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# **THE PACT FOR THE FUTURE AND REPOSITIONING AFRICA'S PLACE IN THE GLOBAL ARENA**

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# Introduction

The Pact for Future, adopted by leaders of the world, during the 79th United Nations (UN) General Assembly, is hailed as a mark of the continuing commitment of Member States of the UN to the UN despite the proliferating challenges and weakening trust. While its adoption by consensus and the reform agenda it articulates affirm the indispensability of multilateral diplomacy, anchored on the UN, several questions arise. A key question is whether the kind of reform packages I [the Pact] envisaged are commensurate with the gravity of the challenges afflicting the multilateral system, including its inbuilt wiring and operation to the detriment particularly of Africa. This brief accordingly presents analysis of whether and how the Pact for the Future provides any opportunities for rectifying the structural flaws and the operational bias of the prevailing power structure of the multilateral system.

## Africa and the Pact for the Future

There is no doubt that the role and contribution of UN member states from various parts of the world was critical for securing the consensus that led to the adoption of the Pact. At the same time, despite not getting the kind of reform measures it championed, **Africa demonstrated the value of its leadership and agency for multilateralism and the reform** that makes it fit for purpose in view of the current and emerging challenges facing the world.

**First**, through the Republic of Namibia, Africa contributed, as Co-Facilitator, along with Germany, for building bridges and mobilizing consensus among Member States of the UN. The work of Namibia along with Germany, guided by UN General Assembly [Resolution 76/307](#) and [Decision 77/568](#), entailed a series of closed informal consultations with principally Member States but also with CSOs and academia as well.

**Second** and similarly, Zambia, gave the Africa Group a representative in co-facilitating one of the annexes of the Pact of the Future, namely the Global Digital Compact.

These leadership roles are important not only symbolically but also substantively. They highlighted the collaboration and consensus building skills of the Co-Facilitators. The role of co-facilitating also played critical role in initiating and presenting the draft of the Pact of the Future and steering the negotiations on the draft that has gone through four versions.

**Third** and perhaps the most significant contribution of Africa is its principled engagement, along with like-minded states mostly from the global south, in the negotiations on the contents of the Pact of the Future. Africa, leveraging its status as the largest voting bloc in the UN, exercised notable influence to secure some commitment for multilateral reform.

**Fourth** and related to the foregoing is the role Africa played through the leadership that Uganda provided as the Chairperson of the Group of 77 plus China. Africa through Uganda's Chairship of the G77 and its significant membership in the G77 and the UN as a whole was critical in pushing to the forefront of the pact of the Future the pressing developmental and existential issues facing the developing world. Despite the lack of immediate and specifically measurable commitments able to meet Africa's expectations, it is not by coincidence that the Pact incorporates commitments that reflect the demands of the global south as reflected among others in Chapters I, II and V making up more than 90 % of the 58 actions that UN member states committed to under the Pact.

**Fifth**, during the negotiations there were some issues that are considered dear to Africa and much of the global South on which there were fierce contestations. In the context of Uganda's chairship of the G77, for example, it was very uncertain whether the international law principle of common but differentiated responsibility will find its way into the Pact. A minority of members actually felt and expressed that such was unachievable. But leadership of Uganda along with the firm position that countries such as Pakistan adopted eventually secured the inclusion of this principle of common but differentiated responsibility into the Pact.

**Sixth**, during the last part of the negotiation on the Pact of the Future, Africa again played the most crucial role of averting the danger of a potential collapse that the

Pact faced. It is to be recalled that the last-minute proposal led by Russia with support from about seven other countries threatened to derail the adoption of the Pact. It was thanks to the diplomatic creativity of the Africa group and the role of the Cameroonian Chairperson of the General Assembly that the serious threat was averted. Speaking on behalf of all African member states of the **UN, Congo's motion** not to vote on Russia's proposed amendment carried the day and secured the adoption of the Pact as agreed by consensus.

## The mixed, if not poor, delivery of the Pact for Africa

Uganda's Ambassador to the UN chairing the G77 drew on his engagement in an independent high-level process on Africa and reform of the multilateral system. In a major initiative illustrative of Africa's active engagement in the policy discourse and debate on reform of multilateralism, the **Joint Namibia-Amani Africa High-Level Panel of Experts** emerged as a unique platform for harnessing the expertise and knowledge of a diverse group of African experts for articulating a vision of reform of the multilateral system that Africa envisions and the world needs and deserves in the context of the Summit and beyond. The report of the Panel not only underscored the imperative of the principle of common but differentiated responsibility but also articulated the 'what and how' of reforming international financial institutions to address the deep structural flaws and operational bias of the multilateral financial system that impedes the means for meeting the development needs of Africa.

With respect to the global financial and economic architecture, two of the five key reform areas that the Panel's report proposed stand out. The first of these concerns the governance and decision-making structures and processes of the financial and economic institutions, including through the reform of the quota system of the IMF for ensuring effective representation of Africa in the Fund's decision-making architecture and changing the business model of the international financial institutions.' As the Panel observed '[r]eforming the quota system (in favor of developing countries while avoiding diminishment of existing quota shares) is crucial not only for its impact on voting rights but also due to its influence in guiding access to finance.'

The RSFs intensification of organised violence and control of resource and supply chains has taken many forms, such as the control of smuggling routes along Sudan's Western and North-Western borders and allows it to trade with other countries. And at a greater scale, significant access to Gold mining and transit. Notable that an estimated 75% of the gold mined in the country disappears on the black market and most or all of it to Dubai. Another is the widespread violence involved in the commercialization of the essential livestock production where alliances between traders and violent entrepreneurs have been instrumental in enabling the lucrative livestock export to the Gulf countries. Also, as the subsequent analysis would indicate, there is a close connection between the capacity for organized violence and large investments necessary for acquiring and building ports along the Red Sea as demonstrated by external involvement in the ongoing war in Sudan. The UN confirms the RSF is using large-scale proceeds from gold mining to fund the UAE-backed war against the SAF.

The other relates to addressing challenges relating to access to development finance and the sustainable resolution of the debt distress facing countries. In this respect, the Panel envisioned actions involving 'independent global sovereign debt authority, rechanneling of SDRs through regional banks, reducing the cost of (access to development) financing and debt servicing and reforming credit rating standards and institutions.'

This has proved to be the aspect of the summit in respect of which major powers particularly the **'US and its allies'** reportedly proved reluctant to make any significant concession, arguing that 'the UN is not the right space to negotiate financial issues.' Viewed through the lens of Africa's demands and needs, this is one of the areas where the Pact failed to advance substantial reform measures commensurate with what is required to meet the development needs of countries in Africa and other parts of the developing world.

Yet, even here the Pact affirms the need for reform of the international financial architecture with a commitment for 'more urgent and ambitious action to ensure that the international financial architecture becomes...fit for the world of today and responsive to the challenges faced by developing countries... Also worthy of note is the recognition of 'the importance of continuing to pursue governance reforms at the international financial institutions and multilateral developments banks...to enhance the representation and voice of developing countries in decision-making, norm setting, and global economic governance at the international economic and financial institutions, including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.'

Not unrelated to these are the policy rents linked to the conduct of foreign relations as the foreign office became a major battleground between the SAF, RSF and civilian leadership during the post-2019 transition period, which came to an end when the military staged a coup in October 2021. Regional actors were also involved in Sudan's military coup against Al-Bashir, the military's decision to try and rule on its own, and when that initiative failed, to launch another coup on 25 October 2021 against the civilian wing of the transitional government headed by Abdallah Hamdok. The civil-military transitional government also failed because the military still had considerable power resources at its disposal. This was pronounced by the revival of populist and nationalistic politics and alliances as both the RSF and the army as well as civilian political forces struggled to navigate the immense economic and social challenges that generated mass protest movements. Whereas the civilian revolutionary forces largely regarded the RSF as a potential ally in democratic transition (a now dated understanding), the military has come to regard the paramilitary group as a rival economic and security actor.

Also, despite the lack of specific and measurable commitments, the Pact clearly acknowledged the centrality of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and financing for development curtesy of the role of Africa and the G77. Considering that the SDGs constitute a central pillar for boosting faith in and enhancing the legitimacy of the multilateral system, the importance of bringing the issue of finance and SDGs to the centre cannot be overemphasized. The lack of progress in the SDGs, with only 17% of the SDGs being on track to be achieved according to the UN, constitutes the single most serious setback against multilateralism. It is also common knowledge that the SDGs face a \$4 trillion financing gap. Similarly, as the Africa High-Level Panel report underscored, dealing with climate impacts will require urgent action to reduce greenhouse gas emission by those who historically and currently bear the most responsibility for emissions and to finance adaptation and loss and damage on the basis of 'climate justice' as enunciated in the Pact. While the Pact has not gone far enough with respect to the reform of the global financial architecture, the engagement of Africa and the G77 made it possible for the Pact to put the limelight on such issues as sovereign debt, resource mobilization, Special Drawing Rights, tax, and support to deal with systemic shocks.

These elements add important impetus to the efforts particularly of developing countries and the UN Secretary General to mobilize consensus for rectifying the unjust and deeply skewed global financial architecture, especially if the World Bank and International Monetary Fund heed the calls not only to increase the voice and representation of developing countries but also the conditions of access to development finance by developing countries.

A key area of reform around which Africa mobilised the most has also been in respect of the reform of the global collective security system with a focus on UN Security Council Reform. Here, the issues to which the Africa High-level Panel's Report addressed itself include a) the historic injustice of the non-representation of Africa in the permanent category and its underrepresentation in the elected category of the UNSC membership, b) the bias and double standards characterising the operation of the global collective security system and c) its colossal failure to respond meaningfully to some of the major conflicts in, most notably, Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine, among others. The Panel thus elaborated 'how the legitimacy and effectiveness of the UN, particularly its Security Council, can be restored by addressing this historic injustice on the basis of the Ezulwini Consensus as part of the Pact of the Future by affirming the commitment to treat Africa's quest for permanent membership as a special case.'

The Panel's position for Africa's representation in the UNSC is not confined to the argument of rectifying the historic injustice the continent suffered and the attendant crisis of legitimacy afflicting the global body. **What is novel in the Panel's argument is the additional value proposition of Africa's membership for the effectiveness of the Council.**

*Beyond meeting the demands of the principle of legitimacy, enlargement of the size of the Council, through allocation of permanent and non-permanent seats within the Ezulwini framework, has also the role of injecting into the Council members who have [greater] stake in the effective functioning of the Council and hence have the incentive to operate as moderating force for breaking the gridlock that from time to time paralyses the Council owing to geopolitical contestations between rival major powers in the UNSC.*

This is premised on the recognition that the dysfunction and failure of the UNSC, like other parts of the multilateral system, tends to be most acutely felt in Africa and other parts of the world similarly situated. African states, and those similarly positioned in a reformed UNSC, thus possess, on account of their position, inherent motivation to operate as purveyors of common ground in a polarized and multipolar global order.

Sierra Leone, as Chairperson of the Committee of Ten of Heads of State and Government of the AU Assembly on UNSC reform, has been at the forefront of championing Africa's position for rectifying the historic injustice done to Africa by its exclusion from permanent

membership with all its privileges. It broke the taboo of tabling in the UNSC the issue of reform of the UNSC by convening a high-level debate on UNSC reform during its presidency in August ahead of the Summit of the Future.

As a file in respect of which progress remains stalled for decades, it is not an in-significant win for Africa that the Pact contained as the first element of the first action point in the part concerning UNSC reform, the commitment of UN member states to 'redress the historic injustice against Africa as a priority.' Yet, as the **recent announcement** by the Permanent Representative of the US to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, expressing US support for two permanent seats for Africa made it clear, this commitment in the Pact could not be considered as reflecting support for Africa's demand for two permanent seats with all their benefits and privileges, including the veto, if the veto is to be maintained. Clearly, there remain a lot of serious work to build on this progress for realizing the longstanding just demands of Africa for redressing the historic injustices by ensuring the full implementation of the Ezuliweni consensus.

# Conclusion

Africa showed willingness and capacity both to lead and collaborate with others to restore confidence in multilateralism by pushing necessary reform proposals. It served as a shield to prevent the hard-won consensus of UN member states on the Pact from being derailed at the last minute.

Yet, without effective implementation of the commitments in the Pact, all of Africa's efforts may end up being in vain. Indeed, without implementation, the contribution of the Pact for achieving a more inclusive and legitimate multilateralism could not be realised. Despite its flaws, the reference value of the Pact for enabling Africa to bolster its campaign for bridging the distance between the promises of multilateral principles and commitments for example as encapsulated in the Sustainable Development Goals and the lack of delivery by the multilateral system on these principles and commitments.

Outside of the role Africa played in the negotiations on the Pact for the Future, there are recent examples that show the possibilities for Africa to exercise leadership and agency for disrupting distances. A case in point is the role Africa played around the reform of the global tax regime. After years of diplomatic efforts at the UN in New York, in November 2023, **Africa led the UN to make history with vote for global tax convention.** Overwhelming majority of member states of the United Nations voted for a resolution tabled by the Africa Group in New York spearheaded by Nigeria authorizing the negotiation of an international tax convention within the framework of the UN.

The outcome of the vote signifies, and the promise of this resolution, is that despite all the odds the reform of the multilateral financial system is not an unrealistic pursuit. The resolution and its promise also suggest that such a reform has a better chance of success if the UN's role as the premier platform for global governance is reaffirmed. Yet, as the Africa High-level Panel pointed out

*Considering the challenges for achieving the kind of reform that serves Africa and all other parts of the world, Africa must be mindful of the fact that there may be no linear or single path for a reform or transformation of the multilateral system. Various reform processes are at play. These processes take two forms: reform efforts from outside of the system and those from within the system.*

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Solomon A. Dersso is the Founding Director of Amani Africa. A leading legal scholar and analyst of peace and security and current African and African Union (AU) affairs, Dr Solomon Dersso served as the Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights during 2019-2021. He remains a Commissioner and is also Adjunct Professor of Law at University of Cape Town. Formerly, he worked as Head of the Peace and Security Council Report Program of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) after serving as a senior researcher, which he assumed on joining the ISS in 2008. He was also a research fellow at the South African Institute for Advanced Constitutional Law (SAIFAC).

Apart from documenting and publishing on AU policy issues and processes, Dr Dersso has delivered high-level policy briefings and presentations for governmental and inter-governmental representatives and policy-making bodies including the AU Peace and Security Council, IGAD, the Panel of the Wise and the AU High-Level Panel on Egypt. His legal scholarship that covers teaching of human rights and academic and policy research includes non-faculty professorship at the College of Law and Governance, Addis Ababa University. With over hundred publications including four single authored monographs, one edited book, more than two dozen peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters as well as reports and numerous opinion editorials and analysis, Dr Dersso's expert opinion featured in the works of major media organizations including Mail and Guardian, Times, SABC, Al-Jazeera, Daily Maverick, CGTN, the Guardian, and the BBC.

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