

**The Grand Africa Debate: United States of Africa (USAF), African  
Union Government (AUG), or Union of African States (UAS)? Seminar  
Debate in Commemoration of Africa Day**

**By  
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## **Introduction**

The debate started at 10.55 am with an introduction and background by Wole Olaleye, Head of Policy, Actionaid South Africa. The aim of the debate was to educate people on the proposed African government and to elicit a constructive engagement with the process of establishing an African government. The speakers leading the debate were:

1. Dr Chris Landsberg, Executive Director, Centre for Policy Studies.
2. Sam Nyambi, Senior Development Coordinator, Africa Monitor and World Trade University.
3. Wole Olaleye, Head of Policy, ActionAid South Africa - Moderator

## **Presentation 1: Dr Chris Landsberg**

As a way of debating the different models and issues around the proposed African government the presentation focused on events unfolding around accelerating a united States of Africa, the models of government, the balance of forces leading to the negotiations for an African government and a criticism of the models being used.

## **Events Around Accelerating a United States of Africa**

Pan Africanism has gone through five phases. The first phase was led by African intellectuals of the diaspora like Du Bois and George Padmore. The second phase was the independence struggles to liberate Africa from colonialism. The third phase was the building of nation states and an attempt

to unite Africa by leaders like Nkrumah and Nyerere. The fourth phase was the creation of regional blocks like ECOWAS, COMESA, and SADC. The fifth phase is the current phase which is looking at the creation of a continental government.

In the phases before the current one the main question was “who should rule over Africa?” The post-cold war and post-1994 question is “how should Africa be governed?” and “what development trajectory should Africa follow?” The development question is not being given the attention it deserves. In the African Union head of states summit coming up in Accra Ghana in July, 2007 the sole agenda, “The grand debate”, is to decide on the model for an African government.

## **Models of African Government**

There are three models for African government that are under consideration:

- **United States of Africa:** it is the “radical” view led the Libyan president Col Muammar Gaddafi. It “plagiarises” Nkrumah’s ideas of a united Africa and wants an African government now.
- **African Union Government:** it is led by outgoing Nigerian President Olesegun Obasanjo. It advocates for the taking of fifteen continental institutions created under the African Union and transforming them into the 55<sup>th</sup> state in Africa and the rest of the states should cede some sovereignty and functions to it.

Obasanjo rushes to say that the union should be established by 2015 with a president serving for a three year renewable term.

- **Union of African States:** it is led by South African president Thabo Mbeki. It advocates for taking the traditional African Union route and turn Africa into a union of states subscribing to common goals and values. It recognises that this will take a long time and that we should in the mean time embark on strengthening three sets of institutions: executive institutions, judicial institutions and financial/ technical institutions. This is the predominant view among African leaders.

### **The Current Balance of Forces on the Road to Ghana**

There are three power blocks on the road to Accra, Ghana:

- The radicals headed by Col Gaddafi.
- The conservatives who cling to sovereignty
- The progressives headed by Mbeki.

Before the Ministerial meeting in Durban ten days ago SADC had a common position on African government which was the Union of African States by consolidating regional economic blocks. Of late South Africa has adopted a position different from SADC. This entails a twin-track approach which embraces Obasanjo's fast-tracking unity and strengthening regional economic blocks.

### **Criticisms**

- The 'Grand Africa Debate' is driven by two contrasting positions. One argues for a state-driven approach and the other for a market-driven approach. South Africa pursues a state-driven approach. However Mbeki does not have an African constituency, not even in South Africa, to drive his ambitious agenda for Africa.
- Gaddafi's model does not talk of democracy, values, human rights and governance. The conservative wing on the other hand is clinging to crude sovereignty (Mugabe is in this group). Gaddafi wants to transform Africa to the stage where the European Union (EU) is currently ignoring the long history of the EU and the challenges they have undergone.

### **Conclusion**

In Accra a compromise is going to be achieved on realistic time lines for an African government. The radicals are going to be drawn to compromise and pursue strengthening financial institutions among others.

### **Presentation 2: Sam Nyambi**

The presentation focused on the following areas:

- The road travelled
- Challenges
- Opportunities
- Key drivers

### **The Road Travelled**

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was “toothless.” The African Union (AU) however has developed various mechanisms like the Peer Review Mechanism (PRM) among other to be more effective in executing its mandate. During the OAU member states jealously guarded their sovereignty while AU adopts a more central role. The AU Commission is an improvement over the OAU Secretariat and it takes into consideration gender issues among others. The AU was effectively started in Durban in 2002. The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) was a bold idea in which Africa acted to take charge of planning for the continent and its people.

### Challenges

There are a number of challenges to the creation of an African government:

- **Conflict:** Africa has long running and new wars that have killed over seven million people.
- **Marginalisation:** it is more evident with globalisation. Africa is increasingly left behind by other continents in many aspects of life.
- **Institutional cacophony:** duplication and conflicting views of institutions. The institutions are not streamlined so their productivity cannot take Africa where it wants to go.

### Opportunities

- The AU is moving forward.
- Key organs of AU have been put in place or are in the process of being put in place: these include the African Parliament,

ECOSOCC, financial institutions, Peace and Security Council.

### Vision Forward

The AU through the leadership of Conary has created the document “Vision 2030.” The implementation of this document is done in three stages:

- Formative work to establish fundamental structures and institutions.
- More tedious negotiations on how or what can be the central authority, powers to be ceded by member states leading to a union under a name to be decided by member states.
- Establishment of a union with a name chosen by member states.

### Key Drivers

#### Regional integration

- **Economic integration:** there is no coherent way to exploit resources e.g. Africa has minerals. It has 30% of world minerals, with 40% of gold and 60% of cobalt. It has 75.4 billion barrels of oil and produces 8 million barrels of oil per day. We need to integrate macroeconomic planning.
- **Infrastructure:** we need key infrastructure that links the countries.
- **Currency:** clinging to diverse currencies will continue to be an impediment to trade, movement of people and goods.

- Mobility: we need free movement of people in the continent.

### **Developing a shared vision**

There is no shared vision to a united Africa. There is need for advocacy to move towards and achieve a shared vision.

### **Governance**

The issue here is to come up with the most appropriate governance apparatus for a united Africa. The process of negotiating this is complex but needs to be tackled.

### **Legality**

There is need for the rule of law. This has to be developed. Civil society organisations (CSOs) should push this agenda.

### **Peace and security**

We need to work arduously on the peace and security agenda.

### **Massive mobilisation of the African people**

We need massive mobilisation of the people and academics towards the African vision. This will push governments to move forward.

### **Plenary Discussions**

#### **Questions and comments**

The free movement of people is a crucial matter for the African Union. South Africa has not signed the SADC convention on free movement of people yet president Mbeki talks about African Renaissance. In South Africa there is xenophobia and discrimination against other Africans. South Africa is also expanding its economic dominance over

other African countries e.g. Namibia and Congo.

How do we build African civil society which is still weak to a level like that in Latin America?

Can you clarify South Africa's shift away from SADC's position on African Unity and how SADC is responding to this shift?

CSOs involvement is critical in the African Union process. However CSOs tend to be reactive. What should we take to Accra, Ghana? There has been no robust debate in civil society about the African government. How do we engage in this process without being retrogressive?

What is the concept of the African citizen?

The models of African government presented are elitist. We then look up to elites to deliver to the poor. What are some of the studies that point out the interests around these models so that CSOs can engage them effectively?

### **Responses**

Free movement and migration: the idea of free movement should be viewed in the broader sense that goes beyond regulations around immigration. Countries need to strike a balance in the immigration issue. Another important dimension of free movement is the brain drain. There is movement of skilled people from some African countries to other African countries and also outside the continent. We need to do work to understand the dynamics of this phenomenon.

Governments should relax laws that hinder free movement. This can be started by simple initiatives like African tourism. Movement in Southern Africa is easier compared to movement in other parts of the continent.

The role of South African capital in Africa is a direct consequence of the policies pursued by South Africa.

South Africa has broken away from SADC's position by introducing the idea of a "development state" modelled around South Africa. Whether South Africa is a development state is another matter all together. South Africa now wants African countries to follow this model which articulates policies of massive investments in infrastructure among other things.

There is no people-driven or people-centred paradigm in practice now as far as the creation of an African government is concerned.

Elite Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) should pull back and allow the poorer CSOs to participate.

CSOs can come up with alternative models.

We need to work on a strong cross border CSOs networks.

We need to break down the "Chinese wall" between development workers and those who work around the political aspects of issues. The two sides currently view each other with a lack of seriousness.

CSOs need to take the debate from where it is and contribute to it

constructively so that Africans are seen to be working together.

Some research has been done on the African Union but it has not been made widely available. Some of these studies are with the AU commission in Addis Ababa.

We should move from the idea of the "grand debate" to that of the "grand agenda." This is to avoid a tendency by people to tear apart issues when they are framed as debates. The idea of an agenda moves people to more united action and work.



**A participant making a comment during the debate**

### **Questions and comments**

We welcome the shift of South Africa on the AU. We have debated the role of CSOs in the EU for a long time and the debates continue. What is the possible outcome in Accra? Is there a possibility that some states may be dissatisfied with the pace of progress and resort to smaller clusters of development? How do you then transform the clusters to an African union? How can we fast-track the creation of the African union?

We are hampered by the way the state views CSOs on the AU process.

The level of analysis of CSOs is elitist.

At a cultural level when we talk about governance and democracy there are specific understandings depending on the cultures. How do we go beyond this to create a common understanding?

Francophone Africa is limited by colonial pacts. This undermines the wonderful vision of a united Africa. In the past Anglophone Africa has led the agenda for a united Africa. Leaders in francophone Africa who tried to pursue this agenda were either overthrown or assassinated.

Part of the problem is that the vision does not match reality. We may be very effective by pursuing the unity of sub-Saharan Africa and a different block for North Africa. Maybe there can be collaboration between the two blocks.

What is the ideological seat of the AU?

As a journalist I have a difficulty in communicating to the ordinary people what the AU is all about since leaders and academics are talking in models which are very hard to communicate to the people.

### **Responses**

SADC is the most overrated regional block. It is dominated by political leaders and governments.

There are initiatives at local levels already to get Africans to work together like is the case in Central Africa in a way similar to confederations.

The debate missing in NEPAD is whether it is the correct development paradigm to be pursued by Africa. South Africa has loosened its grip on NEPAD after it realised that this was counterproductive.

The rhetoric of governments in Africa (democracy and governance) matches commitments of CSOs thus CSOs

should take the space to influence institutions and processes.

One cannot talk about Pan Africanism without talking about:

- Order
- Development: modernize and improve the lives of people
- Citizenship issues
- How does Africa relate to the outside world: partnerships, integration, and self-reliance?

The key question is to how to rationally manage the continent.

The driving interests of leaders in the AU are three fold:

- Some are driven by grandiose dreams like Col Gaddafi.
- There are those who merely want to be presidents of Africa like presidents Obasanjo and Museveni.
- There are those who want to modernize Africa like president Mbeki.

There are enough elements in African culture that can form the foundation for African unity.

As for colonial pacts that militate against the AU, they have to be peacefully negotiated.

How do we define Pan Africanism? There are those who argue that we should not exclude the diaspora. We should not divide Africa into North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In looking at the “grand agenda” there is the issue of the form (structure) and that of the content (what are we trying to achieve?). It is better to focus more on the content (free movement, democratic



rule, rule of law etc). The content can easily be understood by the people and can form a basis for educating them.

Focusing on the content will also help the media educate people.

CSOs in the context of the AU should refer to the people: grassroots, academia, private sector, Faith Based Organisations etc as opposed to the institutionalised CSOs. We need to go for a wider notion of people.

The hierarchy of challenges should be constantly revised so that more difficult issues are dealt with first.

### **Conclusion**

CSOs need to be clear about our expectations of the process. We need to take a step back and understand our position. We need to understand where we are and what we want to get out of the AU process.