

# MP-IDSA

## *Issue Brief*

# Africa and the United Nations Summit of the Future

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## **S***ummary*

The United Nations Summit of the Future is a pivotal event, bringing together global leaders to address pressing challenges and shape the future of global cooperation. The summit will produce a 'Pact for the Future' covering sustainable development, peace and security, science and technology, youth and global governance. For Africa, this summit represents a significant opportunity to advocate for its unique needs and priorities on the global stage.

The United Nations Summit of the Future, scheduled for 22–23 September 2024, aims to unite world leaders in ‘forging a new global consensus for a better present and a secure future’. It provides a timely opportunity for the global community to deliberate and establish more effective and inclusive global cooperation and to identify ways to tackle current challenges and potential future threats. The summit will produce a ‘Pact for the Future’ covering sustainable development, peace and security, science and technology, youth and global governance reform. The UN released the zero draft of the Pact in January 2024 and the governments are currently negotiating it. The summit represents a significant opportunity for Africa to advocate for its unique needs and priorities on the global stage.

## Summit of the Future: Why it Matters

The proposal for the Summit of the Future emerged during the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN in 2020. The anniversary coincided with pressing issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and concerns over Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These challenges prompted UN members to adopt a resolution urging the Secretary-General to propose recommendations addressing these critical issues.<sup>1</sup> In response, the Secretary-General in September 2021, published ‘Our Common Agenda’, urging faster implementation of the SDGs and reaffirming UN75 Declaration commitments.<sup>2</sup> The report also proposed a Summit of the Future to build a global consensus on navigating a future of challenges and opportunities.

In January 2024, Germany and Namibia, as co-facilitators of the Summit, released the zero draft of the Pact for the Future. This draft is the basis for intergovernmental discussions on an action-oriented final Pact. After extensive feedback from all delegations, informal consultations, and engagements with major stakeholders, the co-facilitators released a revised draft of the Pact in May 2024. The zero draft of the Pact focuses on five key priorities: (i) sustainable development and financing for development, (ii) international peace and security, (iii) science, technology, innovation and digital cooperation, (iv) youth and future generations, and (v) transforming global governance.<sup>3</sup>

The Summit of the Future comes at a pivotal moment for several key reasons. First, the world is facing unprecedented challenges, including climate change, pandemics, geopolitical conflicts and economic instability. These issues have significantly impacted the progress towards achieving the SDGs. At the halfway point to 2030, the SDGs are far from being achieved, with only 15 per cent of the goals on track.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [“Declaration on the Commemoration of the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the United Nations”](#), United Nations, 28 September 2020.

<sup>2</sup> [“Our Common Agenda”](#), United Nations, September 2021.

<sup>3</sup> [“Pact for the Future Zero Draft”](#), United Nations, January 2024.

<sup>4</sup> [“The Sustainable Development Goals Report Special Edition”](#), United Nations, September 2023.

Furthermore, a recent UN report highlights the urgent need to secure large-scale financing to address the development financing gap, which has increased to US\$ 4 trillion annually from US\$ 2.5 trillion before the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>5</sup> The gap to reach the SDGs in developing countries increased by 56 per cent after the outbreak of the pandemic.<sup>6</sup>

The draft Pact proposes ten key actions to achieve SDGs including closing the SDG financing gap with sustainable and predictable finance and aligning the global trading system with sustainable development goals.<sup>7</sup> It also underscores the importance of assisting developing countries in catalysing increased private sector investment in sustainable development. This includes expediting reforms of multilateral development banks and other development finance institutions, as well as fostering a conducive domestic regulatory and investment environment. Addressing climate change impacts, supporting adaptation in developing nations, and accelerating environmental conservation efforts are additional critical actions under discussion.<sup>8</sup>

The Summit places a strong emphasis on international peace and security, recognising the ongoing challenges posed by widespread conflicts and unprecedented violence that deeply affect global stability. Currently, there are 56 conflicts worldwide, the highest since World War II, involving 92 countries.<sup>9</sup> In the past year, these conflicts resulted in 1,62,000 deaths, the second-highest toll in three decades, notably impacting regions such as Gaza and Ukraine. The economic repercussions of this violence have been significant, with global costs amounting to US\$ 19.1 trillion in 2023, equivalent to 13.5 per cent of the global GDP.<sup>10</sup>

The zero draft proposes an updated collective security framework that prioritises preventive diplomacy and mediation, aiming to bolster national capacities in alignment with the 2030 Agenda. It advocates for international financial institutions to prioritise funding initiatives that tackle root causes of instability.<sup>11</sup> Emphasising a revitalised UN role in disarmament, the draft underscores coordinated responses to chemical and biological weapons. It calls for enhanced, pre-emptive measures against terrorism and violent extremism, addressing their underlying drivers comprehensively. Moreover, the draft supports the establishment of international agreements and norms to guide the responsible development of emerging technologies. This includes measures to prevent space militarisation, regulate

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<sup>5</sup> [“Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2024”](#), United Nations, April 2024.

<sup>6</sup> [“Global Outlook on Financing for Sustainable Development 2023”](#), OECD, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> [“Pact for the Future: Rev.1”](#), United Nations, May 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> [“Global Peace Index 2024”](#), Institute for Economics & Peace Report, June 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> [“Pact for the Future: Rev.1”](#), no. 7.

military artificial intelligence, and establish norms against cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure.<sup>12</sup>

The third section of the draft highlights the potential of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) to advance UN goals. It proposes seizing STI opportunities for the benefit of people and the planet by scaling up support to developing countries, strengthening their STI capacities, upholding intellectual property rights, and applying flexibilities to aid sustainable development.<sup>13</sup> Further, it introduces a Global Digital Compact to harness digital technologies to protect human rights and ensure inclusivity. This Compact will focus on closing digital divides, accelerating the SDGs, expanding digital economy benefits, fostering a secure digital space, advancing data governance, and strengthening the governance of emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence.<sup>14</sup>

The draft further suggests enhanced youth participation in global decision-making through commitments to youth engagement in all UN processes. It calls for national environments supporting youth rights through education, employment, health services, youth consultative bodies and resources for youth-led organisations. Globally, decision-making would prioritise future impacts, safeguarding future generations through a Declaration on Future Generations.<sup>15</sup> The Declaration would represent a significant multilateral statement affirming the responsibility to protect the needs and interests of future generations.

The growing disparity between escalating global challenges and our current global governance system highlights its weakness, outdated nature and imbalance. The solution lies in establishing a more effective, inclusive and equitable multilateral framework. This new approach to multilateralism must redefine global regulations to address significant ongoing transformations—ecological, digital and social. Reforming multilateralism to make it effective, just and inclusive is the central focus of the Summit and the Zero Draft. The draft envisions a Security Council with updated composition and methods to improve representation and effectiveness. Embracing innovation, data, digital tools and foresight is highlighted, along with sustainably financing the UN development system.

The pact also outlines a vision for an inclusive international financial architecture to enhance developing countries' participation in economic decision-making. It includes reforms to sovereign debt frameworks, the utilisation of special drawing rights to bolster a robust global financial safety net, and the provision of concessional climate and development financing. The draft further recommends efforts to strengthen international environmental governance to enhance cooperation and achieve

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> “[Global Digital Compact: rev. 1](#)”, United Nations, 15 May 2024.

<sup>15</sup> “[Declaration on Future Generations](#)”, United Nations, 26 March 2024.

ambitious goals for protecting the planet. It also advocates for improving the governance of outer space to promote peaceful, safe and sustainable uses that benefit all humanity, with particular attention to the needs of developing countries.

## What could the Summit mean for Africa?

The summit's themes resonate with Africa's pressing needs and aspirations for sustainable development, peace, security and global governance reform. Despite having some of the world's fastest-growing economies, Africa confronts formidable obstacles in achieving SDGs, particularly in eradicating poverty, advancing education and improving healthcare.<sup>16</sup> In recent years, several African states have grappled with significant challenges stemming from conflicts, governance issues, and socioeconomic complexities, profoundly impacting peace and security in the region. The summit provides a valuable platform for African nations to address these developmental and security challenges.

However, there has been limited engagement on the summit within the Africa. The recently concluded Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development sought to align Africa's sustainable development and financing priorities with the UN Summit's priorities. It underscored the need to reform global financial institutions to support Africa and other developing countries, ensuring access to adequate and equitable concessional financing and affordable market-based resources.<sup>17</sup> The forum also emphasised international tax governance reform, the governance of emerging issues like seabed and outer space resource management, and the resilience and effectiveness of sustainable development frameworks at all levels.

Africa should seek commitments from summit stakeholders to invest in critical infrastructure like transportation, energy and digital connectivity. These investments will significantly boost trade and economic activities in the African continent. Moreover, advocating for fairer trade policies and removal of barriers that hinder African exports is crucial for economic development. Encouraging innovation and technology transfer, particularly in sectors vital to Africa's sustainable development goals, should also be emphasised.

Addressing peace and security issues is another vital aspect. Africa hosts two of the world's ten most violent conflicts—in Nigeria and Sudan.<sup>18</sup> Political instability in the continent has increased with recent military coups, including in Gabon and Niger. Ongoing conflicts in Eastern DRC, northern Mozambique, Burkina Faso,

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<sup>16</sup> [“African Countries to Dominate the World’s Top 10 Growing Economies, ECA Report”](#), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 28 March 2024.

<sup>17</sup> [“Draft Addis Ababa Declaration on the Effective Delivery of Sustainable, Resilient and Innovative Solutions to Reinforce the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and to Eradicate Poverty in Times of Multiple Crises”](#), ECOSOC, 8 April 2024.

<sup>18</sup> [“ACLED“Pact for the Future: Rev.1” Conflict Index”](#), ACLED, January 2024.

Mali, Cameroon and Somalia, further compound regional instability. The Sahel remains a terrorism epicentre, accounting for 48 per cent of global terrorism deaths in 2023.<sup>19</sup> African countries can use the summit to seek international support for peacekeeping and conflict resolution initiatives. The draft Pact for the Future emphasises securing adequate and sustainable financing for the African Union (AU) and sub-regional peace operations.<sup>20</sup> In light of the recent withdrawals of UN peacekeepers from Africa and the pressing need to address the resulting security vacuums, this issue holds critical importance.<sup>21</sup>

The summit also presents an opportunity to explore reforming the global governance including the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Africa has long pursued UNSC reform, beginning with the 2005 Ezulwini Consensus outlining its common position. The Ezulwini Consensus calls for two permanent seats and three additional non-permanent seats for Africa on the UNSC to rectify historical injustice and under-representation.<sup>22</sup> The summit proposes reforms at international financial institutions and multilateral development banks to enhance representation of developing countries and build trust among their members. Africa should advocate for the rebalancing of voting rights at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) to enhance the representation of African countries. Moreover, Africa should call for an end to the ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ that traditionally allocates the leadership of the World Bank to an American and the IMF to a European.

Africa should also advocate for initiatives to bridge the digital divide, ensuring all countries on the continent can access the benefits of digital technologies. Science, innovation and technology are critical to the continent's transformation in agriculture, industry and poverty eradication. The AU Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024 places science, technology and innovation at the epicentre of Africa’s socio-economic development and growth.<sup>23</sup> Supporting the development of innovation ecosystems will drive economic diversification and job creation. Furthermore, enhancing cooperation with other developing regions through South-South cooperation can facilitate knowledge and resource sharing, while encouraging partnerships with the private sector can leverage additional resources and expertise for development projects.

Finally, youth-related issues are of paramount importance to Africa's development agenda. Roughly 60 per cent of Africa's population is under 25, with over one-third

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<sup>19</sup> Alex Vines OBE, [“What’s At Stake for Africa in 2024?”](#), January 2024.

<sup>20</sup> [“Pact for the Future: Rev.1”](#), no. 7.

<sup>21</sup> [“Peacekeeping without the UN”](#), GIS Report, 12 February 2024.

<sup>22</sup> [“The Common African Position on the Proposed Reform of the United Nations: The Ezulwini Consensus”](#), African Union, March 2005.

<sup>23</sup> [“Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa \(STISA-2024\)”](#), African Union, April 2024.

aged 15 to 34. By 2100, Africa will maintain the youngest population globally, with a median age of 35.<sup>24</sup> At that time, Africa's youth population is projected to be twice that of Europe's entire population, making up nearly half of the world's youth. Therefore, it is imperative for Africa to have a significant influence in shaping the Declaration on Future Generations, one of the anticipated outcomes of the Summit.

## Conclusion

Historically, many critical international decisions have been made with minimal African representation. Notable examples include the formation of the United Nations, the Bretton Woods Agreement, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). This marginalisation in global decision-making has hindered Africa's development and exacerbated existing challenges. The Summit of the Future presents a significant opportunity for Africa to rectify these historical injustices and advocate for a more inclusive and equitable global governance framework.

However, African stakeholders' minimal engagement in the summit's preparatory phases highlights their skepticism about its effectiveness amid global divisions. This approach risks marginalising African priorities in shaping the final pact and influencing summit outcomes. Therefore, it is crucial for Africa to seize this opportunity and actively participate to ensure its interests are adequately represented and addressed in the summit's deliberations and outcomes.

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<sup>24</sup> [“Africa Youth Consultative Forum on UN Summit of the Future”](#), UN Economic Commission for Africa, April 2024.

## About the Author



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