional support for impact, and effective translation of research into policy and practice. Capacity strengthening must therefore go beyond producing degrees. It must cultivate ecosystems where research informs communities, institutions, and decision-makers. Ultimately, the session reframed research as responsibility. A PhD is not a title but a tool. Capacity strengthening is not an abstract concept but a lived practice. And African research, when valued, visible, and translated, has the power to drive African futures.

Audience questions introduced further complexities. One participant asked how to amplify impact stories that are not technological “gadgets” but social or policy innovations. Another described difficulty translating a master’s thesis into policy influence and asked how researchers activate agency when policymakers seem uninterested.

Dr Dube responded with a powerful example from her own experience: when mining companies denied him access to data, she wrote and published about that denial. By publicly interrogating institutional barriers, she applied constructive pressure. Her strategy illustrated research as advocacy, using scholarship not only to generate knowledge but to challenge systems. Professor Moroe added that institutions themselves hold convening power. Universities can leverage their authority to bring policymakers into dialogue. She urged persistence and strategic engagement

rather than resignation. The final interventions brought the discussion back to implementation gaps. A parent of an autistic child questioned whether Africa needs more research or better application of existing knowledge. Dr Dube acknowledged the disconnect: “We are doing research, but we’re not translating that into practice.” The problem is less about volume and more about knowledge translation and implementation. (Link to session <https://youtu.be/GFmbfVMx3Dc>).

13. Panel on Communicating African Agency in the Digital Age: A Consultation on ACHPR Resolution 630 (Session by Media Monitoring Africa rebranding to Moxii Africa)

The session unfolded as a dynamic and reflective consultation on Resolution 630 of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR), placing platform accountability and information integrity at the centre of Africa’s digital future. Convened by Moxii Africa, formerly Media Monitoring Africa, the engagement was designed not as a lecture, but as an interactive dialogue aimed at shaping guidelines that will eventually inform how African states monitor technology companies operating across the continent.

The discussion began by situating Resolution 630 within a broader set of digital governance measures adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights. Alongside Resolution 620 on access to data and Resolution 631 on public service content, Resolution 630 addresses the growing concern that technology platforms are failing to safeguard information integrity. It calls for greater transparency, responsible content moderation, especially in African languages, and meaningful human rights impact assessments aligned with global standards. Crucially, it recognises that independent fact-checking cannot simply be replaced by corporate mechanisms such as “community notes,” and that platforms have a duty to operate responsibly within African contexts.

Yet the consultation quickly moved beyond the technical language of resolutions into deeper questions of agency and power. Participants identified misinformation, corruption, propaganda, weak data protection regimes, and limited access to reliable information as pressing challenges. But what stood out was a more introspective critique: that Africa often “silences itself.” One participant argued that information integrity is not only about correcting falsehoods but also about who controls narratives. A voice from the African diaspora reinforced this, noting that outside the continent, Africa is rarely portrayed as powerful or innovative. The struggle, therefore, is not only against misinformation but against structural marginalisation in global storytelling.

Artificial intelligence emerged as both promise and peril. Some saw AI as a tool that could accelerate Africa’s development and help the continent leapfrog traditional stages of technological advancement. Others warned that without adequate training, oversight, and data sovereignty, AI could deepen dependency and amplify misinformation. The reliability of AI-

generated research, the opacity of algorithms, and the dominance of non-African data sets raised concerns about epistemic control. Participants questioned what information feeds these systems and who ultimately shapes the knowledge they produce. Language surfaced as a related issue: while Resolution 630 calls for content moderation in African languages and dialects, participants debated whether platforms have the will or capacity to meaningfully engage the continent's linguistic diversity.

Perhaps the most contentious issue was the idea of state monitoring of technology platforms. While the resolution envisions states overseeing platform compliance, participants expressed anxiety about surveillance, political misuse, and the risk of governments defining "truth" for their own ends. In a so-called post-truth political environment, the question "who decides what is true?" became central. Some argued that oversight should rest with independent regulatory bodies or constitutional institutions rather than executive branches of government. Others stressed that the state must ensure accountability without infringing on freedom of expression.

Transparency quickly became the session's dominant principle of discussion. Participants called for full disclosure of data flows, clarity about where African user data is stored, and public access to contracts governing digital operations. There were demands for meaningful sanctions, fines, penalties, and even criminal accountability, though practical enforcement challenges were acknowledged, particularly given that many global platforms operate in African countries without a physical presence. A strong sentiment emerged that guidelines without enforcement mechanisms risk becoming symbolic gestures rather than transformative tools. The conversation also broadened to consider harms beyond state-platform dynamics. Participants raised concerns about children's exposure to harmful content, non-consensual image sharing, cyberbullying, and the circulation of violent material without warnings. These interventions reminded the room that information integrity is not an abstract regulatory debate; it is lived daily by ordinary users, especially the most vulnerable.

Toward the end of the session, attention shifted to implementation. Several speakers noted that while continental and international bodies can adopt progressive policies, the real work begins afterwards. The African Union, it was argued, is largely a policy body rather than an enforcement authority. For guidelines to matter, member states must internalise them within domestic legal frameworks, engage parliaments, and ensure sustained follow-up. Without ownership at the national level, even well-crafted resolutions risk gathering dust. The interactive session concluded with a sense of both urgency and realism. Participants recognised that safeguarding information integrity is essential to democratic resilience, human rights protection, and the preservation of African agency in the digital age. At the same time, they acknowledged the complexity of regulating powerful global platforms while maintaining freedoms and avoiding state overreach.

The session ultimately underscored that Resolution 630 is about more than monitoring misinformation. It is about who controls Africa's digital narratives, how human rights are protected in algorithmic spaces, and whether the continent can assert meaningful agency in shaping the norms that govern its technological future. (Link to session <https://youtu.be/uojQ56Q1XYw>).

14. Panel on Communicating African Agency: Radical Transparency and Circular Design as Policy Lever (Panel by Confluence, South Africa)

The session began as a conversation about creativity, dignity, and economic justice. What started as a panel discussion quickly became a reflection on what it means to be an artist in a fractured global system, and how collective action might offer an alternative.

At the centre of the discussion was Antidote, a collaborative creative initiative rooted in recycling, upcycling, and reclaiming African artistic agency. The artists introduced themselves not through formal titles, but through lived journeys. Mr Diddi Mayanda, a dancer and multidisciplinary artist from the Democratic Republic of Congo, spoke of transformation, from working in isolation to discovering the power of collaboration. Through Antidote, he learned new skills, from sewing to visual art, and began blending them with his dance practice. What moved him most was the sense of shared vision: no longer creating alone, but building something distinctly African with others.

Ms Thando Dlamini, a creative social activist and founder of African Lifestyle, described Antidote in a single word: synergy. After leaving corporate South Africa to pursue singing and heritage beadwork, she came to understand collaboration as a deliberate craft. For her, Antidote represents the possibility that when artists bring their distinct talents together, the result exceeds what any one individual could achieve alone. Relationships, trust, and commitment are not secondary to the work; they are part of the work.

Textile artist Mr Tlotlo Mothwane echoed this ethos. Rejecting fast fashion and mass production, he creates unique garments, referred to as one-of-one garments, from recycled and discarded materials. Every offcut becomes part of a new canvas. To him, Antidote is both an environmental and a cultural intervention, a "cure" for the wastefulness of contemporary fashion and the disposability mindset that accompanies it. Collaboration is not just productive; it is joyful. The emphasis, he noted, is rarely on money first. The priority is creating something meaningful together.

Beneath the enthusiasm ran a sharp awareness of structural inequality. One speaker framed the world as "broken", marked by deep North–South imbalances, environmental degradation, and systems that externalise costs onto the most vulnerable. Fashion waste was not discussed abstractly; it was understood as part of a global system in which excess from wealthier nations finds its way into African landfills and ecosystems. Antidote positions itself as a small but intentional counter-model: a circular, non-extractive experiment in economic practice. Waste

becomes a treasure. Discarded garments become high-value art pieces. Agency replaces dependency.

A central question was, what is value? The artists resisted purely monetary definitions. Value, they argued, is socially constructed — shaped by psyche, culture, and consumer consciousness. If society learns to see waste differently, its value changes. If consumers understand the environmental and social costs embedded in fast fashion from companies such as H&M, Shein, and Temu, purchasing decisions may shift. The problem is not confined to a single country or producer; it is systemic. The true cost of fashion is often borne not by corporations but by communities who live with polluted waterways and mountains of textile waste. Still, the conversation did not romanticise struggle. The panel acknowledged the friction that money introduces. Passion may drive creation, but artists live within a capitalist framework. “Love doesn’t pay the bills,” one speaker admitted candidly. The challenge is to prevent financial value from eroding dignity and relationships. The collective grapples openly with this tension, making Antidote a space that lives “in the friction between worlds” — cooperative in spirit, but pragmatic about survival.

Questions from the audience pushed the discussion further. How could a movement like Antidote influence policy? Should it aim to do advocacy at forums such as the G20, where creative industries often lack representation? The response was both defiant and grounded: they are not waiting for permission. Advocacy happens through action, through producing case studies, writing up their model, and demonstrating that alternative economic practices are viable. Rather than seeking handouts, they seek exchange and reciprocity. Dignity, not pity, is the principle. Another intervention came from a chef who lamented the lack of pension structures for artists and the dominance of European culinary curricula in South Africa. His frustration mirrored the artists’ own struggles: creative labour is undervalued, and indigenous traditions are marginalised. The panel’s response was one of cultural reclamation. Just as Antidote revives beadwork and textile traditions, culinary artists must claim space for African cuisine, refusing to wait for elite institutions to validate it. Recognition often follows persistence and self-belief.

Throughout the session, a deeper philosophical thread emerged. Collaboration in the informal sector is not easy. Colonial histories and capitalist pressures have eroded communal trust. Working together requires emotional discipline and maturity. The collective spoke of Ubuntu not as a slogan but as a practice, mutual accountability, shared growth, and conscious communication. Collaboration, they admitted, is a science in itself. The artists were described by one audience member as prophets, those who sense and shape future desires. The panel embraced this framing. Artists are not peripheral to society; they are culture-makers, communicators, and conscience-keepers. The myth of the starving artist, they insisted, must be dismantled. Creative professionals must combine artistic excellence with reliability and business discipline. Showing up, delivering on time, honouring commitments, these are acts of dignity.

The session closed on a personal reflection from a parent who had struggled to accept her son's decision to leave a corporate job to pursue jewellery-making. Inspired by the discussion, she embraced the idea of "failing forward." Creativity, she realised, is not recklessness; it is courage. In the end, Antidote emerged not simply as a brand but as a movement: experimental, intuitive, sometimes chaotic, yet grounded in deep conviction. It seeks to redefine value, transform waste into cultural capital, and build solidarity among artists who refuse to be marginal. It is an attempt, however small, to craft an economy rooted in reciprocity rather than extraction, dignity rather than dependency.

What remained most striking was the quiet confidence of the artists themselves. They were not asking to be included. They noted that they were already in motion. (Link to session <https://youtu.be/AymLUDc9MR4>).

15. Panel on The African Union's External Relations Architecture and Mechanisms: Fit for Purpose or Due for Rethinking?

The final session of the day, moderated by Dr Thokozani Chilenga-Butao of University of the Witwatersrand University, Prof Gilbert Khadiagala of Witwatersrand University and Mr Jeggan Grey Johnson of Open Society Foundations, presented a co-authored work in progress on African institutional actors and their engagement with global partners, with Ms Sanusha Naidu serving as respondent. The discussion interrogated the scale, coherence and consequences of Africa's expanding external partnerships.

Prof Khadiagala framed the paper around a central question: what do Africa's proliferating global partnerships look like, how have they evolved, and where are they heading? These are not merely descriptive concerns, he argued, but analytical ones about purpose and consequence. The paper, still under refinement, draws inspiration from Rwandan President Paul Kagame's 2016 challenge asking whether the African Union (AU) was "fit for purpose." Here, however, the focus is not the AU itself but the architecture of Africa's external engagements. Are these partnerships fit for purpose, or do they require fundamental rethinking? Prof Khadiagala traced the roots of this partnership model to the post-Cold War era, noting that the AU's 2000 Constitutive Act explicitly mandates engagement with the world. Outward engagement is therefore foundational. Yet the multiplication of summits and strategic dialogues raises deeper questions: what substantive outcomes do these partnerships deliver? Does diversification strengthen Africa's voice in a hierarchical international system, or risk fragmenting and diluting collective agency?

The intellectual backbone of the project is sceptical. The global system remains structured by postcolonial asymmetries. Longstanding arrangements such as Africa–EU relations, the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), and TICAD have been joined by newer frameworks, including Africa–Turkey, and Africa–Saudi Arabia. The expanding web of summits prompts strategic concerns: can the AU meaningfully coordinate such multiplicity? What is the cumulative effect of constant high-level engagement?

Three research questions structure the inquiry. First, do these partnerships effectively mitigate structural asymmetries? Second, do they galvanise genuine African agency—defined as projecting a self-confident and competent collective voice? Third, does relentless summitry dissipate time and resources needed for consolidating intra-African cooperation? The risk, he suggested, is an “illusion of efficacy,” where visibility does not translate into structural change.

The authors adopted an explicitly Pan-Africanist normative stance. They call for rigorous cost–benefit analysis of summit participation: what tangible outcomes are achieved, who bears the costs, and what motivates attendance? In some cases, participation is externally funded, raising concerns about autonomy. Rather than assuming that more partnerships equal more influence, the study urges empirical evaluation and possibly even a moratorium on unchecked proliferation.

Mr Jeggan Grey Johnson expanded on the scale of the AU’s engagement architecture. The AU manages over two dozen formal partnerships. These include continent-to-country frameworks with major powers such as China, the United States and Turkey; institutional partnerships with bodies like the United Nations, the World Health Organisation and the Global Fund; continent-to-continent platforms (Africa–Europe, Africa–Asia, Africa–South America); and relations with organisations such as the Organisation of American States, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the Commonwealth and La Francophonie. Internal-facing partnerships with Regional Economic Communities (RECs)—including the East African Community, SADC and ECOWAS—add further complexity.

The cumulative result is managerial strain. Amid conflict, debt distress, climate vulnerability and democratic backsliding, the AU must simultaneously address urgent crises and administer an expansive partnership system. Each framework demands bureaucratic oversight, political management and strategic clarity. The question is whether such breadth is sustainable.

Externally, structural asymmetries persist. In AU–EU relations, funding instruments such as the European Peace Facility are largely designed and controlled by European actors, even when deployed in African contexts. Trade arrangements like AGOA with the United States remain vulnerable to shifts in U.S. political discretion. Agenda-setting power often lies outside Africa, leaving the continent reacting rather than advancing a consolidated strategy. Geopolitical rivalries and the internationalisation of African conflicts—in Libya, Sudan and the eastern DRC—further complicate dynamics. The COVID-19 vaccine inequity episode starkly exposed the limits of proclaimed solidarity.

Internally, challenges are equally sobering. Although the AU has adopted 69 treaties and protocols, implementation is weak. Foundational instruments such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights are frequently violated. Coups have proliferated, sanctions are inconsistently applied, and subsidiarity between the AU Peace and Security Council and RECs is uneven. Even relatively functional bodies like the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the African Peer Review Mechanism encounter political resistance.

Institutional fragmentation compounds these weaknesses. The AU's nine principal organs and numerous specialised agencies create coordination challenges. Conflict management is strained by rivalries among RECs. ECOWAS, once seen as a normative leader, faces significant instability amid a regional coup belt and withdrawals by the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Such unpredictability weakens Africa's bargaining position with external partners.

In response to audience questions and comments, Mr Johnson outlined strategic imperatives. First, partnerships must align with Agenda 2063 and prioritise self-financing. With more than half of the AU's total budget and over three-quarters of its programme budget externally funded—largely by the EU, United States, and China—the current model risks dependency. Second, Africa should prioritise partnerships offering clear comparative advantage and align them with established Common African Positions (CAPs), including the Ezulwini Consensus on UN Security Council reform, the African Mining Vision, the African Continental Free Trade Area, and the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons.

Third, institutions tasked with implementing CAPs must be strengthened. If the Malabo Protocol were to enter into force, granting the Pan-African Parliament limited legislative authority, synchronised implementation across member states could become feasible. Fourth, the stalled Kagame reforms—initiated under Paul Kagame and later overseen by William Ruto—should be revitalised to enhance financial and institutional efficiency. Finally, Johnson stressed the need to strengthen Africa-based knowledge production. Policy-relevant research remains heavily externally driven. An integrated, interdisciplinary platform anchored in CAPs and evidence-based design is essential.

Responding, Ms Sanusha Naidu engaged the moderator Dr Chilenga-Butao's question: Is the AU distracted by its multiplicity of partnerships? She acknowledged the concern, noting that distraction may mean allowing external actors to shape strategy by default. Increasingly, actors bypass continental structures and embed themselves directly within Africa's political and security architectures. She reflected on the historical layering of partnerships, from AU–EU frameworks to emerging powers such as China and newer actors, including Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. These states are not merely financiers; they are mediators and strategic brokers, often involved in peace processes while pursuing economic interests. Partnerships are becoming embedded in conflict resolution and economic governance.

Citing Horn of Africa and Nile Basin dynamics, she noted how continental disagreements reverberate across global platforms. Agency is entangled in layered geopolitical contests. She also questioned internal financial accountability: why do member states fail to pay dues to sustain institutions like NEPAD, the APRM and the Pan-African Parliament? Dependency cannot be separated from governance deficits. She warned against the increasing transactionalisation of partnerships, where bilateral deals proliferate on the margins of global summits. External interventions in places like Sudan and tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia risk reshaping

conflict dynamics. Without a coherent African strategy, partnerships may become part of the architecture of instability.

In the final phase of the discussion, participants reflected on leadership, institutional coherence and Africa's global positioning. Critics questioned the culture of summitry and external validation. Others pointed to the disconnect between the AU and RECs, weak implementation of Agenda 2063, and political obstacles to reform. A generational perspective highlighted the potential of digitally connected youth and cultural actors to shape African identity and agency. The session concluded with a clear message: Africa does not lack ideas or frameworks. It lacks consistent political will, coordination, and accountable leadership. Without financial ownership and strategic coherence, the expanding web of partnerships may deepen vulnerability rather than strengthen autonomy. The imperative is to move from rhetoric to decisive, united action. (Link to session <https://youtu.be/bPXWPYDsxCk>).

Day 3 Proceedings

16. Panel on Centering African Agency: Rethinking Relations with the Gulf (Panel by Centre for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient- CARPO)

The first Panel session of the day was moderated by Ms Desiree Custers of CARPO. Jan Hanrath, the CARPO CEO laid the ground explaining how relations between the countries of West Asia (countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Iran) and Sub-Saharan Africa have known a long and intertwined history on a political, economic, religious, and cultural level. The panelists, Dr Aziz Alghashian of Naif Arab University for Security Studies, Dr Damyana Bakardzhieva of Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, and Dr Sebastian Sons of CARPO, discussed engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa by Gulf countries – from infrastructure deals and energy investments to mediation in African conflicts – is reshaping African agency, diplomacy, and long-term strategic autonomy. The panel discussion extended into the political and economic intersections between Sub-Saharan Africa and West Asia.

During the session, Dr Aziz Alghashian said that there is very little scholarly exchange between the Gulf and Sub-Saharan people. Even within the region north of the Sahara, Countries such as Egypt do not have sufficient exchange with countries such as Syria. However, there is an observable increase in the role of the private sector in the region, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt, to enhance security, stability, and prosperity. The private sector has increasingly shaped relationships between Sub-Saharan Africa and the Gulf over the past decades. The relations have intensified as they both increasingly diversify their external relations on multiple levels. Saudi Arabia, though culturally conservative, has a private sector that invests in English Premier League teams like Newcastle, which are popular both in the Gulf and Africa.

Both Dr Sebastian Sons and Dr Damyana Bakardzhieva observed that countries of Sub-Saharan Africa and West Asia are cooperating in several formal frameworks of South-South cooperation,

from the Non-Aligned Movement established in 1961 to BRICS+, as well as developing elaborate bilateral agreements. The two regions have also known informal relations that date back centuries and include cultural and religious exchange, migration channels, trade flows, and growing economic investment. In the current international context of multipolarity and great power competition, relations between the two regions are constantly changing and re-shaping. Thus, they constitute a relevant theatre of South-South cooperation driven by political multi-alignment, power projection, economic diversification, cultural competition and collaboration, as well as contested issues such as land-grabbing, security partnerships, assistance for autocratic leaderships, and religious indoctrination.

During the interactive session, several questions were asked. How do partnerships with West Asian states affect Sub-Saharan Africa's ability to exert agency and lead developments on its own terms? What are some of the successes and failures of African agency regarding relations with West Asia? What strategies and cooperation models can position African and West Asian players as leaders in sustainable climate solutions, integrating adaptation, mitigation, and green industrialisation? Are bilateral and multilateral actors from West Asia emerging as partners, competitors, or alternatives to traditional multilateral institutions in Africa? Why are the Gulf states struggling to re-establish relations with Sub-Saharan Africa, even though they were among the first to interact with Africa long before Europe and China? The panel took note of the need to engage with the history of the relations between the two countries. This would help in understanding why the relations plummeted in the past and why they are rebounding.

The audience also questioned the authenticity of Saudi Arabia's and the United Arab Emirate's stated commitment to a peaceful and stable Africa, given the allegations that it fuels conflict in Sudan to gain access to resources such as gold and to exert regional influence over the Red Sea. Another concern was the concept of African agency in general, whereby the conceptualisation and benefit favour the elites. The wider African population is not involved. Some in the audience wondered if a new word for agency was needed to replace the existing one. One audience member drew attention to a New York Times story that alleged the wanton mistreatment of Kenyan women in Saudi Arabia.

Dr Aziz Alghashian shared that UAE society is using sports diplomacy to achieve a great deal, even if the public may not yet be able to see it. There are more student exchanges with Africa and the rest of the world than ever before. UAE domestic foreign policy is fascinating due to its revision to ensure it enhances external relations. Some of the UAE's cultural values are considered nonsensical by younger generations born in the 2000s. This puts pressure on the hitherto largely conservative society and governments to adopt more global policies. The contradictions that can be observed in UAE society indicate that there are shifts in people's mindsets, moving from conservative states to a modern, open-minded society with global aspirations.

Ms Desiree Custers guided Dr Aziz Alghashian, Dr Sebastian Sons, and Dr Damyana Bakardzhieva into the discussion that the UAE mainly uses three drivers to invest in sports. Firstly, social

resilience. Non-communicable diseases such as obesity and diabetes are a threat to societal health in Saudi Arabia. The UAE's Vision 2030 aims to encourage ordinary people to participate in sports in order to prevent these diseases. Governments are investing in football stars, of course, to create a generation of role models who will encourage people to get involved in sports voluntarily. Interestingly, sports at the grassroots level have enhanced the UAE's national identity and global outlook by fostering identification with global sporting icons.

The second driver is the UAE's portrayal as a tourist destination. This boosts economic activity, creating jobs for young people and reducing the resentment towards foreigners experienced in many other countries, which is associated with neo-nationalism. The speakers argued that local people do not fear losing jobs to people from outside the UAE, which creates stability and tolerance towards external visitors. The third driver is the juxtaposition of conservatism and liberalisation. Here, conservatism is viewed positively, with people from around the world visiting the UAE to experience its conservative culture. This contrasting yet interesting phenomenon is responsible for the numerous visits to the UAE, with tourists adopting the UAE culture and lifestyle. For example, many people visiting Dubai want to wear hijabs and drive or ride in the dunes. (Link to session <https://youtu.be/zgVb8mQqQuk>)

17. Panel on Africa's external relations- Africa-China; Africa-US; Africa-Brazil.

The panel session, moderated by Jeggan Grey Johnson of Open Society Foundations, opened with a critical reflection on Africa's position within global politics. Setting the intellectual tone of the discussion, Dr Westen Shilaho Kwatamba of Witwatersrand University argued that Africa's marginalisation on the global stage is neither new nor accidental, but deeply historical. He challenged the widespread perception that the presidency of Donald Trump marked a dramatic shift in the marginalisation of Africa. According to Dr. Shilaho, Trump did not create new forms of exclusion; rather, he exposed dynamics that had long existed but were previously expressed through diplomatic subtlety by earlier United States administrations.

Dr. Shilaho contended that Trump's openly transactional and confrontational political style unintentionally presents Africa with an opportunity to reassess and reimagine its global standing. Instead of interpreting current geopolitical tensions as setbacks, African states can use this moment to confront structural inequalities and redefine their agency within international relations. He cautioned, however, against framing global engagement through a binary choice between global powers. The growing belief that China represents a preferable alternative to the United States, he noted, risks misunderstanding China's own strategic ambitions.

China, he argued, is pursuing an upward trajectory toward global hegemony similar to that historically associated with the United States. Its engagement with Africa is primarily driven by national growth and development priorities rather than ideological alignment or historical solidarity. Unlike the unpredictable and often erratic posture associated with Trump's leadership, China operates with calculated consistency, making it a fundamentally different—but not

necessarily benevolent—partner. A central concern raised was Africa’s internal fragmentation, which weakens its collective bargaining power. This disunity allows crucial decisions affecting the continent to be shaped in external centres such as Beijing, Washington, and Brussels rather than within Africa itself. Ultimately, Dr. Shilaho emphasised that overcoming marginalisation requires continental cohesion, strategic clarity, and a unified African voice capable of influencing global governance rather than merely responding to it.

Dr. Camila Cristina de Oliveira Alves, University of São Paulo, buttressed Weston’s argument by invoking the well-known reflection of Paulo Freire that *“if education is not liberating, the dream of the oppressed is to become the oppressor.”* Her intervention emphasised that higher education must cultivate multiple intellectual discourses rather than reproduce a singular global narrative. The dominance of one discourse risks returning the Global South—and particularly Africa—to colonial patterns of knowledge production where independent thinking was discouraged and external epistemologies defined legitimacy. Drawing from the experience of Brazil, Alves highlighted the paradox of representation within emerging global platforms such as BRICS+. Although Brazil hosts the largest Black population in the diaspora—approximately 128 million people—linguistic barriers limit intellectual exchange. With only about five percent of Brazilians speaking English, much Brazilian scholarship remains inaccessible to African academics, just as African research struggles to circulate within Lusophone spaces. This linguistic divide reinforces asymmetries in global knowledge flows.

Existing initiatives, including Brazilian scholarships extended to Portuguese-speaking African countries and to Rwanda, represent important steps toward South–South cooperation. However, Alves argued that such programs remain modest when compared with educational outreach and academic influence exercised by the United States, Europe, or China. Expanding these exchanges is therefore essential for building intellectual autonomy. Beyond education, Brazil’s financial infrastructure and development experience offer viable alternatives to dependence on Global North systems. Collaboration in areas such as tropical agricultural technologies, climate-adaptive farming, and scientific research presents practical pathways for mutual growth. Ultimately, Alves underscored that Africa–Brazil engagement can help generate plural knowledge systems, enabling Africa’s global interaction to be defined not by dependency, but by diversified partnerships grounded in shared historical and developmental realities.

Mr. Chris Kabwato of Witwatersrand University narrowed the discussion to the African media within the broader theme of “G20 and Africa–China relations,” emphasising the central role media institutions play in shaping Africa’s engagement with global powers. He argued that the media is not merely an observer but an active participant in defining how Africa understands and relates to China. Central to his presentation was a decade-long initiative known as the China–Africa Reporting Project, which seeks to strengthen journalism focused on Africa–China relations while addressing sustainability challenges facing modern media organisations. The project responds to shifting global media business models by commissioning specialized reports capable of attracting funding and ensuring long-term reporting viability. Beyond financial sustainability,

the initiative also works to influence and correct public perceptions surrounding China's presence in Africa. Kabwato recalled that, in previous years, many Africans associated Chinese products with poor quality, to the extent that the term "Chinese" became synonymous with "fake."

Through research-based journalism and informed reporting, the project aims to challenge such stereotypes by providing balanced and evidence-driven narratives. Importantly, the initiative brings together academics, researchers, and media practitioners to build professional capacity for nuanced reporting on complex geopolitical and economic relations. Recent reporting has focused on four major drivers of China's economy: domestic policy direction, trade and investment expansion, the blue economy alongside critical minerals, and technological advancement. These themes help African audiences better understand China's strategic interests on the continent.

Kabwato's reflections echoed earlier questions raised by Dr. Shilaho regarding China's long-term intentions in Africa—whether China seeks genuine partnership or aims to emerge as the next global hegemon. According to Kabwato, China's strategy prioritises minimizing competition while maximizing cooperation, positioning itself as a collaborative partner rather than a direct rival to Western economies. Africa's strategic leverage in this relationship lies in its combined population market and the collective diplomatic influence of its 54 member states at the United Nations, making Africa an indispensable partner in China's global ambitions.

Questions from the audience prompted the observation that China is not interested in regime changes in other countries. Also, the framing around China-Africa could be problematic because China engages bits and pieces of Africa but not Africa as a whole. It also showed that Brazil-South Africa relations are possible despite language barriers. There can be inter-university student and knowledge exchange, then economic and political collaborations. Also, Trump's presidency was seen as a necessary wake-up call to activate Africa's potential and to stop external overreliance. (Link to session <https://youtu.be/98suY2bdCH0>).

18. Panel on Communicating African Agency - Voices on the Global Stage

The moderator, Prof Admire Mare of the University of Johannesburg, opened the floor with a provocative question: whose voice matters in the era of AI and other media technologies? He then asked how Africa can position itself in the global sphere, where a few players have strategically positioned themselves for advantage.

Professor Jacob Mati of Witwatersrand University was the first to offer his perspective on the topic of 'Media, youth resistance, and the future of solidarity in Africa's multi-lateral engagement', effectively using visual slides depicting the 2024 Gen-Z protests in Kenya against the Kenyan government. He observed that the IMF had been implicated in the protests, which depicted the Kenyan president as overtaxing the Kenyan people amid rampant corruption. The youths questioned why the IMF does not scrutinise how the Kenyan government spends the money it lends the country as development funds. In a rare response to the Kenyan public, the

IMF argued that the Ruto government should be accountable to its people, not to them. Prof Mati argued that media technologies enable people to delegitimise governments in ways never before seen in human history.

Dr Joyce Omwoha of the Technical University of Kenya reinforced Prof Mati's argument by asking how Kenyan youths use new media technologies to voice their political concerns. This contrasts with the public's perception that the ruling elite live in opulence while ordinary people live in abject poverty. The young people presented a new perspective on Kenyan politics, arguing that they should be listened to because they form the majority. Previously, political groupings were based on class, ethnicity, and other factors, but not age. The young people's approach to politics amplified their voice across the continent and globally, inspiring other African countries. Dr Omwoha observed that, in previous generations, political mobilisation had moved from the physical realm to the online realm. However, Kenyan youths first mobilised politically online before taking to the streets. The gender dynamics were also different from previous protests, with young women playing a central role. This reversed approach to political engagement was highly effective due to the ease and affordability of online mobilisation.

Dr Omwoha explained that the young people jokingly advised those over 35 years to stay at home, as they assumed they would not be able to participate in the physical protests. They also argued that older people had led them down by electing corrupt governments and, therefore, lacked the legitimacy to complain. These logical arguments empowered the young people to effectively articulate their issues using new media technologies, including AI. They used digital media to create hashtags and AI-generated visuals that humorously conveyed their political messages on various national, continental, and global platforms.

Dr Kimberly Tyson of North Carolina A&T State University made a presentation, 'Shared Legacies, Shared Futures: Building Academic Bridges between Africa and HBCUs', which highlighted the need to connect students in the US with those in Africa through student exchange programmes. This allows for faculty members and students alike to benefit from shared experiences, opportunities, and research. It also gives people confidence and expertise on various issues of mutual interest. Students from African universities and HBCUs can present case studies of current and proposed partnerships.

These provide practical models that advance the G20 priorities of solidarity, equality, and sustainability by amplifying African agency through: - media-based projects (documentaries, podcasts, and social media campaigns) created by students and/or faculty to document their academic and cultural experiences; technology initiatives to strengthen African capacity in digital tools and platforms, improving research collaboration, and broadening reach. Joint research that advances African priorities and amplifies African expertise in global discourse. Student mobility programmes that foster cultural immersion, collaborative problem-solving, and the joint creation of projects that address shared challenges, while facilitating networking between African and HBCU students.

Dr Tyson shared her practical experience of collaborations between Africa and HBCUs, which she gained during her visit to Africa before the AFSA conference. She demonstrated how shared legacies of resilience, innovation, and cultural exchange have shaped partnership approaches between African institutions and HBCUs. She presented case studies documenting media projects, technology initiatives, joint research, and student mobility programmes that have strengthened academic links, raised the profile of African expertise, increased global reach, and created lasting connections between institutions. The Partnership frameworks provide clear guidelines for establishing cross-institutional collaborations that balance resources, honour institutional histories, and prioritise African-led objectives.

One audience member who happened to be a panelist at session 15, Dr Aziz Alghashian, expounded on Dr Omwoha and Prof Mati's portrayal of the hijab as a symbol of purity in their presentation. Aziz observed that some people, especially the younger generation in Saudi Arabia, view the hijab as a symbol of oppression. They yearn for the liberty that the modern world comes with modernity. Another member of the audience suggested the need to deepen the methodological approach to the study of digital media due to the novelty of the phenomenon. If not approached with caution, it could affect the findings.

Perhaps the most engaging comment was an analogy that drew parallels with electoral politics in East Africa in 2025, 2026, and 2027. In the analogy, Tanzania's 2025 electoral-related protests were considered the quarter finals, Uganda's 2026 elections the semi-finals, and Kenya's 2027 elections shall be the finals. The rationale behind this analogy is that electorates are no longer afraid of electoral-related deaths perpetrated by governments. (Link to session <https://youtu.be/Zo4GSZubbRg>).

19. Panel on African Agency - Africa in Global Politics

The moderator Dr. Ekeminiabasi Eyita-Okon of Witwatersrand University, set the session rolling by introducing the first speaker Dr Gabriel Nguijol of the Cameroonian Institute of Diplomatic and Strategic Studies (ICEDIS), Cameroon.

Dr Nguijol used the imagery of a beautiful girl to capture the imagination of the audience regarding the global order shifts towards multipolarity. Africa is portrayed as a passive, beautiful girl whom the rest of the world is scrambling for. The multipolarity is raising geopolitical tensions and opportunities, marked by changing migration patterns and increasing natural resource dependencies. These require bold actions, where Africa appears, again, at the centre of the new great game. He argued that it is time for Africa to get involved and shape the future of the global order. The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), one of the eight (8) African Union (AU) building blocks, made up of rich strategic resources, appears as a pivotal region in shaping the African collective future.

Dr Ngoijol critically examined Central Africa's regional potential and geopolitical importance to leverage and enhance African agency, by evolving from a historically fragmented entity into a united force that can effectively express and protect African interests on the global stage. The region boasts around 31.3 billion barrels of proven crude oil reserves, which represents 31% of Africa's total, behind the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) with 35% and ahead of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) with 19% of the continent's reserves. Moreover, ECCAS, is the world's first producer of cobalt (80% of global production), with more than 300,000 kilotons produced in 2024, and is the second-largest world producer of copper, with over 2.84 million metric tons the same year, essential minerals for the rapidly growing electronic industries.

The Congo Basin is the second-largest tropical rainforest in the world and plays a vital role in regulating global climate, and the Gulf of Guinea holds over 30% of Africa's maritime trade, making ECCAS a critical trade hub. Applying regionalism and constructivist theories, this study allows us to see how the formation and development of regional organisations as enhanced and coherent institutions, can develop unified strategies to engage with external partners effectively; and how these organisations can construct a shared regional identity and normative framework that promotes African agency.

Dr Nguijol adopted a mixed-methods approach that includes geopolitics, policy analysis, and case studies to evaluate ECCAS's operational capabilities and strategic initiatives. He examined how ECCAS can use its combined strengths. These include potential such as an intra-African trade expected to be 45% by 2030, contributing to the success of the African Continental Free Trade Area, and Agenda 2063's aspiration for a united African market; a privileged access to the Atlantic Ocean through the Gulf of Guinea, and controlling major ports in Angola, Cameroon, and Gabon; with a population estimated at 229.4 million which is a substantial consumer market; spanning 6.67 million km², and as a home to diverse ecosystems and wealth of natural resources.

These strengths place ECCAS in a good position to navigate external partnerships, reduce asymmetric dependencies, and foster sustainable development that aligns with Agenda 2063. Although ECCAS is grappling with some serious challenges, including poor infrastructure, political instability, transnational security issues, and low intra-regional trade, it however, has a wealth of untapped potential that can enable it to emerge as a significant player in promoting African agency, and amplifying African voice globally, by shifting from being a passive recipient of outside influences to an active force in shaping global norms and policies.

Professor Jonathan Makuwira of the Malawi University of Science and Technology drew from a French magazine that portrayed Trumpism as "a political phenomenon that defies old definition", to analyse the inauguration of Donald Trump as the President of the United States of America for the second time, arguing that the global political landscape has seen a remarkable shift. The shift redefined international relations, and in the context of Africa, it is reconfiguring the African agency. He observed that the decision to freeze aid to many countries around the world, many

of whom are in Africa, has heightened African agency and triggered a new narrative, which, for decades, has remained silent. Prof Makuwira said that the new global geopolitical reconfiguration of 'Trumpism' has thrown the "African Agenda 2063" into both a development and political spin. Prof Makuwira asked the audience to ask themselves why the US elected Trump twice. The ideas of polarisation politics, reactionary nationalism, isolationism, and demonising idealism, among others, lingered around that question.

Prof Makuwira identified liberative narratives in response to not only the aid freeze but also how African leadership was responding to Trump's new African strategy, which, to a larger extent, is private sector-oriented. At the same time, he delved into an analysis of whether there were shifts in the continental development agenda – African Agenda 2063 – The Africa We Want, against the current geo-political reconfiguration. Prof Makuwira advanced the thesis that while President Donald Trump's second term is marred by controversy in terms of foreign policy, the time is now ripe for African leadership to reconfigure its development trajectory and engage in the reassessment of liberative and emancipatory development approaches anchored on new models of social policy and its financing. This is similar to Dr Weston Shilaho Khwatemba's view explored above.

Prof Gabriel Ukertor Moti of the University of Abuja used an analogy of heaven to explain how the electoral politics in Africa is full of empty promises. He characterizes African agency as one with constraints. African people are considered passive recipients. African leaders have many parallel engagements, most of which are repetitive, eating into governments' coffers in terms of travel funding, even as they bring no tangible returns to the people. Africa finds herself at an economic and political junction. It must take one direction or another. For instance, Tanzania and Madagascar abandoned their mineral resources exploration even as other countries scramble for the very minerals. Such decisions are not beneficial to the continent. Mineral power would elevate Africa to global stature for negotiations. It would also result in elite capital which many Western countries are looking for.

Prof Moti noted amplified corruption that exasperated political instability and invited external manipulation and staining already fragile political frameworks on the African continent, which reinforces structural dependence. Africa is increasingly present at the global stage: There is rapid demographic growth, an acceleration of urbanisation, mineral harnessing, digital leapfrogging, and enhanced regional integration. Agenda 2063 is a homegrown solution that can be amplified and mainstreamed for growth. We need to transform to green energy. Accountability and critical focus on the youths to harness the opportunities available.

The questions from the audience showed the need for African people's resolve to act assertively and go for their global share of every opportunity. The scholars toyed with the issue of whether Trump is burdening Africa or if his actions are inviting Africa to rethink its own internal contradictions, around health, security, and others. The structural engagements, especially

around youth engagement in politics is necessary to avoid vacuums in case the youths succeed in deposing current leadership. (Link to session <https://youtu.be/uKuGRABoQbU>).

20. Panel on The M20; and the Role of African Media in Amplifying African Voices in the G20 (Panel by Moxii Africa)

The panel moderator Ms Liezel Wilson of SABC News, set off the session by welcoming Mr Churchill Otieno of the African Editors Forum to make his presentation. Mr Otieno delved straight into the cracks of the issue, arguing that Gen-Z has rejected everything conventional. They first rejected the Kenyan media even before they rejected the Kenyan government. They even reject their parents and what their parents believe in. In accordance with democratic tenets, since they are the majority, they need to have their way. We can bring this Gen-Z notion to the G20 through the proposition that Trump is a distraction. The G20 issues suspiciously shifted to Trump's absence, even when there were more pressing issues about Africa, where the G20 Summit was being held.

Mr Otieno highlighted a critical paradox facing African participation in global governance and media representation. Even when African voices are visibly present and acknowledged, formal systems still require validation through registration and recognition before participation can meaningfully occur. This reflects broader structural inequalities that continue to limit African agency within global platforms such as the G20. Although the G20 was hosted in Africa and efforts were made to foreground continental concerns, the outcomes reflected minimal incorporation of African priorities. This raises an important challenge: once global summits conclude, African stakeholders must deliberately sustain conversations that reintroduce African perspectives into international discourse. The marginalization of these perspectives forms part of what has been described as epistemic erosion, where dominant global narratives overshadow African ways of knowing, thinking, and framing realities.

For the media, this creates a responsibility to bridge the gap between journalistic production and audience expectations. African audiences increasingly demand equitable representation, yet much reporting still relies on external news agencies, reproducing foreign tones and interpretations. Without independent funding and ownership of media institutions, reclaiming African agency remains difficult. Finally, the issue of information integrity emerged as central. Communication is deeply emotional, and misinformation often spreads faster than verified truth. In an era shaped by artificial intelligence and large language models, Africa faces both opportunity and risk. Collective action is therefore necessary to protect narrative sovereignty and strengthen authentic African storytelling.

A question from the audience sought to understand how Trump's absence from the G20 Summit should have been handled, and the response was that it should have been ignored, and the conference should have gone on as if nothing had happened. It was, however, argued that Trump

is very active online. He lives his reality on media, and so even if he is ignored, his realities would come to bite those ignoring him. It was clarified that there is a difference between the G20, which is about 150 groups and the G20 Summit which is only one event.

Mr William Bird of Moxii Africa indicated that India started the idea of including media agendas in the G20 Summits. Brazil followed, and now South Africa has followed suit. When Trump came to power, he instigated restrictions that affected the media, AI, digital, and traditional media. This resulted in the convening of a media forum, the M2, during South Africa's G20 Summit, with 16 pillars of media reporting, including integrity, ethics, copyright, licenses, and safety, among others. He observed a rise in cyberbullying, gendered intimidation, and the stealing of information from Africa to make AI better, especially in other parts of the world. He said there are possibilities of running the M20 in the US in 2026 because it shall voice the African issues to the global stage to hopefully trigger change.

Mr Bird reflected on the growing concern about how global political tensions, media narratives, and Africa's strategic positioning intersect within multilateral platforms such as the G20 and the Media 20 (M20). His reflection on reactions to statements made by President Donald Trump emphasised that the excessive attention to provocative political rhetoric risks distracting Africa from its own developmental priorities. Rather than reacting emotionally to global political personalities, speakers argued that African institutions must remain focused on long-term structural goals and collective organisation.

A central theme emerging from the dialogue was Africa's underestimated capacity. Contributors highlighted that despite prevailing narratives of crisis and dependency, the continent possesses sufficient internal resources, knowledge systems, and human capital to confront its challenges independently. Examples such as Ethiopia's nationally funded dam project demonstrated how African-led initiatives can mobilize domestic solidarity and financing without excessive reliance on foreign aid. This perspective encouraged a shift "beyond aid and fear" toward self-organisation and policy ownership.

Equally significant was the role of the media in shaping global perception. Participants cautioned against reactionary journalism driven by social media trends rather than verified facts. The rapid spread of misinformation, particularly when political announcements circulate online without context, was identified as a major threat to informed public discourse. Strengthening African media ecosystems, therefore, emerged as essential, not only for accurate reporting but also for safeguarding Africa's narrative sovereignty.

Speakers stressed that Africa cannot depend on external media institutions to tell its stories. Building resilient, independent, and well-resourced African media systems was framed as a continental responsibility tied to identity, vision, and democratic participation. Media development was also linked to inclusivity, particularly the need to integrate youth voices and digital creators into policy conversations. Ultimately, the panel underscored that Africa's agency lies in coordinated action rather than external validation. The challenge moving forward is

transforming dialogue into practical outcomes—ensuring that continental cooperation, credible journalism, and strategic engagement within global forums translate into tangible progress rather than symbolic participation.

The questions from the audience pointed to the idea of how to contain AI, where disinformation and misinformation have taken centre stage during the G20 Summit. The AI-generated video clips mimicking prominent leaders make it difficult for the public to recognise the fake from the genuine information. Another issue that emerged was around the monopoly of the digital major platforms, including Google, whose advertising revenue is so high that when they are penalised for misconduct, the fines are too low.

Another issue that emerged is around the monopoly of the digital major platforms, including Google, whose advertising revenue is so high that when they are penalised for misconduct, the fines are too low, and thus, non-prohibitive. There was also a question seeking clarification around the notion that when an African country disagrees with the US, it would switch alliances to Europe and find suitable allies. That should not be the case. A section of the audience humoured that Africa could squander the opportunity presented by Trump's open and courageous disregard to African interests, to reflect on how to amplify its own Agency. (Link to session <https://youtu.be/BYgRt6KUkt4>).

21. Closing Remarks and Vote of Thanks

In closing, on behalf of the African Centre for the Study of the United States (ACSUS), Dr Kabaso Kabwe expressed sincere appreciation to all partners whose financial and in-kind contributions made the conference possible. She extended her gratitude to all participants, particularly those who traveled from across the continent and beyond, for their commitment, active engagement, and for enriching the discussions over the three days.

She emphasised that the conference marked not an endpoint, but a continuation of critical dialogue. The Centre will carry these conversations forward throughout the coming year through a range of platforms and initiatives. Dr Kabwe encouraged participants to remain connected, engaged, and involved in shaping these ongoing exchanges through ACSUS platforms

22. Key Findings and Recommendations

a. Findings

1. Africa's Global Governance Moment Is Real but Constrained

- South Africa's historic G20 presidency marked a shift from symbolic inclusion to substantive participation in global governance.
- The African Union's admission into the G20 signals institutional recognition, but influence remains uneven and structurally constrained.

- Agenda-setting power still rests largely with established powers, limiting Africa’s capacity to translate presence into outcomes.

2. African Agency Requires Structural, Not Rhetorical, Sovereignty

- “African agency” emerged as a central but contested concept.
- True sovereignty must extend beyond diplomatic positioning to economic autonomy, digital governance, industrial capacity, and financial self-determination.
- External financing and extractive economic models continue to reproduce dependency patterns.

3. Financing Africa’s Sustainable Future Is the Central Bottleneck

- Africa faces acute implementation gaps in sustainable development due to high borrowing costs, debt vulnerabilities, and limited fiscal space.
- The global financial architecture disproportionately penalises African economies through risk premiums and credit ratings misaligned with actual risk.
- Climate finance remains insufficient, inaccessible, and slow to disburse.

4. AI and Digital Infrastructure Are Material and Political

- Artificial intelligence and digital transformation are not immaterial “cloud” phenomena but deeply embedded in energy systems, extractive supply chains, labour markets, and data governance regimes.
- Africa risks remaining a site of raw material extraction (critical minerals, data, labour) without moving up the AI value chain.
- Digital sovereignty is emerging as a key arena of geopolitical contestation.

5. China–Africa Engagement Is Complex and Evolving

- China’s role in infrastructure, mining, and digital sectors remains significant but is shifting toward more risk-sensitive, commercially driven engagement.
- African states are recalibrating their engagement strategies amid global competition, debt scrutiny, and diversification efforts.
- There is growing recognition that bilateral engagement must align with long-term developmental strategies.

6. Fragmentation Undermines Collective African Influence

- Continental coordination remains uneven across trade, climate, debt, and digital governance.
- The AfCFTA presents an opportunity, but implementation gaps persist.

- Without stronger regional coherence, Africa’s negotiating leverage in global forums remains diluted.

b. Strategic Recommendations

1. Institutionalise African Agenda-Setting Power

- Develop pre-G20 and pre-multilateral coordination mechanisms among African states to consolidate unified negotiating positions.
- Strengthen the African Union Commission’s technical capacity to support member states with evidence-based policy proposals.
- Align continental priorities (climate finance, debt restructuring, industrialisation) into clearly sequenced negotiation platforms.

2. Reform Global Financial Architecture

- Advocate collectively for reform of credit rating methodologies that disadvantage African economies.
- Push for expanded use of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) reallocation to African development banks.
- Institutionalise climate finance instruments that prioritise concessional and grant-based funding over debt-creating instruments.
- Advance debt restructuring frameworks that incorporate development and climate resilience considerations.

3. Build Domestic Resource Mobilisation and Industrial Capacity

- Strengthen tax administration systems and reduce illicit financial flows.
- Prioritise value addition in mining and critical minerals sectors to prevent continued extractive dependency.
- Integrate industrial policy with green transition strategies to enable leapfrogging rather than incremental adaptation.

4. Develop a Continental Digital Sovereignty Framework

- Establish African data governance norms aligned with developmental priorities.
- Invest in public digital infrastructure and AI research ecosystems.
- Ensure that digital trade agreements protect policy space for industrial and technological upgrading.
- Promote regional data centres powered by renewable energy to reduce external dependence.

5. Move Up the AI and Technology Value Chain

- Position African states not merely as suppliers of raw materials (e.g., cobalt, lithium) but as participants in battery manufacturing, semiconductor assembly, and AI research.
- Create public–private partnerships for AI skills development.
- Integrate AI governance into continental policy frameworks such as the AU Digital Transformation Strategy.

6. Recalibrate China and Global Partnerships Strategically

- Shift from project-based negotiations to sector-wide strategic frameworks.
- Ensure transparency and sustainability in infrastructure and mining contracts.
- Diversify partnerships while avoiding securitisation of development policy amid great-power rivalry.

7. Strengthen AfCFTA Implementation

- Accelerate tariff liberalisation schedules.
- Invest in cross-border logistics, energy corridors, and digital connectivity.
- Harmonise regulatory standards to facilitate intra-African trade in green and digital sectors.

8. Embed Climate Justice in Development Strategy

- Position Africa’s climate vulnerability as a structural issue requiring systemic reform of global climate finance.
- Link adaptation finance directly to industrial transformation.
- Advocate for loss-and-damage mechanisms that are predictable and adequately funded.

The report underscores that Africa stands at a pivotal historical juncture. Representation in global institutions has improved, but structural power asymmetries remain intact. Without coordinated continental strategies, financial reform advocacy, industrial upgrading, and digital sovereignty planning, Africa risks remaining embedded in extractive and peripheral roles within emerging global systems.

However, with strategic coherence—anchored in collective action, institutional strengthening, and long-term developmental planning—the continent can convert diplomatic presence into transformative influence.



About the Organisers

The African Centre for the Study of the United States (ACSUS) at the University of the Witwatersrand is the definitive hub for African-generated knowledge of the United States of America (US). ACSUS, established in 2018, addresses a distinct gap in research and engagement dedicated exclusively to the study of the US in sub-Saharan Africa. It thus became, and remains, the first Centre of its kind on the African continent to turn a nuanced, analytical, and rigorous African gaze on the US. ACSUS is building extensive, multi and interdisciplinary, incisive, and cutting-edge perspectives on the US, probing topics ranging from political diplomacy, internal US dynamics, diasporic matters, and the US as a global political leader. Through its African Agency Towards Global Power Project, ACSUS aims to enhance Africa's approach to and engagements with traditional and emerging powers. The project intends to activate initiatives intended to boost African agency toward global powers as a means of beneficial social-cultural, political, and economic outcomes for Africa. It focuses on the policies, strategies, and activities being employed and deployed toward Africa by the various powers. AFSA conference forms part of this initiative, convened annually with several partners.

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