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INSTITUTION BUILDER

SA should strive to be embodiment of Pan-Africanism

Is there a Pan-African agenda that is helping the continent confront the global issues of the day? This is the key question to be addressed at an upcoming conference hosted by the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (Mistra) with the Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung, the Institute for Global Dialogue and the National Institute for the Humanities & Social Sciences.

The conference is focused on Pan-Africanism in the context of big power rivalry, climate change, the post-Covid-19 effects, the fourth industrial revolution and the rise of



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populism and authoritarianism. It occurs when progressive parties are trying to figure out what should constitute an enlightened agenda.

Part of the conference will focus on SA's leadership role on the continent, analysed in Mistra's most recent publication, "Reflections on

Africa's Place in the World", co-edited by myself and colleague Laurence Caromba. We argue that apart from our country's decline in economic prowess, there are several reasons why its role on the continent is being redefined.

Among these is SA's focus having shifted to larger powers such as the Brics grouping (Brazil, Russia, India, China and SA), as was the case during the Zuma administration, or even those of the Group of 20.

Defence budget cuts have also resulted in a drop in SA's peacekeeping capacity, with our troops barely remaining involved in the Democratic

Republic of the Congo and Mozambique.

Moreover, whichever way SA's authorities spin it, the attacks on foreigners, especially those from Africa, are not doing our standing any favours.

Additionally, fratricidal squabbles in the governing party undoubtedly take their toll on leaders' attention spans.

For SA to play any kind of leadership role on the continent, it would help if the country recovers the economic mojo that made it Africa's powerhouse.

SA has been slipping in the size of economies league, with our GDP of \$427bn competing

with Egypt's \$435bn for the runner-up spot, against Nigeria's GDP of \$510bn.

And if that wasn't bad enough, forecasts for 2023 put us 48th on our continent for GDP growth rate. SA is expected at best to grow at 1.4% while Egypt will grow at 5.6% and Nigeria 2.7%, according to the IMF's World Economic Outlook.

Caromba and I argue that we should perhaps focus on using SA's domestic and international experience to become the institution builder of the continent, given the country's various setbacks in economic performance and African

relations and standing.

We have a unique ability to act as an architect and underwriter of Africa's continental institutions, as was epitomised when former president Thabo Mbeki and former foreign affairs minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma held sway. Modest as this proposed role may be, it could go a long way towards building and strengthening institutions that promote co-operation, integration, security and prosperity in Africa.

There are three areas that could be the focal points of this institutional building strategy – trade, investment and migration

relations and standing.

Intra-African trade has eluded us ever since individual countries began gaining independence.

SA should not only be seen as an enthusiastic proponent of the African Continental Free Trade Area, it should also be using its vast public and business sector resources to help overcome the hindrances to trade within the continent.

The leadership President Cyril Ramaphosa showed in negotiating for the supply of Covid-19 vaccines to Africa should be replicated in ushering investment into the continent, through the councils we have access to, such as the Group

of 20 and the New Development Bank of Brics.

Counterintuitively, SA should be providing the lead on encouraging the free movement of people across borders, which goes with the free movement of goods.

Given the paucity of our skills base, it is in SA's own interest to ensure it attracts the best talent Africa can offer. Most importantly, it allows us to be the pre-eminent embodiment of Pan-Africanism during these turbulent times.

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