

ATHENA POLICY VIEWPOINT

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AfDB Election 2025: Dr Sam Maimbo Is the Strategic Choice for Africa and Nigeria

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About Athena Policy Viewpoint

Athena Policy Viewpoint is the official editorial voice of the Athena Centre for Policy and Leadership. It presents the Centre's considered position on pressing national and global issues, informed by research, data, experience, and values. These briefs are not just opinions—they are calls to action, offering clarity, direction, and policy alternatives grounded in evidence and a commitment to public good.

A Continent at a Crossroads

On 29 May 2025, the African Development Bank (AfDB) will elect its next President. This decision arrives at a critical moment for the continent. With declining aid flows, increasing debt burdens, and a shifting geopolitical landscape, Africa requires strong and principled leadership at the helm of its foremost financial institution.

The AfDB is one of Africa's few functioning pan-African bodies with the financial means and institutional mandate to shape long-term development. As the Bank's largest African shareholder, Nigeria must treat this moment with strategy, not a time for divided loyalties or transactional politics. The choice must be guided by competence and vision.



A Mixed Legacy: Assessing the Adesina Years

Dr Akinwumi Adesina, Nigeria's outgoing President of the Bank, has presided over a decade marked by high ambition but uneven delivery. His 'High 5' development agenda offered a bold framework: Light Up and Power Africa, Feed Africa, Industrialise Africa, Integrate Africa, and Improve the Quality of Life for Africans. His tenure saw a significant capital increase, from \$93 billion to \$318 billion, and he succeeded in preserving the Bank's prized AAA credit rating.

Yet beneath the visionary rhetoric, the record is complex. Flagship projects like Desert to Power have failed to deliver on their promise. Of the nearly 600 million Africans without electricity, only 25 million were reached over ten years of energy investments. Efforts to feed Africa were limited in scope and heavily reliant on short-term interventions. His push to industrialise the continent produced modest gains, and intra-African trade remains critically low.

Perhaps most concerning is the missed opportunity to position the AfDB as Africa's dominant source of development finance. In 2023, the Bank disbursed just over \$6 billion—less than half the amount the Inter-American Development Bank distributed, despite Africa having twice the population.



The Candidates: A Continental Choice, Not a Regional One

Five candidates are vying for the presidency. All speak of jobs, infrastructure, and integration. But vision is not enough. The continent needs technical depth, operational independence, and an ability to attract capital at scale.

- **Dr Samuel Munzele Maimbo (Zambia):** is currently the Vice President for Budget, Performance Review and Strategic Planning at the World Bank in Washington D.C. Dr Maimbo brings an unparalleled record in financial reform, budget planning, and multilateral negotiations.



- **Amadou Hott (Senegal):** A former AfDB executive and Minister of economy. Backed initially by Nigeria, his candidacy is capable but risks becoming an extension of Senegal's regional rivalry with France.



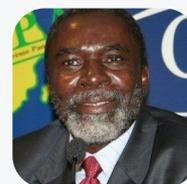
- **Sidi Ould Tah (Mauritania):** This leader of the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa is backed by French interests. It may offer donor diversification but lacks operational familiarity.



- **Swazi Tshabalala (South Africa):** Brings institutional knowledge and would be the first woman to hold the post. Her campaign lacks momentum.



- **Ngarlejy Yorongar (Chad):** is a symbolic entrant lacking the executive profile needed now.



The Nigerian Dilemma: Sentiment or Strategy?

Nigeria faces a difficult yet defining choice. Should it pursue the sentimental continuity of a successor to Dr Adesina or the strategic clarity of a leader who can secure the Bank's relevance in a changed global environment?

The answer, from our perspective, is clear.

Dr Maimbo has demonstrated the capacity to modernise the Bank, restore donor trust, and protect the AAA rating. He is well-positioned to navigate a complex, post-aid environment and maintain access to affordable capital. Backing him is not a retreat from Nigeria's leadership. It is a reaffirmation of it.

Conclusion: The Right Choice For the Right Reasons

The AfDB's next chapter will be shaped by decisions, not rhetoric. Nigeria's vote, as the largest African shareholder, is decisive. It should be cast with intention, not inertia.

We acknowledge Dr Adesina's achievements and respect the credentials of other candidates. However, we believe that Dr Sam Maimbo, because of his competence, neutrality, global credibility, and pan-African commitment, is the right choice for the Bank, Africa, and Nigeria.



THE AFDB CANNOT AFFORD ANOTHER FIVE YEARS OF CAUTIOUS AMBITION OR PERFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP. IT NEEDS A BUILDER AND A BRIDGE.

Someone who can restore coherence to Africa's development agenda while adapting to a world of shrinking aid and rising scepticism.

Nigeria should lead by example. It should back Dr Sam Maimbo, not for his nationality but for his qualifications, not to claim a prize but to secure a future.

This is a strategic moment. Nigeria should seize it.

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