

# Club De Madrid's Annual Policy Dialogue 2025: A Nigerian's perspective

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## Diplomatic Display

The United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) serves as the UN's central hub in Africa. It is the largest UN headquarters in terms of land size, occupying 140 acres (56 hectares) within the lush Karura Forest. UNON hosts a range of UN agencies, programmes, and funds, making it a vital centre for multilateral diplomacy on the African continent. It is also the global headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and UN-Habitat (United Nations Human Settlements Programme).

Notably, UNON is not just an administrative centre; it sits within a diverse and rich environmental ecosystem, embodying the UN's commitment to sustainability and environmental conservation. What began with UNEP and UN-Habitat has grown into a dynamic UN presence in Kenya, now comprising 23 agencies, solidifying Nairobi's status as a key diplomatic and development hub on the African continent.

The United Nations Office in Nairobi was the stage for the second edition of the Annual Policy Dialogues hosted by Club de Madrid from Thursday, April 3rd to Friday, April 4th, 2025. Club de Madrid's Policy Dialogue 2025 could not be more timely in engaging and bringing the voice and agency of its members to decision-making spaces.

Club de Madrid is the world's largest forum of democratic former Presidents and Prime Ministers, who leverage their individual and collective leadership experience and global reach to strengthen inclusive democratic practice and improve the well-being of people around the world. As a non-partisan and international non-profit organisation, it counts on the hands-on governance experience of more than 100 Members from over 70 countries, along with a global network of advisers and partners across all sectors of society.

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Walking through the gates and security checks of UNON, I read about the premises I had just set foot on. Past the courteous and professional United Nations security officials, who were not only Kenyans but also from other nationalities, I came across a pathway that led me past a plethora of all the flags of member states of the United Nations. This was a precursor to the event for the next two days, which I will posit as the intentionality and convening power of international relations.

Club de Madrid's convening power and network brought about the Annual Policy Dialogues, which provided a unique platform to inspire democratic policies with global

reach. The institute states that this is done through the sharing of hands-on government experience and lessons learnt in a dynamic pursuit of practical policy recommendations. Democratic former Presidents and Prime Ministers from around the world brought their distinct, individual and collective leadership experiences to this particular gathering, which was held at the United Nations Complex in Nairobi. Experts, analysts, scholars, and leaders from the private sector and civil society were actively engaged in several poignant sessions and discussions, which focused on the present global issues.

#### Deep-Dive Discussions

There were three working groups with different objectives. Working Group One focused on scaling up funding and reforming financial institutions and was led by Professor Kevin P. Gallagher, Director, Global Development Policy Center, Boston University. The second working group focused on debt to development and was led by Joseph Upile Matola, Economist, South African Institute of International Affairs. Working Group Three focused on international tax cooperation and was led by Jose Antonio Ocampo, former Minister of Finance of Colombia and Advisor of Club de Madrid.

The Annual Policy Dialogues was held for the first time in Africa. The choice of theme, "Driving Sustainable Future for All: Financing for Sustainable Development," was particularly important as it is the key driver of reforms amid the present realities of the world and geopolitics. Reforms of financial institutions are vital, and the unlocking of private financing and international development is also critical. Kenya's Minister for Health, who represented the Government of Kenya, stated that "Kenya supports proposals that ease debts and measures to reform the global credit systems."

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President of Slovenia (2007–2012) and President of Club de Madrid, President Danilo Türk, stated—and paraphrasing him—"The reality we face is sombre: eighty-five per cent of the development goals are off track. Without strong institutions, fragmentation will be present. The global systems now don't reflect the realities of our time. This outdated architecture cannot work in our modern world. Multilateral development banks work with closer partnerships with government institutions and the private sector rather than only giving credit."

Danilo Türk, President of Club de Madrid and former President of Slovenia, is also quoted to have said: "Finance must serve development and dignity of people. As geopolitical

tensions rise and trust erodes, the decision makers must deliver on their commitments—those of the past and those requiring bold but feasible reforms.”

A profound statement was made during one of the panel sessions when Sean Cleary, Executive Vice Chair, FutureWorld Foundation, opined: “Many of the developing countries are defaulting on their development, so that they don't default on their debts.”

President Michelle Bachelet, President of Chile (2006–2010, 2014–2018) and Vice President of Club de Madrid, was not mincing words when she said: “We don't need to build something better but something more inclusive.”

Prime Minister Moussa Mara, Prime Minister of Mali (2014–2015) and a member of Club de Madrid, was of the view that “Financing to save our state and financial systems is most paramount to developing states.”

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The former Prime Minister of Mali gave a lucid example of Mali's 2025 budget. Without financing development, a country cannot finance growth. He said: “Even though we are advocating for debt removal, we should remember that we were here about twenty-five years ago. We should not be talking about this in the next twenty-five years. We have to work to tax corporations. A lot of big companies in Africa are not following the laid-down rules. Also, tax havens have to be banned. We also have to work on administrative reforms. Finally, Africa has to clean up her own garden, fight against corruption, strengthen continental policies which will strengthen internal resources.”

During one of the sessions, Dr. Oby Ezekwesili stated categorically: “We need to rejuvenate African politics. We have great potential, but much to improve. We must redesign African politics. Young people must take their place, and they have the ability to lead.” She went further to opine that “For decades, society ignored Africa. It is time to change that. We must start a serious conversation about how Africa can be a close ally; one with whom we build lasting partnerships.”

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There was also conversation on the rapid rise of billionaires. A participant stated that there will be five trillionaires in the next five years. There was conversation on inheritance taxes and the pros and cons of inheritance taxes. A pertinent question was tabled: Is working an immoral exercise? Questions were raised on taxes being levied on incomes and not as much as on capital gains. It was generally accepted that income is income and has to be taxed on a progressive level.

There was a general consensus that taxes are not a matter of charity; they are a matter of give and take. If you are going to levy high taxes on your citizens, you have to formulate a proposal that indicates the offering of government services that individuals cannot get for themselves—that is, meaningful social amenities. This and much more were part of the wide range of discussions.

Debt, Development, and Digital Deployments: Dynamic Deliverables

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There were pertinent recommendations made. Notably, a new UN-anchored framework is needed to deliver timely, fair, and inclusive sovereign debt restructurings. It must include automatic standstills, independent debt assessments, private creditor participation, and tools linking debt relief to climate and development goals. Preventing future debt crises also requires scaling up concessional, countercyclical, and local currency financing, guided by vulnerability, not income.

Multilateral Development Banks must fully implement the G20's Capital Adequacy Framework (CAF) recommendations and significantly expand financial capacity, delivering at least USD 300 billion annually in long-term finance by 2030. This must be accompanied by reform of global liquidity mechanisms to ensure timely, equitable, and countercyclical support. All development partners must protect and scale up Official Development Assistance (ODA) and reaffirm their commitment to the 0.7% target, including 0.2% for Least Developed Countries. ODA is not charity but a strategic tool for peace, resilience, commerce, and international trust.

Climate finance must be an addition to development aid, not a substitute. Private finance has a role to play but must be mobilised responsibly—through transparent de-risking, fair

risk-sharing, and strong development alignment. Taxing rights must be rebalanced towards countries where economic activity occurs. A new international framework should apply the principles of unitary taxation and significant economic presence. In parallel, countries should work towards a coordinated global minimum tax on the world's wealthiest individuals. Club de Madrid calls on governments to adopt whole-of-government approaches to reform and modernise fiscal systems and supports work on the UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation.

Digital technologies can accelerate financial inclusion and improve the efficiency and transparency of public finance.

## Diplomatic Dignitaries

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As Club de Madrid stated: "Recent history will be remembered as a period of significant turmoil in every dimension of human and planetary well-being. A shared element among these diverse challenges is the need for enhanced financing for sustainable development. Only by mobilising sufficient resources will we be able to eradicate poverty, ensure our collective well-being, and protect our planet."

The two-day gathering had in attendance former Presidents, Prime Ministers, and policymakers, namely: President Joyce Banda, President of Malawi (2012–2014); PM Cellou Dalein Diallo, Prime Minister of Guinea (2004–2006); PM Moussa Mara, Prime Minister of Mali (2014–2015); President Michelle Bachelet, President of Chile (2006–2010, 2014–2018); President Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of Lithuania (2009–2019); Prime Minister Mari Kiviniemi of Finland (2010–2011); PM Iveta Radičová, Prime Minister of Slovakia (2010–2012); President Danilo Türk, President of Slovenia (2007–2012); Sean Cleary, Executive Vice Chair, FutureWorld Foundation; Jose Antonio Ocampo, former Finance Minister of Colombia, Former United Nations Under Secretary-General.

Others were Dr. Obiageli Ezekwesili, CEO Human Capital Africa and Senior Fellow at Yale University; Francesc Pont Casellas, Head of the International Economy and G20 Unit, Office of the Prime Minister of Spain; Ambassador Cristina Díaz Fernandez-Gil, Ambassador of Spain to Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda; and Dr. Stephen Jackson, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Kenya; amongst others.

## Discernments and Deductions

From my perspective, one of the hallmarks of such gatherings is that there is usually a lot of honest and no-holds-barred conversations and deliberations, which are not meant for public consumption and held behind closed doors. As aptly stated by one of the past Presidents: “As former Heads of State and Governments, we don’t claim to have all the answers. We do not seek the whole consensus alone.”

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Another prominent theme among those in attendance—and most importantly among those who spoke during the two-day gathering—was that liquidity must be a tool for global development, not a tool for the privileged few. A more multipolar world demands stronger, more inclusive multilateral cooperation on financing for development. Renewed political will and collective action are needed to realign global financial systems with shared values.

The truth must be made plain: international relations and geopolitics have changed and evolved in the last seven months. Some countries were prepared; some countries were unprepared but are already realigning themselves, whilst some countries were caught pants down and stranded. How does Africa move in the evolving world order as multilateralism reaches a turning point?

**Aina writes from Rwanda**

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