

The dynamics of decision-making in Africa

When it comes to multilateral engagement with Africa there is a tendency to view the continent as a monolithic whole, rather than the complex mix of states, interests, and geo-political dynamics that comprise the continent. The complex nature of internal African decision making processes was clearly illustrated by the lack of unity – despite all the rhetoric – between African states during and before the Copenhagen Climate Change negotiations of December 2009. The African Common Position that took years to materialise fell apart due to fissures and differences between the African states involved in the negotiations. It was also, once again, clear that external actors, such as the EU seemingly underestimate the intricate nature of international relations on the continent. Even at the regional level, there is limited understanding of the dynamics shaping positions adopted by the regional economic communities. While the AU has a Permanent mission in Brussels, and the EU has observer status at the AU, there is still considerable scope for building on areas of cooperation and shared understanding.

The role national political and economic expediencies play in decision making processes is apparent and raises questions concerning the continent's position on a number of salient issues. As the climate change negotiations demonstrate, determining an 'African position' is a complex process, drawing together a myriad of country interests, continental (AU) and regional organisations (SADC, EAC, IGAD), as well as different leadership styles. It is this complex interplay between states in determining common positions in international regimes that is the focus of this seminar.

In addressing these dynamics of decision-making the following questions serve to guide the analysis: What are the key drivers and interests shaping pan-African decision-making processes? What are the areas of consensus and divergence? What countries and leaders can be seen as the key stakeholders at regional and continental levels? How are national, regional and continental dynamics managed and exploited by African as well as external actors?

This analysis is focused on determining the 'how' and 'why' positions are arrived at within Africa's continental and regional organisations. The conference will take a look at the continental and regional levels of decision-making to have an in-depth understanding of the interests of a variety African institutions, organisations, countries and leaders. This is an area that has received only limited attention, but an understanding of which is imperative in building partnerships with the continent on global challenges such as peace and security, economic development and the protection of the environment.

The first session sets out to address the question of what shapes decisions in defining an African position on the international stage. This focuses particularly on the internal dynamics of decision making within the AU (challenges, strengths and weaknesses), before moving on to consider the case study of the Africa Group at the climate change negotiations. The political dynamics behind the 'African position' will be further in a case study on the dynamics in the Nile Basin and South Sudan. This case study will give us more insight in the decision making within the relevant multilateral institutions and how member states work with – or against – each other to address these issues.

The second and third and session will consider the role and influence of the regional economic organisations (RECs) in both guiding regional economic development and in supporting peace and security initiatives respectively. The second session will focus on the dynamics of actual economic integration within the RECs. The third session will analyse their role with regard to the African peace and security architecture: how do they handle different national interests and mutual interference within these organisations? What are the different elements (political, economic, and social) that shape these conflicts and what is their impact on the decisions taken within African peace and security structures? During this session, there will be ample opportunity to illustrate these dynamics with case studies, especially from the Horn of Africa. With the recent negotiations surrounding a new Nile treaty and the expected referendum on Southern Sudan's independence in 2011, these two issues are very topical. By working with two thematically-based panels, we can get a clearer understanding of the political and

economic issues respectively and how these may inter-act and where responsibilities and/or memberships of the RECs overlap and cause confusion.

The final session will look at the policy implications of the lack of attention for and understanding of the dynamics of the African political context for the EU-Africa Partnership. The EU has taken on board the idea of the AU as the counterpart organisation on the African continent, with which it has developed a significant commitment, but the EU has difficulty implementing its policies towards Africa. Can we consider the EU and AU as each other's counterparts? Are the EU and the AU facing similar issues in terms of balancing national and regional interests? What lessons can be learned from the dynamics of African decision making for the upcoming EU-Africa Summit? With the summit taking place at the end of November, this focus is very topical and will provide recommendations for the Africa-EU summit.