

Final report on the high level panel on "G7 & Africa"

Within the organizational machine of the G7, G7 engagement groups are the form in which the G7 Presidency by interacting with the civil society builds trust with its citizens on their issues of concern. The African focus the Italian G7 Presidency gave to this year's Think Tank Summit has specific reasons. Development of the African continent is a cross-cutting theme for the Italian Presidency and many African leaders have been invited to the forthcoming G7 Summit in Taormina for a G7 outreach session specifically devoted to innovation. The African outreach dimension in G7 Summits was first devised by Italy at the 2001 G8 Summit in Genoa and since then has been sustained by the successive G7 Presidencies. The Italian government itself is committed to developing a positive agenda for a sustainable development of Africa based on greater awareness of the numerous African issues but also with a clear focus on new opportunities for cooperation, through a win-win approach where economic growth for the widening middle class and the skilful young generation would also mean more business opportunities for African and European businesses. Still on a methodological note, the merit of organizing an event centred on think tanks at the eve of the G7 Summit in Taormina is rooted in the political role that think tanks have, giving strategic depth and less evident far-reaching vision to governments and the public opinion, addressing all the dimensions of the topics of discussion. Hence, the importance of setting up a network of people and think tanks who care and know about Africa, which links their strategic thinking to the practice of the diplomatic world.

The goal of the three sessions of the Summit was to identify areas where the G7 can bring added value. Evidence of the interlinkage of food security, innovation, and mobility agendas, some issues were raised across the different sessions. The most pressing one was the urgency to develop a new positive narrative on the opportunities many African economies offer and a more nuanced understanding of those issues which go beyond stereotyped over-pessimistic or over-optimistic perceptions of Africa.

Achieving food security in Africa: beyond emergency responses

The objective of the first session was to discuss the role that G7 could play in tackling all the issues related to food security, especially how it could lead the private sector to inclusive implementation of food security policies.

First, the main trends and challenges of food security were presented. With dismal data such as 23% of Sub-Saharan population suffering from chronic hunger juxtaposed to optimistic forecasting scenarios predicting a three-fold increase of Sub-Saharan GDP per capita by 2050, the participants acknowledged that one of the main challenges for Africa is to make this growth inclusive of the poor and hungry. A broad range of proposals ensued from the lively debate on the potential areas of partnership with G7 against Africa's food insecurity. The participants' different backgrounds shifted the discussion on some specific topics like large-scale land acquisition and the role of investors. Success stories were also brought into the discussion, recognizing the difficulty in building them up when they happen at the lowest scale.

Overall, what emerged from the first session was a shared and urgent call for changing the negative narrative on Africa that by flattening the picture of the continent has been impeding the flow of investment to Africa. A positive narrative can instead induce investors to the continent and the G7 could play a catalyst role in fostering

this, especially towards its own private sector. Apart from the issue of perceptions, more investment in infrastructure and research and development was likewise deemed fundamental for agricultural growth and its impact on food security, employment and development at large. Growth in agriculture was reported to be 11 times more effective than other economic sectors in reducing poverty in Africa. However private sector engagement and innovative inclusive business models which prevent the displacement of smallholders could hardly be achieved without international support in risk reduction and specific training in knowledge-intensive climate-smart technologies. Finally, some remarks were also made on the need for less stringent rules of origin in trade with African countries and the issue of urbanization, especially how this is changing the food system.

Promoting innovation for inclusive growth and development in Africa

In the second session the focus shifted to innovation, especially on the ways of empowering agents of inclusivity such as youth, smallholders and women. The discussion started with a note of optimism acknowledging that if the right conditions are in place Africa can be innovation-prone. Innovation is happening in some parts of Africa – Kenya being a frontier of this – faster than other regions. However, it was noted that the Fourth Industrial Revolution – a convergence of new technologies, materials and processes which has a huge impact on productivity, employment, the very definition of jobs, new skills, trade and the location of production – happens largely outside of Africa. Inside the continent, this new production revolution can trigger opportunities and risks alike. In the lively debate that followed the participants discussed innovation opportunities for the region to leapfrog various steps of development, after taking stock of the fallacies of premature industrialization. Low manufacturing in African GDP ratios was portrayed by some as not necessarily an issue, suggesting instead that services and agriculture can play a more valuable role in promoting African growth. By taking the Silicon Savannah in Nairobi as an example, it was also discussed the damage of ill-advised policies in hampering innovation. As some active policies trying to find innovative ideas have been captured by vested interests, it was suggested that policies and regulations matter but to foster innovation they should be restricted to creating an enabling environment, removing distortions and providing people with skills and affordable internet access.

In fact, still today access to technology and banking remains a problem as well as under-investment in knowledge or even brain drain, so diverse areas were devised for G7 partnership with Africa for innovation-driven development. Access to credit being central to this, first participants highlighted the need for partnership in risk-mitigation and in building a functioning financial system in Africa. Then, G7 contribution was recommended also in terms of sharing experience in regulations, smarter city planning, capacity building in its broader context, that is in research, institutions, training and skills, and by developing a better understanding of intellectual property policies.

Finally, some resolute warnings were constantly issued against questionable broad policy recommendations which look at Africa as a uniform continent.

Migration and beyond: mobility in Africa

The last section, devoted to the overarching theme of mobility, inevitably centred on today's most discussed form of people's mobility, migration. The debate took place inside a framework that conceived of migration not as a problem but as a driver of economic growth. A number of points came out of the discussion as critical actions to be taken by Africa and the G7 together. First and foremost, it was stressed the importance of a more positive approach to migration to demystify negativity around the issue, starting from a more empathic vocabulary such as human mobility. It was noted that the general public prefers quick and clear-cut

representations of the world, often stereotyped because of a pessimistic narrative. Similarly also those over-optimistic views of a continent rising at an unprecedented sustained growth are stereotyped, because overlook divergent trajectories that African economies have taken in recent years. This calls for a more nuanced reading that by lowering the barriers between pessimistic and over-optimistic views on Africa can expand room for policy makers.

Then, some data and recent studies assessing the normality of human mobility – African migration is a stable rather than exceptional scenario and 2/3 of its flows are intra-continental – were presented to start the debate. The main issues of discussion revolved around factors pushing people to move, the possibility to change people's mind about their choice to migrate, a smarter use of aid by G7 countries and more broadly their migration policies. Some criticism was prompted by the discussion on the mismanagement of the financial resources pledged for migration which are not invested in infrastructure and jobs creation. Other remarks were made on the need to increase legal paths for migrants by highlighting the risks of closing borders and the opportunity to finally facilitate return migration, an appealing issue for which little has been done so far.

Finally, at the end of the debate, addressing the issue of the securitization of migration, the discussion went back to the need to resort to better communication and information strategies that could unlink migration from violent events.

To conclude, the main points that emerged from the discussion voiced support for the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and broadly matched the priorities of the Italian G7 Presidency on human mobility: shared responsibilities; partnership among origin, transit and destination countries; investment in job creation, trade, diasporas, and the private sector; protection of migrants; the valuable and positive impact of migration in terms of demographic, economic, cultural contribution.