



INCLUSIVE SOCIETY INSTITUTE

Op-ed

Reimagining Global Governance: A Call for Equitable and Resilient Systems

By Daryl Swanepoel

In an era marked by complex global challenges—ranging from climate change to geopolitical tensions—the call for a robust, equitable, and resilient global governance system is not just timely but imperative. A short while ago, I had the privilege of sharing the collective wisdom of the Africa Focus Group in New York, an essential part of the Global South Perspectives on Global Governance Reform Network. This network is a confluence of intellectual powerhouses from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, and North Africa, united in the quest for a more balanced and inclusive international order. The insights garnered from our discussions underscore the urgent need to reimagine the architecture of global governance; it is a call for crafting a multilateral system in which Africa can participate fully and thrive.

Africa's peace and security landscape is complex and marred by armed conflicts, terrorism, and political volatility. The surge in coups in the Sahel region for the past five years is a stark reminder that Africa's challenges are not isolated; they have far-reaching implications for global stability. Inequality in Africa is not merely a standalone problem; it is deeply rooted in a long history of colonialism and racialised capitalism. This legacy continues to manifest in contemporary issues such as land ownership, access to quality education, and economic opportunities, often skewed in favour of elites.

International corporations and governments continue to exploit Africa's abundant natural resources, often without adequate compensation or benefit to local communities. This form of neo-colonialism not only deepens existing inequalities but also undermines Africa's ability to achieve sustainable development. The extraction of minerals, oil, and other resources creates a cycle of dependency that hampers efforts to diversify economies and invest in human capital.

The militarisation of Africa has emerged as a critical issue that warrants immediate attention. Over the years, the continent has seen a significant increase in domestic and foreign military presence, raising concerns about the long-term implications for peace, security, and sovereignty. Countries like the United States, France, and China have established military bases across the continent, ostensibly for reasons ranging from counter-terrorism to safeguarding trade routes. However, the presence of these bases often serves to protect the interests of foreign powers rather than contributing to regional stability.

The involvement of non-state actors, such as the Wagner Group, adds another layer of complexity, as they operate in a legal grey area, often without the oversight or accountability that state military forces are subject to. Their activities can exacerbate existing conflicts and introduce new elements of instability, all while escaping the scrutiny usually applied to traditional military operations.

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UN's role is undeniably crucial, its track record reveals a disconcerting pattern: a high failure rate in sustaining peace agreements, particularly in Africa. One of the critical reasons for this is the marginalisation of local and regional peacebuilders in peace processes. The UN's top-down approach often overlooks the complexities of local conflicts. It fails to adequately engage African institutions and communities with a more nuanced understanding of the issues.

Thus, as a response to situations where the UN is unable or unwilling to respond, the African Union (AU) has increasingly become a significant player on the global stage, particularly in matters related to peace and security. Its initiatives, such as the African Standby Force and the Panel of the Wise, demonstrate a commitment to proactive conflict resolution. The AU has deployed dozens of missions across Africa in varied contexts like Somalia, Sudan, Burundi and Mali. However, the AU often finds itself outmatched by the sheer scale and intricacy of its problems.

This resource gap inevitably leads to a dependency on the UN and other external actors for support, particularly in peace operations and humanitarian interventions. This over-reliance on external support has several ramifications. First, it undermines the AU's credibility and authority, as it appears incapable of resolving the continent's challenges independently. Second, the dependency creates a power imbalance that may limit the AU's policy options and strategic autonomy. For instance, external priorities may not always align with the AU's. Yet, the latter finds itself in a position where it cannot easily dissent due to its reliance on UN resources.

Multilateralism is increasingly facing a crisis of legitimacy. Despite its lofty goals and numerous initiatives, institutions like the UN have struggled to enforce compliance among its member states on various global issues. This ineffectiveness has paved the way for alternative international groupings, such as BRICS, which offer a different global governance model, challenging the Western-centric paradigm that has dominated international relations for decades.

Considering UN reform's slow and often frustrating pace, alternative solutions are being proposed. One such proposal comes from the Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability, which suggests the establishment of a Global Resilience Council. This body would focus on non-military existential threats such as climate change, pandemics, and economic instability. By concentrating on these pressing issues, the Global Resilience Council could serve as a catalyst for making the UN system more responsive and focusing on the long-term planning needs required to move countries from fragility to resilience. While it may not replace the need for comprehensive UN reform or existing structures, it could be a supplementary mechanism to address urgent global challenges more effectively.

We find ourselves at a pivotal moment in history. The challenges that confront us require global solutions. The existing multilateral system should serve the interests of humanity rather than catering to the narrow interests of a select few nations. The stakes are too high to allow inertia and vested interests to impede progress. Let us seize this moment to create a more equitable, just, and resilient global governance system. The onus is on all of us—governments, civil society, and international organisations—to work collaboratively. The time for action is now.

Daryl Swanepoel is the Chief Executive Officer of the Inclusive Society Institute. This article builds on the speech he made at the 'Inclusive Governance for a Peaceful and Resilient World conference', held in New York on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2023.

