



AFRICA
EUROPE
FOUNDATION

REORDERING THE FUTURE: 100 African Voices on Global Governance and Finance Reform



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Foreword

Written by Laura Maschio, ONE Youth Ambassador for the ONE Campaign, an anti-poverty organisation co-founded by Bono on behalf of ONE Youth Ambassadors in Brussels

The International Summit for a New Global Financing Pact on the 22nd of June in Paris, represents a pivotal moment to rally support for the Global South, which is currently paying the highest price for the converging crises of our time. Developing and emerging economies, already burdened with significant debt and limited resources, are now facing the harshest consequences of today's challenges, such as climate change, COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurities, and geopolitical conflicts.

This summit holds immense potential to create a paradigm shift in international finance: the international development community has called for in-depth reforms of Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), whose capital could effectively address development challenges if used more efficiently. In July 2021, the G20 called for an Independent Review of MDBs' Capital Adequacy Frameworks (CAF) to enhance the leveraging of MDBs' capital through strategic adjustments in five key areas of the frameworks. These included adopting more efficient management of capital and risk, defining risk tolerance more precisely, relying more on callable capital, increasing the rate of financial innovations, and engaging in closer dialogue with credit rating agencies. By implementing these five recommendations, MDBs could lend up to a trillion dollars more to vulnerable countries, helping them in investing in future growth, fighting poverty, and dealing with current global challenges. It is actually estimated that addressing the consequences of climate change, pandemics, and conflicts will require a tripling of financing from the MDBs, a doubling of bilateral aid, and a massive rise in the flow of private capital. The estimated needs to respond to these shocks run in the trillions, and the role of MDBs is perceived to be central.

In all of this, it is critical to guarantee the active participation and influence of youth voices in shaping the design of these reforms. The potential of a strengthened Africa-Europe partnership on global governance reform has become increasingly in focus with the rise of multipolarity. Africa and Europe working together could drive the needed transformation of our multilateral systems, a goal that can only be achieved through the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including youth on both continents. The key lies in structuring new instruments that effectively address the ongoing crises and offer solutions in situations where national governments fall short in doing so. African economic policy institutes have engaged in extensive discussions, delving into two tracks of research: the first one revolves around proposals for structuring a new instrument that can effectively respond to the current financial landscape, and it would involve exploring innovative mechanisms and frameworks that can better support sustainable development, financial inclusion, and economic resilience; the second track focuses on leveraging the existing efforts and initiatives taking place in Africa, and building upon successful local endeavours.

This last approach emphasizes the importance of amplifying African voices within global fora, ensuring that the perspective, needs, and aspirations of the continent are duly considered in the design and implementation of reforms. In this way, it would be possible to create a financial system that truly reflects Africa's development goals and contributes to sustainable and equitable growth on the continent.

The Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) has provided a platform to some 100 young Africans aged 18-38 to express their opinions on the ability of post-World War II global governance institutions to respond to the challenges Africa is facing. Unsurprisingly, there is a widespread agreement that the Bretton Woods institutions are out of date and often prioritising Western interests over African needs. Respondents also agreed on the need to increase African representation in global governance, in MDBs decision-making bodies but also at the G20 and the UN Security Council and to direct more funds towards infrastructure and sustainable development projects.

Along with giving more space to African perspectives in the debate, it is equally crucial to support their fight for justice and to amplify their voices with support from like-minded peers in Europe. This is why as ONE Activists, we addressed a [letter](#) to Macron to push for more commitments for vulnerable countries through a financial tax transaction and reforms to fund climate and development ahead of the Summit for a New Global Financial Pact.

In recent years, ONE activists has been advocating for several causes, among which climate justice, stressing how, despite having contributed the least to historic carbon emissions, African countries are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and the least prepared to address them. This is why cooperation and mutual respect between Africa and Europe, underpinned by a robust monitoring of cross-continental commitments, is vital. African and European youth are ready to change the way Europe and Africa work together, and get leaders to commit to policy changes that ensure youth are empowered for the future. Leaders on both continents need to commit to doing things differently. They need to start listening to youth, and prioritise the issues that will affect their lives.



At a Glance

The Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF), established in 2020, finds itself at the heart of shifting geo-politics, as COVID, climate and conflict have shaken many of the assumptions on which the last 30 years have been based. The build-up of momentum in favour of global reform positions AEF well to provide a platform for exploring different, better ways of managing the multiple crises buffeting the planet. As part of these efforts, the foundation invited over 100 young Africans to participate in a series of online focus group discussions to canvass their opinions on the post-World War II global order and its main institutions—the UN, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank institutions. Did they trust their ability to respond to the challenges Africa faces or did they, as many do, see the need for change in the wake of a confluence of crises, from food price inflation as a result of the Ukraine war to rising global carbon emissions. This report outlines the perceptions and recommendations of participants, distinguished by calls for reforms in governance at an international level and much closer to home

An Introduction to the Project

What do young Africans think about the current systems of global governance and their ability to deliver on the range and severity of challenges the continent faces in the 21st century? Do they support the reforms proposed by world leaders, international institutions and civil society organisations or do they have other solutions in mind? What do they believe is the best path to addressing widening inequalities as they affect their lives and futures?

Whether it concerns debt issues, the climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, or the fallout from regional destabilisation and conflict, notably in Ukraine, there is widespread agreement that the current systems are not delivering. The Bretton Woods institutions were created in 1944, and the UN structure in 1945 – both nearly 80 years ago, at a very different time for the distribution of global economic and political interests. It is therefore not surprising that the structures and processes established several generations ago are no longer able to address speedily, effectively and credibly the range of problems faced today. Although there has been considerable reform and renewal of structures and methods over the decades, with recognition of new actors and creation of new institutions, such as the expansion of the UN Security Council, and founding of the G20 as a body for heads of state in 2008; today there is growing acknowledgement that more than just tweaking existing structures is needed.

To hear what young people think, the AEF ran a focus group project to ask them directly. We spoke to over 100 young people (aged 18-38) from the continent about their views. In a series of online focus groups, we asked them to critically assess global governance and finance institutions and to share ideas for how they could be improved, to weigh in on a range of proposed reforms, and to share ideas of their own from their perspectives as citizens.

Participants were divided into twelve groups. The focus groups were conducted virtually via Zoom and lasted for one hour. Participants were issued gift vouchers for their participation. Focus groups were led by an experienced moderator and ranged from 5 to 10 participants each. We have only used first names to protect the anonymity of participants.

Participants came from Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa and Kenya. Each focus group kicked off by asking participants to provide examples of global inequality as it affects Africa and to share their opinions on whether the current systems of global governance were able to address them. Participants were critical of institutions of global governance, which they felt had let them down on multiple fronts. They pointed to the marginalisation of African voices in decision-making and the perceived lack of oversight by International Financial Institutions (IFIs), which they felt led to the mismanagement of public funds and rising debt levels. While they supported efforts to strengthen African representation in global governance, they wanted it to be representative of the interests of citizens rather than corrupt officials or members of the elite.

Asked to weigh in on proposed reforms to institutions such as the UN Security Council, G20 and Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), they joined calls for more inclusivity while advocating for new institutions to be created in line with the African context. The most popular of these were intermediary bodies that would bridge the gap between citizens and global decision-making and hold national governments to account. Finally, participants were asked to imagine an agenda to be shared with global leaders, which would convey the priorities of young Africans today and inform efforts to make global governance fit for purpose in the 21st century.

What changes do young Africans have in mind to advance international cooperation and global governance?

Global Governance: What Young Africans Told Us



With Rising Inequality, Young Africans Want to be Represented at the World Stage

Key takeaways

1

There's an unequal distribution of influence and resources globally.

2

Developed countries hold a disproportionate amount of power, which can disadvantage Africa.

3

Global governance structures must reflect the changes to the global landscape since their establishment.

With rising global inequality and the connected crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate crisis, and the invasion of Ukraine as “the biggest shared test since the Second World War,” according to UN secretary-general António Guterres, youth in Africa joined a chorus of voices worldwide seeking institutional reform to tackle the challenges of their time.

There is growing recognition that the global economic system is facing a range of challenges, including rising inequality, environmental degradation, and financial instability

— António Guterres
UN secretary-general

“On the one hand, these institutions have played a crucial role in providing financial assistance to countries in need and promoting economic growth and development around the world,” said Alfred from Nigeria. “They have also been instrumental in facilitating international cooperation and coordination on a range of economic issues.”

Despite this, he said, many among his peers felt that they “prioritise the interests of powerful corporations over the needs of ordinary people in developing countries.”

“There is growing recognition that the global economic system is facing a range of challenges, including rising inequality, environmental degradation, and financial instability,” he continued. “Some argue that these challenges require new approaches and institutions that are better equipped to address them.”

Gold from Kenya said institutions created after World War II were failing Africans, despite the impact of the war on the continent. “Those institutions should have a change in policy in order to accommodate African nations. I feel we are being cheated at the moment.”

“Because we weren’t a part of the war then, but we were the casualties of war. We were shipped in to fight the European wars and we haven’t been compensated enough.”

He proposed a roundtable meeting to review the policies created at that time “in order to recognise us as a continent. I feel we deserve that respect.”

“Everyone needs us at the moment [...] when we aren’t given the proper seat at the UN, I think that’s a gross disrespect to Africa as a continent,” Gold concluded.

Bias in favour of the global North: Participants perceived inequalities in the way international bodies responded to global challenges, accusing them of prioritising Western interests.

“Global institutions like the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation suffer from representation inequalities where power and decision making are contemplated in the hands of a few powerful countries like the United States and United Kingdom,” said Solomon from Nigeria, adding that this could lead to the marginalisation of the smaller, less powerful nations, “resulting in an unequal distribution of influence and resources.”

Wills from Kenya agreed, saying it no longer made sense for Africa to be excluded in the current state of the world. “Judging from my own perspective, I would say that there’s a little more bias in the way they operate because they tend to accommodate Western countries and tend to leave African countries out,” he said, calling for Africa to be “more included as a world power in global politics.”

Ghanaian Alexander supported their statements, stating that global institutions were dominated by Western countries, which could lead to “policies that are biased towards Western interests.”

“In institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, voting power is not equally distributed. Developed countries hold a disproportionate amount of power and can block reforms that benefit developing countries.”

He added that developing countries sometimes lacked the resources to participate fully on the global stage, “for example, they may not have the financial resources to send delegates to meetings or the technical expertise to participate in complex negotiations.”

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— Alexander, Ghana

There is so much corruption. So even if the IMF may be advocating for certain policy changes and some welfare packages, but these packages are not getting to the grassroots where it should get to because of the bottleneck, the bureaucracy, and just the plain corruption that is very dominant in Africa.

— James, Nigeria

Many, such as Joseph from Nigeria, felt it apparent that Africa was low on the list of priorities in the current world order. “In other parts of the world, I’d say they’re doing good. I’d say they are fulfilling their purposes in those parts of the world, like USA, United Kingdom, Europe, Asia but in Africa, I don’t think they’re performing enough.”

To even discuss Africa, Africa has to be at the table. We have to get past that point where global North countries sit down and think about what could be necessary to Africa, what is relevant to Africa. We have to get past that. Africa has to be at this table. Africa has to be at the United Nations Security Council. Africa has to make their own contributions and tell them exactly what these problems are.

— James, Nigeria

Not all representation is equal: While participants supported efforts to increase African representation at the global level, they were equally concerned about what this would look like. Because in instances where the continent was represented, they did not always see the concerns of citizens being brought forward.

James from Nigeria said there was very little representation of “real Africans,” with many international bodies working directly with leaders who did not understand the needs of the average citizen. “There is so much corruption. So even if the IMF may be advocating for certain policy changes and some welfare packages, but these packages are not getting to the grassroots where it should get to because of the bottleneck, the bureaucracy, and just the plain corruption that is very dominant in Africa.”

He points to Nigeria’s ongoing security challenge as proof of this discrepancy. “Nigeria has been facing the issue of terrorism for a long time and we are part of the United Nations, they should be able to render aid to us but if it was other countries like the UK that has such issues, it would’ve been addressed for a long time. Terrorists cannot survive on the soil of the UK or the US but in Africa terrorists grow and thrive. Nothing is being done to tackle them.”

Compatriot Catherine agreed, calling attention to the #EndSars series of mass protests against police brutality in the country in late 2020. She was among a few Nigerians to accuse the international community of turning a blind eye to the use of lethal force on peaceful protestors, which led to the death of at least 12 people, according to Amnesty International.

“What happened in Nigeria on the 20th of October 2020 during the End SARS movement where so many lives were lost and people kept writing petitions to the UN and nothing was done, I believe that’s because it doesn’t affect them, they probably can’t intervene.”

Responding to his countrymen, Oluwole said there were limitations to what the UN Security Council could do and proposed a review of policies on when international institutions could intervene in times of crisis. He suggested that Africa could better leverage its natural resources to attain the status of a “global power and trade partner,” which would compel international partners to intervene to protect their interests.

Room for improvement: While most participants pointed to the shortcomings of global institutions, a few were willing to admit to the good work being done while identifying areas for improvement. The general sense was that the existing model for international development assistance was much too flawed.

“The World Bank and the IMF are actually doing their jobs, but I feel like the world is past just giving out these funds and relief materials,” said Travis from Ghana. “Maybe they could do better by not just releasing these funds to leaders. If they want to increase unemployment rates in Ghana for example, instead of just saying ‘we’ll give these funds to the government’ why not set up these industries for themselves?”

Abraham from Kenya said that the IMF had helped countries move through “many different challenging economic situations.” “The organisation is also continuing to evolve and adapt to the ever-changing world economy.”

“We shouldn't play down the role of the IMF and World Bank,” added Frank from Nigeria. “They've done a lot and that's commendable.”

Usman from Kenya was similarly upbeat, saying that while there were valid criticisms, the IMF and World Bank continued to play an important role in the global economy and in promoting financial stability. “However, there is also a need for ongoing reform and adaptation to ensure that they remain relevant and effective in the years to come.”

“I think it's very simple,” said James from Nigeria. “Have Africa at the table where the policies are being made and being negotiated.”

“To even discuss Africa, Africa has to be at the table. We have to get past that point where global North countries sit down and think about what could be necessary to Africa, what is relevant to Africa. We have to get past that. Africa has to be at this table. Africa has to be at the United Nations Security Council. Africa has to make their own contributions and tell them exactly what these problems are.”

What Needs To Change?

Along with support for global institutional reform, most participants wanted stronger policies to curtail the mismanagement of public funds at the national level.

“The World Bank and the IMF should find a way to interact directly with the grassroots because trusting the people in power to deliver these dividends directly to the people, it's not working,” said James from Nigeria.

“In as much as I don't want to downplay the role that the World Bank and IMF have played so far,” said Alexander from Ghana, “I feel that we can have new institutions or alternative approaches to address complex economic challenges that are facing the world today.”

The effectiveness of the institutions depends on their ability to adapt to the changing global economic conditions and the willingness of the member countries to support reforms to promote more inclusive and sustainable economic growth. I feel new institutions can be made and if they are willing to adapt to these changes, then it's going to be much better for the world as whole.

— Alexander, Ghana

He added that reforms needed to reflect the enormous changes to the global landscape since their establishment. “The effectiveness of the institutions depends on their ability to adapt to the changing global economic conditions and the willingness of the member countries to support reforms to promote more inclusive and sustainable economic growth. I feel new institutions can be made and if they are willing to adapt to these changes, then it's going to be much better for the world as whole.”

John from Ghana shared similar views: “I believe that there should be reforms because most of these organisations were

formed right before Africans started having a lot of say in the affairs of the world and they have been continuously run like that ever since.”

Who should represent Africa: Participants who wanted African representation to be strengthened on the world stage deemed the quality of representation to be just as important.

“The IMF are doing their work as it’s supposed to be but with the masses, it seems as if they’re not doing what they’re meant to do because the African leaders, I feel, when they get the funds from IMF, they will not do what they’re supposed to do,” said Paul from Nigeria.

Florence from South Africa agreed, proposing stricter laws to govern those funds on behalf of citizens. “For leaders that are going to be representing us on the international level, there should be some laws guiding them. They should be held accountable if they are not able to do anything for African countries when they get up there.”

Reiterating the notion that representatives didn’t always reflect the concerns of young people on the continent, Ghanaian John saw a disconnect between leaders and the grassroots. “Most Africans who represent us in these political organisations like the UN and G20, I really think these people don’t really know the problems facing Africa as a continent. I feel like most of them have lived their lives in the US and Europe and you’re making them representative over Africa. They don’t know anything; they don’t know our core basic problems.”

South African, Ricky, said the development financing model needed to evolve past the issuance of loans and aid packages. “I feel that the IMF and the World Bank are doing a good job, but I think it’s not just about doing the job well, but we have to monitor the changes. Most of the time countries get funds for some things but they end up not using it for that. It’s on the news, ‘your country has gotten so and so money for this’, and this is not happening. Apart from just the pain of the poor masses, it’s uncalled for.”

“Africa needs leaders who have a clear vision for the continent’s development and a long-term strategic approach to achieve it,” said George from Nigeria. “This includes setting goals and priorities, formulating and implementing evidence-based policies, and planning for sustainable and inclusive development that takes into account Africa’s unique context, challenges, and opportunities.”

Ghanaian, Nicki, concurred: “The problem of Africa is the leadership structure. You know, John Maxwell says that ‘everything rises and falls on leadership.’ Even if the IMF would channel all their funds to Africa, if the leadership structure is not reformed, I don’t think there will be much difference.”

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— Nicki, Ghana

Low Trust in Institutions, Both Local & International

Key takeaways

- 1** International Financial Institutions (IFIs) turn a blind eye to the mismanagement of funds in Africa.
- 2** Africa needs intermediary institutions to ensure proper use of development funds.
- 3** Power should be decentralised to open governance to wider public participation through intra-continental organisations of multiple stakeholders.

Though participants were starkly aware of the connected crises facing the world today and the calls for reform to tackle what's being termed a 'polycrisis,' they were pessimistic about their governments' ability to make good on these changes. Even the most cynical respondents, who saw global institutions as a destructive force in Africa, trusted their national governments even less.

"The inequality there is that the UN has decided to turn a blind eye to what the few individuals called politicians are using the money they're lending them for," said Daniel J from Nigeria, arguing that aid funds and materials were often issued to African governments without follow-through.

Session after session, participants' lack of trust in global institutions was reiterated. For some, the despondency was palpable: "We have taken so much debt here in Nigeria," said Jessica. "We are unable to pay. Our future generations will inherit this debt." She accused IFIs of creating indebtedness by issuing loans to countries that did not have the resources to pay them back.

"Presently in Nigeria there are a lot of resources that have been stolen by the Western world. Why do you still have our resources and still borrow us money? You could just make an exchange for our resources for the loan we have taken, but instead, you have the resources you steal from us, and we still pay these loans with interest. So, what grounds do we have here, when slowly we have gotten into slave trade but in a modernised way?"

On the issue of sovereignty: While most participants argued for more stringent measures

to be put in place to avoid excessive borrowing, theft and mismanagement, some vehemently disagreed. Kenyan Charles said despite malfeasance being too common, no lender could be expected to concern themselves with the administration of funds once issued.

“You can’t expect the IMF or the World Bank to say, ‘okay, because African leaders in general are corrupt, we cannot lend money to them.”

“African countries do not have enough resources to be independent, so they have to borrow for infrastructure, roads, construction and the rest,” he continued. “They need the money, so you can’t say they should not borrow. The problem is, ‘okay, you’ve borrowed. What are you using this money for?”

Responding directly to Charles, Daniel from Kenya said it was entirely unfair to pin the issue on African leaders as they were navigating unjust systems where the terms of lending were often different for African countries. He made an example of an unnamed infrastructure project gone array: “If you look at the terms they negotiated with Nigeria; it has to be their own train, they have to have their people to construct the railways and everything. You can’t loan people money, and then put in all those terms when negotiating with them. They won’t negotiate that way with a country like Russia. When negotiating with Nigerians, you put a lot of terms that you won’t put for all the European countries.”

A government borrows 800 billion dollars to build railways, and at the end there's no railway and what is the IMF doing? The government goes out of office, the next one comes and then demands another 500 million dollars for a railway, the same railway that was supposed to have been built by the previous administration.

— James, Nigeria

Ghanian Thomas said some African leaders were not assertive negotiators as well as corrupt, consequently, their countries were “taken for granted.”

“When it comes to inequalities, I think it’s not actually from the United Nations. It’s not from World Bank. It’s not from IMF. It’s actually from African leaders to be sincere. Most times, these leaders collect these funds, this huge amount of money, but they don’t actually use it for the right purpose.”

James from Nigeria said it was “embarrassing” that lenders continued to hand over loans without proper follow-up, allowing countries to “shamelessly” demand funds in times of crisis and mismanage them while accumulating debt. “In the end, this money is not being used for the purposes they were obtained for. So, a government borrows 800 billion dollars to build railways, and at the end there's no railway and what is the IMF doing? The government goes out of office, the next one comes and then demands another 500 million dollars for a railway, the same railway that was supposed to have been built by the previous administration.”

Corruption, debt and development: To curb excessive debt and improve the fulfilment of developments funds, participants were split between those wanting less restrictions on their national governments and those wanting more. “On one hand, the IMF and the World Bank are at fault because they don’t have transparency policies and follow up plans and all of that. And then, of course, there’s this corruption issue in Africa. So, it’s difficult. The problem is on two levels,” said James from Nigeria.

Alexander from Ghana said unfair conditions placed on loans and aid packages were harmful to developing countries. “For example, they may require privatisation of key industries or austerity measures that can hurt the poor.”

“The World Bank is doing what it’s supposed to do,” offered Kevin from Nigeria. “But there are some governments that are exploiting it, using the fact that they’re a poorer nation to get loans.”

“They don’t actually use this cash for its intended purpose, they siphon this money to their personal accounts, at the end of the day, when their tenure is done, they go back home with lots of cash that was supposed to be for the purpose of helping the country. We have countries that are in a lot of debt and we’re not even sure how it happened.”

Supporting Kevin’s statements, Ghanaian John accused lenders of perpetuating corruption “by financing the elites and their family members who siphon monetary funds.”

Offering a more moderate perspective was Frankline, a Ghanaian, who said that when grants are put to good use, the system works while also laying the blame for “gross misappropriation of funds coming down to Africa” at the feet of its leaders.

“Contrary to popular belief by some Africans that the IMF actually makes monetary policies to impoverish Africa, that is a lie. I’ve done due diligence, I’ve made my research and I’ve noticed that most world leaders are actually being given what they fit because most countries in Africa are being ranked as underdeveloped or developing countries and they are being given stipends, they are being given loans by world bodies like the IMF and World Bank. But I still maintain, most of our African leaders are selfish and they are self-centred. They take these funds, embezzle them and they do not develop Africa.”

What Needs To Change?

As for what could be done to correct the dire situation depicted by participants, most proposed middlemen institutions as a solution. They imagined these intermediary bodies as representing the interests of both external bodies and citizens.

“We should have strong watchdog institutions,” said James from Nigeria. “If there is IMF allocation to a country like Ghana, 800 million dollars, then there has to be strong watchdog institutions to make sure that there is accountability for these funds to the last dollar, and they take these reports back to the IMF and then back to the Ghanaian people.”

“If we have proper monitoring systems, and the IMF becomes very clear about the issue of accountability, I believe you can really get things done because politicians will know that there are many eyes watching them.”

Jessica from Nigeria suggested an ‘accountability panel’ to oversee the fair distribution of funds released to African governments. “I’m not against the lending business, or the fact that we are being helped through loans. But we have resources in Africa. We do not need some of the loans we take, because if there were structures in African countries to manage our resources, we are even better than most European countries. The UN knows this.”

Another Nigerian, Philomena agreed: “I feel that if there was a panel at all to put some measures, some criteria before loans are being given out to African countries, to be precise, yes. I think that it would go a lot to it, helping to see that the loans are being put to good use.”

Misattribution of responsibility: Pushing back against his peers, Charles from Kenya said that no global institution had a right to establish such a body. “African countries are independent. Which European country has a right to set up a panel to investigate? For Christ's sake, it's just because we don't know our rights, they don't have such power. I come to borrow from you, whatever I do with my money is not your business. At the end you are to pay me back.”

“I feel if you're using the money for the purpose it's meant to be used, paying back won't be a problem, because when you invest you definitely make profits, and you'll pay back, paying back won't be a problem, and it will even motivate them to give you more. But when you borrow the money, and you use it for something personal or whatever you think is beneficial to you and then you come and say the IMF, or the World Bank are not doing their job.”

South African Florence agreed with his earlier points, adding that it would be hypocritical for international bodies to demand transparency from African governments when there was insufficient accountability for the extractive practices done in Africa. “The security of Africa is more threatened by the Western world than it is by ourselves because there is no law whatsoever to hold any of them accountable.”

She suggested intra-continental unity as a better system for regulation. “African nations need to stand up for themselves. Africa is not even one as it stands. Everyone is just concerned about their country and what they're going through. The European world has unions to protect themselves and that's why they are invincible to the African world.”

Oliver from Nigeria was similarly torn at the suggestion of external institutions that would hold African governments to account as it would involve them having a say on how national resources are managed. “I think there's need for Africans to actually be in charge of managing their resources, at the end of the day, there's double standards. Most Africans we know our leaders are greedy at the same time I see no need for a foreign country who has no diamonds, per se, as an example, being in charge of the control of diamonds. When it comes to accountability, it goes both ways.”

Diverse units of power: As focus group sessions progressed, it became clear that what most young Africans wanted was the distribution of power to as many representative bodies as possible to avoid corruption and mismanagement.

Kenyan Charles said there was need for organisations comprised of “people with integrity, people that have their country and people at heart.” Nigerian Jessica called for the inclusion of “young minds, new people, not same old story.” Her countryman Joseph felt that regional bodies such as ECOWAS in West Africa could play a bigger role in continental and global politics.

Scott, a Kenyan, concurred: “If you look at the international community you can see that African youth are doing very well for themselves. If you look at the African Development Bank, you will see that it is a young Nigerian that is the managing director of the African Development Bank. African youth are striving to be the best version of themselves, and African governments are not giving them the opportunity to express themselves.”

As well as increased visibility of youth, Nigerian Hans said there was a need for institutions comprised of independent contributors who didn't need to “toe the line” out of personal interest. “There has to be what I call selective leadership where we're sending people that will be representing, whether it's a career person, or someone that is granted in that field or endeavour,

who will be able to agitate for Africa. You know, when you send somebody that cannot speak for you to represent you in an organisation whereas other powers have sent a good representative, they might oppress the other person. The only thing they will be saying is, 'yes, yes, I concur.'

James from Nigeria argued for decentralised power structures in particular: "There is so much concentration of power at the centre. It still looks, you know, back to this issue of getting down to the grassroots. There is so much concentration of power at the centre. Speaking from Nigeria, our country is basically, it's almost like a monarchy, because there's so much power at the centre. If we can decentralise the power at the same time and have strong regional governments, I believe you would really get things done, because this current system is not working."

"I think that's what the United Nations and strong democracies should be advocating for. If we can have stronger regional powers and a largely decentralised government, I believe we can really get things done."

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— James, Nigeria

Alexander from Ghana said while Africa envisioned its own continental governance structures, global bodies could play their part by addressing existing inequalities through reforms such as "increasing voting power for developing countries, diversifying leadership and representation, providing more resources to developing countries, and rethinking conditionality requirements."



The Reforms Young Africans Want

Key takeaways

- 1** International Financial Institutions (IFIs) should consult with local communities where their policies are supposed to act.
- 2** Young Africans want national, regional and global governance reform as there's a disconnect between them and current systems.
- 3** Young Africans are majorly in support of Africa having a permanent seat at the UN Security Council.

With their lack of trust in national and international governance structures apparent, participants were asked to share ideas for African development agendas to be presented at a gathering of world decision-making and financial powers.

James from Nigeria said he would implore the heads of IFIs to consult more with local communities. "The issue is always at the grassroots, because at the grassroots, people know where it is pinching them. People know where the problem is. You'd be surprised, people even know at the grassroots what the solutions to certain policies, to certain problems are. The people at the centre are not listening because they're not close to the people. That's the problem. So, we see that in the IMF, we see that in the World Bank, there is a disconnect between the centre and the actual grassroots where the policies are supposed to act."

His compatriot Frank said he would address one of the most urgent challenges facing young people in Nigeria; access to quality education. "Nigeria has one of the largest populations of out-of-school children in the world, with over 10 million children out of school. Even for those who do attend school, the quality of education is often poor, and many young people lack the necessary skills to succeed in the workforce."

Fellow Nigerian Malcolm set his sights on access to basic services: "I think my agenda envisions a secure world free of poverty and hunger, with full and productive employment, access to quality education and universal health coverage, the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and an end to environmental degradation."

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— James, Nigeria

Meanwhile youth in Ghana faced challenges such as unemployment, lack of access to quality education and health burdens including HIV/AIDS, malaria and other communicable diseases, according to Alexander. For solutions he proposed engaging multiple stakeholders.

“The private sector can create jobs and economic opportunities for young people through investment in key sectors such as agriculture, technology, and manufacturing. Civil society organisations can advocate for the rights and needs of young people and provide support and services to address challenges such as health and education. International organisations and development partners can support initiatives to address youth challenges in Ghana, including providing funding, technical assistance, and other forms of support.”

Reforming the past: Some participants had more retrospective agendas focused on addressing the injustices of the past and their continuances. “If I were to represent my country Ghana in a parliament in the EU, I would actually advocate for more Africans to be put in positions that would actually necessitate the decision-making that is done in Africa,” said John from Ghana.

“Most of the exports going out of the country, most of the exploitation that is being done in Africa is because most of the time there has been a systemic way of exploiting Africa that has been since, should I say, the Berlin Conference, where they actually divided the whole of Africa to all the colonial masters. The system is still on, just now, they actually do it in a more modernised way, they actually give you loans that are stiff and you have to pay through your nose,” he said.

Ernest from Nigeria said he'd tackle poverty and “the inequalities of power” caused by the “weak political voices of the poor masses who are excluded from major areas of decision making.”

Samuel from Kenya said he would advocate for Africa-led institutions to help harness natural resources for development. “We should limit import and export more [...] Africa needs reforms; financial reform, political stability.”

Mark from South Africa said healthcare provision would be his top priority. “People in my country die en masse due to the poor healthcare system while public holders travel abroad to go and get treatment. The bedrock of this all is corruption. There should be a new constitution put in place to put a hold to this.”

As a representative of Kenya, Elijah would push for policy changes at the EU level to help reduce inequality. “This might

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— John, Ghana

Those G20 countries, those are basically the world powers. If Africa was to be represented, or even an African country is among the world powers, there would be some kind of fairness, some kind of respect for Africans.

— Adam, Nigeria

include pushing for more funding for development aid programs, advocating for trade policies that are fairer to African countries, or supporting policies that promote more equitable distribution of wealth and resources.”

Adam from Nigeria said he'd also implore EU leaders to review their policies, “because I feel when these policies and laws were written, most African countries were not independent by then. Those laws don't really favour Africans.”

“Those G20 countries, those are basically the world powers. If Africa was to be represented, or even an African country is among the world powers, there would be some kind of fairness, some kind of respect for Africans.”

Recognising the progress made: Some participants were keen to acknowledge the efforts already made towards inclusivity. “In recent years, the G20 has taken steps to engage more with African countries,” said Williams from Nigeria. “For example, in 2017, the G20 launched the Compact with Africa (CwA) initiative, which aims to promote private investment in African countries. Under the initiative, African countries are invited to present reform programs to the G20, and in return, they receive technical support and assistance with attracting private investment.”

While the G20 did not have any formal African representation, he said, their engagement had increased in recent years.

Similarly, Frankline from Ghana celebrated organisations such as the IMF that were actively working to be more inclusive, “even though when they started, Africans were not really in the equation.” “Some major organisations in the world like the World Trade Organisation is being overhauled by a Nigerian woman in the moment, so I feel like there's more inclusion.”

Despite notable progress, many felt that the issue of representation at global institutions would still need to be improved. “You have to tackle membership of organisations,” said Nigerian Hans. “You will see that the Member States, the world powers, the Westerners, they have more members than Africans, then from that angle there will be issues of inequality.”

“Africa should be represented not just in one, but all of them because these are issues concerning the world, concerning the structure of the world. Why then should we be left out?” concurred fellow Nigerian Jayden.

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— Jayden, Nigeria

UN Security Council: Nigerian participants, in particular, were invested in African representation at the UN Security Council due to the prevailing security challenges on the continent and their country.

“The UN Security Council is one of the most powerful bodies in the world, responsible for maintaining international peace and security,” said Alfred from Nigeria, noting that there were five permanent members — China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—and ten non-permanent members, elected for two-year terms. “Africa is represented

Strengthening African representation in the Security Council could help ensure that African perspectives and concerns are better considered in decision-making processes related to global peace and security, particularly given the significant impact of conflicts and crises on the African continent.

— Solomon, Nigeria

by three non-permanent members, which rotate among the African countries. However, some argue that Africa should have a permanent seat on the Security Council, given its significant role in maintaining peace and security on the continent and globally.”

His compatriot Solomon was fully in support: “Strengthening African representation in the Security Council could help ensure that African perspectives and concerns are better considered in decision-making processes related to global peace and security, particularly given the significant impact of conflicts and crises on the African continent.”

“The institution I want Africa to be strengthened in is on the G20 and the UN Security Council,” concurred Adam, also a Nigerian, “the major issue facing Africa is security. For our security to be good we need allies. Allies like the UN Security Council will really help Africa.”

“It’s an insult that we don’t have proper representation at the UN level. If we are not that important, you won’t see everyone trying to canvass for African support [...] We as Africans, we need to know our worth, first of all. When you know the worth of something you can place value on it,” he said.

“This current United Nations Security Council has to be reformed,” added James from Nigeria. “There has to be reform because it’s not working. It may have worked, we have to tailor it to the current needs of this century, not what has been working in the past. Now we’re looking at the 21st century, this is 2023. We have different problems, different challenges now, and the Security Council must reflect that. If we are sitting down to debate issues about Africa, we must have Africa at the table.”

What Needs To Change?

Included in their mock agendas were participants’ ideas for reforms to the current global establishment. Ghanaian Alexander called for policies to address trade inequalities and help African countries gain better access to European markets, “this could involve advocating for the removal of trade barriers and promoting fair trade agreements that benefit both Europe and Africa.”

George from Nigeria concurred: “The EU could promote fair trade and investment policies with African countries to foster economic integration and create mutually beneficial partnerships.” He proposed supporting African countries in accessing European markets and “promoting responsible investment practices and fostering entrepreneurship and innovation.”

“I would ask the members of the EU, if I am representing Africa, to encourage private sector investment,” said David from Ghana. “Private sector investment can play an important role in reducing inequality, as it can create jobs and spur economic growth. As a representative of Africa, I could work with EU business leaders to encourage more private sector investment in African countries, particularly in sectors that are likely to create jobs and promote economic development.”

Meanwhile Frank from Nigeria focused his interventions on education and skills development. “Education is critical to improving the economic and social prospects of individuals and communities. The EU could help Africa by supporting programs that improve access to quality education, vocational training, and skill development.”

Wart, from Ghana, wanted more emphasis on addressing Africa’s security challenges so that young Africans could focus on the continent’s development. “I encourage the EU and the IMF to ensure that the security of some of these African nations is being strengthened, as well as social justice. We understand that the problem of most of these African nations is not that they are poor, they actually have these resources.”

“Anyone in the EU should approach its relationship with Africa with a long-term perspective focused on building sustainable partnerships that promote economic growth, social development, and environmental sustainability,” said Alfred from Nigeria

Partnership networks: Whether on issues of governance, finance or development, most participants saw partnerships as offering the best solutions.

Ghanaian David said public-private partnerships (PPPs) were an effective way to leverage private sector resources and expertise to address development challenges. “Public Private Partnerships could be used to develop infrastructure, promote entrepreneurship, and address issues like health and education.”

His compatriot Jackson proposed “African Economic Areas” that would “tie the economic interests of leading and lagging countries in each regional neighbourhood tightly, allowing and maintaining the free movement of labour, capital, goods, and maintaining and protecting access routes between land-locked countries and outlets for trade.”

Kenyan, Scott, agreed: “Africa needs a representative in the international community because Africa needs someone to put our voices there to be heard. Africa also needs to form its own organisations to function because there is no cooperation in Africa.”

South African Mark called for the formation of infrastructure development banks to address the continent’s infrastructure gap. “The lack of adequate infrastructure is a major impediment to economic development in Africa. Infrastructure development banks could be established to provide financing and technical support for infrastructure projects.”

Inclusive governance structures: Whatever partnerships they proposed, participants wanted their respective governance structures to represent the realities, concerns and perspectives of the widest range of Africans.

Jayden from Nigeria said the political nature of Africa, which tended to exclude youth and

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— David, Ghana

women, needed to be addressed. “It’s more that the older people get their share, and they keep recycling themselves, from presidency, to senator, to maybe another position but it must be in politics. In Nigeria you’ll notice, there’s never been a female president or a vice president but if you look at other Western countries, you’ll notice that they have these leaders, and it shows inclusive politics [...] the political structure needs to be changed in this current century.”

Thomas from Nigeria also pointed to the issue of “recycling of leaders,” which he saw as one of the great impediments to development.

“Africa needs to change. Africa needs to reform itself before we start talking about international monetary funds. Before you start talking about an outsider coming into your home, you have to reform your home first.”

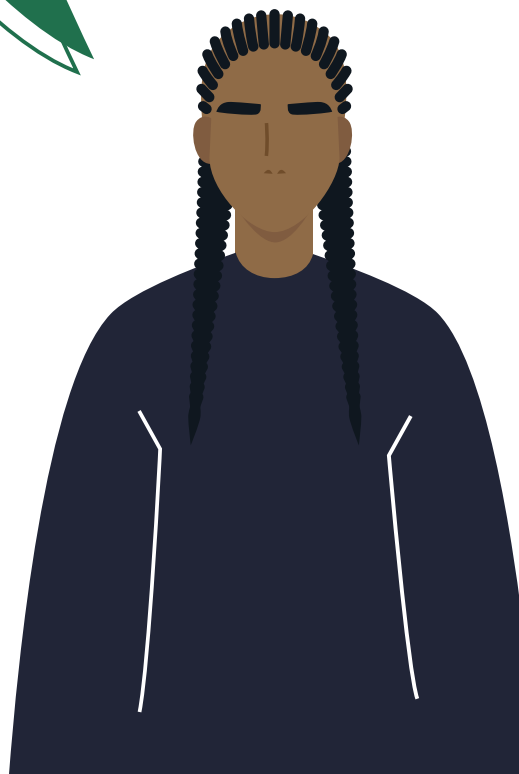
“The most important reform I could see that would be very effective would be an absolute leadership reform as this is the key problem in Africa,” echoed Thomas from Nigeria. “There should be a lot of reforms and inclusion should be made in governance.”

Africa needs to change. Africa needs to reform itself before we start talking about international monetary funds. Before you start talking about an outsider coming into your home, you have to reform your home first.

— Thomas, Nigeria

“This (Nigeria) is a country that has been plagued with gross mismanagement of funds, complete and utter disregard of the rule of law by its so-called leaders. We see people coming to campaign for elections, they campaign, and they campaign and promise you heaven on earth, they make you feel like they have your best interest at heart. Then when they are elected to office, there is utter disregard for the electorate.”

His compatriot George agreed: “Africa needs leaders who are committed to good governance, transparency, and accountability. This includes promoting the rule of law, upholding human rights, combating corruption, and ensuring that public resources are managed responsibly and used to benefit all citizens. Strong institutions, independent judiciary, and effective public administration are essential for building trust and confidence in leadership.”



Reimagining the Role of Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs)

Key takeaways

- 1** MDBs should play a more significant role in Africa's development and increase funding for sustainable development projects.
- 2** MDBs should prioritise debt relief and reduce interests on loans.
- 3** MDBs should play a more proactive role in ensuring loans are used for their intended purpose and improve the lives of citizens.
- 4** MDBs could promote greater engagement with the private sector, civil society groups and other non-state actors.

In their critical assessment of various governance structures, participants were asked to home in on the role of Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) who are uniquely positioned to address the challenges the world faces today. The G20, the international development community, and civil society organisations have called for MDBs to improve their fiscal impact and increase their concessionary funding in response to the adverse impacts of climate change, COVID-19 pandemic, and geopolitical conflicts such as the war in Ukraine.

Participants were largely in agreement that MDBs could play a more significant role in the global recovery, pointing to flaws that leave the plight of citizens unaddressed. Though they had ideas for reforms on the supply side, their main priorities were the perceived flaws on the demand side, which saw poor countries on the short end of their lending practices.

"These global banking systems, we've noticed that over the years they are used to giving out loans to African countries, which, for me, isn't really so great," said Wills from Kenya. "You find African leaders squandering the money, using it for their own personal benefit instead of saving it to serve the cause for which it was collected."

Debt can be a significant barrier to economic growth and development in African countries. Providing debt relief to African countries can help to reduce the burden of debt and free up resources for investment in education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

— Jude, Nigeria

Fellow Kenyan, Daniel, agreed, accusing MDBs of actively colluding with corrupt leaders. “I would say they team up with the African leaders and aid and abet them with still being corrupt and still keeping Africans in poverty.”

“Most African leaders are actually the kings of mismanagement of funds,” said Oluwole from Nigeria. “If there is a policy that states that every fund that is taken as a loan by a leader should be accounted for, the ways or the means of the funds being spent in the country should be put in a legit paper that actually shows there is honesty in managing the funds. The World Bank should put up a policy whereby all funds spent, or taken as a loan, should be accounted for.”

Jessica from Nigeria said it was ‘questionable’ that more effort wasn’t put into helping African countries curb the mismanagement of their resources. “It’s still very questionable, because it feels like they have an interest in African countries not growing because it benefits them more if we are down. They would suffer more if we decide to manage our resources, and that is just the truth.”

Kenyan Charles pointed to other perceived flaws in the international financing mechanism. “In my country, we are owing China, I don’t know how much [...] We didn’t get the loan, our leaders did. Most of the money they borrowed they put into the train sector, the transport, and bandits everyday they are destroying the trains, causing commotion. We’ve not paid. We’ve not been able to utilise the funds.”

Rather than loans, he proposed bilateral agreements between richer countries and developing nations on infrastructure projects.

Mismanagement and lack of transparency: Participants were scathing in their depiction of “archaic leaders” whose economic policies were outdated and self-interested. Nicki from Ghana said many were “very much far away from the current trends,” and asked for monitoring policies to ensure that funds issued by MDBs were used for their intended purpose.

“When money is being sent for a particular thing, there should be policies in place to ensure that what was being said is actualized, that the voices of the citizens of this nation is heard.”

“African countries have problems managing their funds,” said Ashley from Kenya, “in order to limit the wastage of money and resources banks should limit the amount of money being given to different sectors of the country [...] it will greatly help in management of resources.”

“Making the information and the data readily available for public assessment is one of the ways we can promote transparency and accountability,” said Alfred from Nigeria, emphasising that adequate management of funds would result in more capital for Africa’s development.

“If funding for renewable energy projects is provided, funding for agricultural practices is provided, funding to conserve the environmental structures are also provided, I feel it will go a long way to improve the state of African countries.”

Debt relief and spending: For many participants, rising government debt was a real concern. To address this, they wanted MDBs to prioritise debt relief. “Debt can be a significant barrier to economic growth and development in African countries. Providing debt relief to African

countries can help to reduce the burden of debt and free up resources for investment in education, healthcare, and infrastructure,” said Jude from Nigeria.

Compatriot Jones said public debt was exacerbated by high interest rates that made it difficult for African countries to repay, positing that this was done on purpose to secure collateral upon default on payments. In fact, he wanted government lending to be reduced as a matter of policy. “Our constitution should be amended in such a way that, as a sitting president, you don't have the ability or the right to go to any country and borrow any money without proper analysis of what you want to use the money for.”

If Africans who really understand the problems of Africa are represented in this institution, Bretton Woods, the issue of mismanagement of funds will be handled because policies will be created to check mate that.

— Idorenyin, Kenya

“If our natural resources cannot take care of the country in terms of finances, then they should reduce the cost of running the country instead of borrowing money.”

“If I had the power to change anything I would make provisions for free access to loan taking and reduction of interest,” said Hans from Nigeria. “I would prefer MDBs make provision for giving financial support to developing countries with a reduction of interest in these loans.”

Adding to this, Gold from Kenya said a central body was needed to standardise the terms of lending for African countries as a whole. “Instead of working in isolation, they can challenge the interest rates on loans issued to Africa,” he said, further criticising ‘siloes’ lending and older politicians’ lack of creative thinking around the economy.

What Needs To Change?

While participants criticised their governments’ rampant borrowing, which didn’t always align with the interests of citizens, they did want MDBs to increase funding in certain instances.

Solomon from Nigeria said to address the vast development needs of the continent, MDBs needed to raise capital or leverage resources to provide more concessional loans, grants, and technical assistance to African countries. “MDBs could also explore innovative financing mechanisms such as blended finance, public-private partnerships, and impact investing to mobilise additional resources for African development.”

He proposed for MDBs to prioritise critical sectors such as infrastructure, agriculture, health, education, and renewable energy. “This could involve providing targeted financing and technical support to enhance the capacity of African countries in these sectors, promoting inclusive and sustainable growth, and fostering job creation.”

Compatriot George said MDBs could mobilise “more concessional financing, grants and technical assistance to address the diverse needs of African countries like Nigeria, Ghana and others.”

MDBs could facilitate private sector engagement in Africa's development by providing financing, technical assistance, and risk mitigation tools to attract investments and promote entrepreneurship. This could include supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, promoting innovative business models, and creating an enabling environment for private sector growth, including regulatory reforms, policy dialogue, and business climate improvements.

— Hans, Nigerian

He suggested innovative financing mechanisms, including partnerships between governments and the private sector, towards a more coherent development effort.

Cooperation, skills and development:

Participants across various sessions echoed George's sentiments about the need for increased cooperation between multiple stakeholders and MDBs.

Another Nigerian, Hans, said: "MDBs could facilitate private sector engagement in Africa's development by providing financing, technical assistance, and risk mitigation tools to attract investments and promote entrepreneurship. This could include supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, promoting innovative business models, and creating an enabling environment for private sector growth, including regulatory reforms, policy dialogue, and business climate improvements."

"Multilateral development banks should collaborate more closely with other actors in the development ecosystem, such as governments, civil society groups, and the private sector," added compatriot Jude. "This could help ensure that their lending practices are aligned with the priorities of African countries, and that they are working towards common goals."

"MDBs should aim to increase African representation in their decision-making bodies to ensure that the continent's concerns and priorities are adequately addressed," he continued. "This could involve increasing the number of African staff and board members, as well as promoting greater engagement with civil society groups and other stakeholders."

Agreeing with his peers, Frank from Nigeria proposed that MDBs "strengthen partnerships with African governments to better understand their development needs and priorities, and to ensure that development projects are aligned with national development plans."

Infrastructure and sustainable financing: In terms of priorities for funding, participants were largely in support of resources being directed towards infrastructure and climate mitigation and adaptation projects. They saw continental integration, especially, as the quickest path to sustainable economic growth and job creation and wanted MDBs to prioritise projects that connect African countries.

"Many of Africa's development challenges are quite interconnected, and most African countries have the same issues, especially when looking at the different regions in Africa," said Alfred from Nigeria. "The Multilateral Development Banks could play a role in

MDBs should invest in capacity building and knowledge sharing to help African countries develop the skills and expertise needed to promote sustainable development. This could include support for education, training, and knowledge sharing platforms

— Amkey, Fellow countryman

doing this by providing funding for projects that promote cross border infrastructures and trade.”

Fellow countryman Amkey said in the short-term, the focus should be on sustainable infrastructure such as renewable energy, green mobility, and telecommunications, “this will help to promote economic growth, create jobs, and reduce poverty.”

“MDBs should invest in capacity building and knowledge sharing to help African countries develop the skills and expertise needed to promote sustainable development. This could include support for education, training, and knowledge sharing platforms,” he added.

Roland from South Africa wanted MDBs to advance a series of energy transition financing packages “developed and led by key emerging economies, financed by MDBs and private actors.”

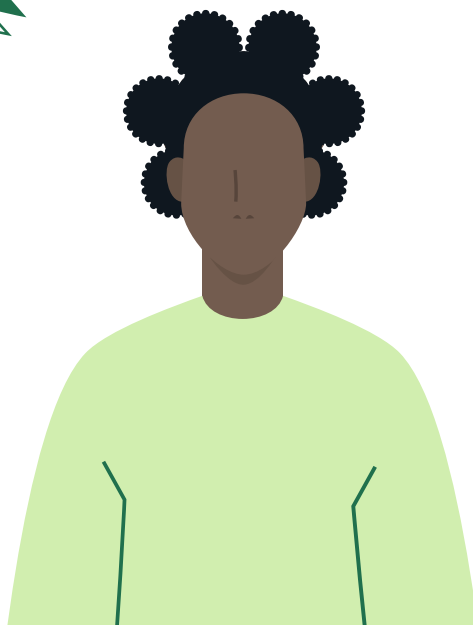
He was supported by Jude from Nigeria, who said: “MDBs should prioritise sustainable development in their lending practices, including climate change mitigation and adaptation, renewable energy, and conservation. This could help address some of the key environmental challenges facing the continent, such as deforestation, desertification, and water scarcity.”

Compatriot Williams had concrete ideas about how to tackle the issue of debt: “MDBs should adopt more flexible lending practices that take into account the unique challenges facing African countries. For example, they could offer more concessional loans with longer repayment periods or provide technical assistance to help countries build the capacity to implement reforms.”

He said MDBs should also explore innovative financing mechanisms to help attract private sector investment to Africa. “This could include blended finance models, which combine public and private sector funding, or green bonds, which fund environmentally sustainable projects.”

MDBs should adopt more flexible lending practices that take into account the unique challenges facing African countries. For example, they could offer more concessional loans with longer repayment periods or provide technical assistance to help countries build the capacity to implement reforms.

— Williams, Nigeria



Conclusions



There is widespread agreement that the old economic and governance order is due for reforms in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate crisis and Ukraine war, which have seen countries report significant increases in the prices of food, housing and fuel. Young people, who are among the most impacted, have been vocal about what needs change to meet the demands of the changing world.

European citizens who spoke to Debating Europe for [100 European Voices: Young People Debate Europe's Recovery Plan](#), lauded the European Commission's series of plans to transform the continent's economy but worried that a recovery plan that comes from the central organ of the European Union could exclude marginalised voices. One respondent, Michael from Belgium, called for debates about Europe's plans for the longer-term future to no longer be "between politicians or professors only but one that everyone can participate in". Teresa from Portugal called for "non-traditional stakeholders" to be included in the debate, particularly regional representatives rather than just national and EU officials.

In another focus group study on [young people's views on the international economic order](#), the citizen engagement platform spoke to diverse youth from all over the world, hoping to understand their view of the world's economy and how to address its flaws. The participants – originating from 14 different countries spread over four continents – perceived the status quo as unjust, with many invoking the growing gap between rich and poor. Habib from Palestine, summing up the common perspective in his group, said: "There is no middle class in many countries. Either you are very poor, or you are very rich. There is nothing in between." German Cornelia added that "the world's problems are shared with everyone, the profits aren't." The power imbalance was further highlighted by Avishek from Iran, who said the system was "completely unfair because the US and Europe hold all the financial power," since global financial markets are operating in dollars and euros. Ecuadorian Hugo complained that the current system's "conditions are set by some countries and all the other countries have to comply," as Aisha from Kazakhstan concluded: "Every economic system is based on the outcome of exploitation. That's why wealth is not distributed equally."

Similar to these discussions with youth from around the world, young Africans are frustrated with prevailing systems that perpetuate inequality, debt and the exclusion of many in decision-making. They felt that while some institutions had played a crucial role in promoting economic growth and development around the world, their structural composition remained biased towards developed countries. They joined their peers in Europe and elsewhere in calling for new approaches to respond to the challenges faced by those on the poorer end of such disparities.

Participants lamented the lack of adequate African representation at international governing bodies such as the UN Security Council, resulting in what they perceived as an unequal distribution of influence and resources. As the world's youngest and fastest-urbanising continent, whose population growth will impact geopolitics, global trade and mobility, they wanted to see Africa's growing value to the world reflected in decision-making. While they advocated for more representation, they wanted it to include the voices of citizens, civil society and the private sector and to involve robust accountability mechanisms.

Participants proposed stringent measures to safeguard aid and development funds and to ensure communities benefitted from projects through proper consultation with grassroots organisations. They were largely in support of expanding the UN Security Council to include permanent representation for Africa and wanted representatives to have a deep understanding of the lived realities of Africans. They advocated for regional coordination and strong intra-African partnerships to act on behalf of the continent from a place of power.

While participants conveyed a lack of trust in current systems, they believed in their intended purpose, proposing a replacement of outdated practices with the inclusive and new. They were largely in agreement that MDBs could play a more significant role in Africa's development if they could ensure transparency and accountability, reduce Africa's debt burden and free up resources for sustainable projects. They called for development plans for Africa to be long-term, strategic, sustainable and involving multiple stakeholders.



About the Africa-Europe Foundation



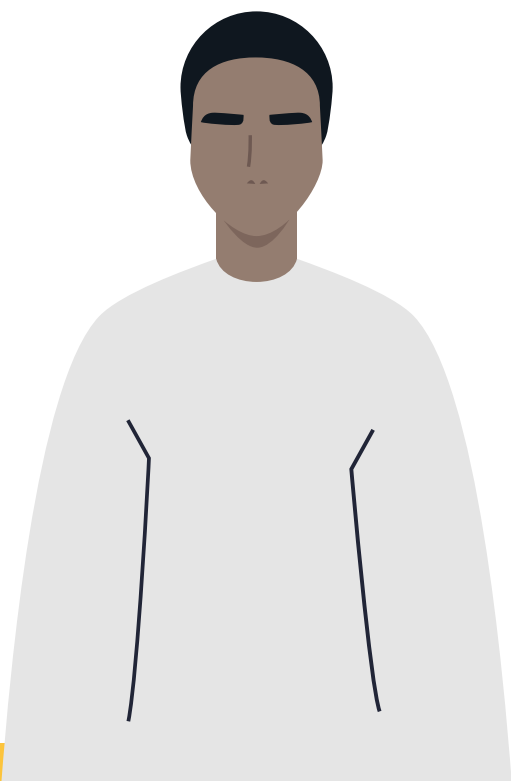
The purpose of the [Africa-Europe Foundation](#) is to facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue, catalyse partnerships and unlock new opportunities that can transform Africa-Europe relations into action.

Africa and Europe are two continents historically bound together by geographical neighbourhood and by shared cultural and linguistic ties. This constitutes key building blocks for a fresh and modern partnership in the face of existential global challenges. Our two continents can work together, collaborate in mutually beneficial ways, and “invest in the next generation” as the foundation for a prosperous and sustainable future.

The Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) is a network of citizens and leaders from all walks of life across both continents, united by a passionate belief in this vision, and a commitment to work towards it. Together we have spent the last year in dialogue exploring the challenges and opportunities we face. Our exchanges, together with the #reimagineAfricaEurope global consultation, have exposed a growing appetite for a deeper partnership between the peoples of Africa and Europe; a partnership that includes civil society, cities and local authorities, the private sector and, in priority, young people. Against this background, the forthcoming AU-EU Summit represents a significant milestone in which to break new ground towards our shared future.

We believe that each continent brings unique strengths and resources to this partnership, and we can choose to use these strengths to build shared prosperity and stability based on common values. By the middle of this century, our two continents will comprise an even more significant proportion of the world's population. Together we can become a powerful unifying global player; geopolitically and economically, counter-acting polarising forces, and fighting for our core values of inclusivity, equality of opportunity and justice.

To succeed we must acknowledge the prevailing power dynamics and inequalities of where we stand, build a strategic vision for where we want to go, and commit to take the necessary steps together, to make sure that commitments made are implemented.





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