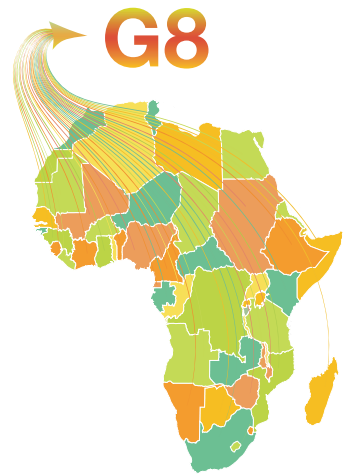


# Africa after the Africa Commission:

What priorities for the German G8?



## Opinion

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## Voice in international institutions

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‘Membership of the G8 is too narrow to deal with the broad range of issues facing an increasingly interdependent world.’

These Opinions have been written for a high level policy forum bringing together senior DFID and NGO staff, MPs, private sector representatives, Africanists, development academics, and key journalists for discussion on the future of Africa in the run-up to the G8 meeting in Germany (6-8 June). The Forum was held on May 2nd, 2007 in London.

The international institutions established after the Second World War were created to govern a world which is radically different to the one that we live in now. Not only has the international distribution of power shifted, but the world has become significantly more interdependent. The most powerful global institutions do not provide adequate voice for low income countries, but it is the economies and politics of these countries that are often most affected by the policies of such institutions. And while events in even the least powerful of nations can impact on the most powerful, unless the global institutions are able to reflect the needs and desires of all of the world's people, they will lack the power to deal effectively with a wide range of issues. As the 2007 G8 meeting approaches, one key question is what can the world's largest economies offer to rectify the power imbalance, particularly for Africa?

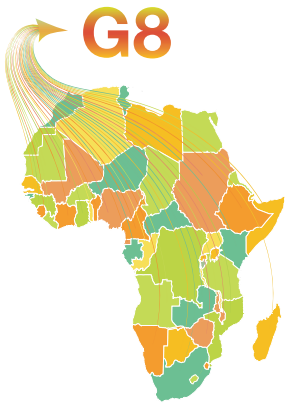
There are three questions to raise in relation to measuring the voice of ‘Africa’ in international institutions:

- Do African states have enough voice in international institutions, vis-à-vis other states?
- Are African citizens adequately represented by the governments who sit on the Boards of these international institutions?
- Are African people, primarily represented by parliamentarians and civil society,

adequately heard by international institutions implementing programmes on the ground?

The two institutions where the members of the G8 most visibly wield the greatest power are the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. For both the answer to the first question is clearly no. The governance reform process underway in the IMF will (slightly) redistribute voting power between developed and developing nations. The lack of adequate representation of Africa has been specifically acknowledged by building protection for African votes into the framework for reform, and by designing other mechanisms for African states to have power (an extra representative on the Board and more frequent meetings with management). Governance reform at the World Bank usually mimics that of the IMF. As has been pointed out in previous ODI publications, the proposed reforms therefore will do little to raise Africa's total voting power, and therefore voice at either institution.

However, any increase in the representation of African states at the level of international boards will be meaningless if citizens within African states lack adequate voice to ensure that their governments respond. Most donors, including the World Bank, have paid limited attention to the strengthening of parliaments and civil society organisations. Both can



serve as an important check on the central government's agreements with international organisations (a recent ODI *Opinion* explores this issue, 'IMF reform: What happens next?', September 2006). While regional organisations such as NEPAD, the AU and the African Development Bank have a critical role to play, global organisations can also help to strengthen the capacity of Parliamentarians, civil society organisations and other actors to hold their governments to account for actions taken both at home and within global organisations.

While African governments might lack sufficient voice within key global institutions, other African actors are almost completely voiceless. This is important because, despite the membership of national governments, international organisations can and do act independently of their views and it is important that when they do so, they take account of all relevant actors, including parliamentarians and civil society organisations.

While it has been at the Bretton Woods Institutions that most heat in the debate about voice has been generated, there are other issues and international institutions where the G8 could have a real impact. Climate change is an obvious one. It was a core element of the G8 discussions in 2006 and has just been the subject of a UK inspired Security Council debate. It is worth noting in this context that four out of the five P5 Security Council members are also members of the G8. Climate change is expected to have a disproportionate effect on the poorest nations and yet without a clear institutional structure to discuss the issue, it is left to ad hoc forums such as the G8, where Southern nations do not participate as of a right, to engage with the issue and develop policy. Climate change is one of a number of global public goods issues where the interdependence of the world has reached such a stage that it is impossible for an unrepresentative body such as

the G8 to make policies that will be effective for the developed nations, let alone less developed ones.

The G8 can take a number of steps in June to make sure that Africa and other low income countries have a stronger voice in international institutions and in key discussions about global public goods. The governments of the G8 should:

- Acknowledge that the membership of the G8 is too narrow to deal with the broad range of issues facing an increasingly interdependent world. **G8 leaders should consider making the G20 the main forum for discussion** of global economic and other public good type issues.
- This G20 proposal will not address the inadequate representation of poorer nations, particularly African, in important policy discussions. **Dialogue must be opened beyond the G20 to address genuinely global issues, such as climate change, migration and others**, powerful governments must institutionalise the invitation of other governments to take part in substantive policy discussions when these are carried out by ad hoc groupings.
- **Provide sufficient long term sustainable resources** and expertise to strengthen Parliaments and civil society organisations to hold their own governments to account as well as engage in global public policy debates.
- **Ensure sufficient access for both parliamentarians and civil society actors** at global policy forums and within global organisations. Additionally, much greater efforts are needed to ensure that a diverse array of African voices is heard in such discussions, which requires time and money to strengthen both African legislatures and civil society organisations.

## Resources

For further information on the event, including podcast, video and further downloadable materials, visit the conference websites at: [www.ids.ac.uk/ids/aboutids/events/dsa\\_policy\\_forum.html](http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/aboutids/events/dsa_policy_forum.html)  
[www.odi.org.uk/events/G8\\_07/](http://www.odi.org.uk/events/G8_07/)

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