

Recommendations for a people-centred and transformative EU-Africa strategy

Our main recommendations¹

The future EU-Africa partnership agenda should include:

A prominent partnership on agriculture and rural development with a long-term perspective to promote synergies between food security, climate/environmental measures, economic development and job creation and to scale-up assistance to sustainable agriculture, small-scale producers, agro-forestry and agro-ecological practice based on local and indigenous knowledge and agency.

A stronger and better-balanced support to the implementation of African partners' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and a substantial increase in EU's financial support for adaptation and for loss and damage.

A focus on decentralised energy provision both in urban and rural areas, on-grid and off-grid, and on small-scale renewable energy technologies that generate and deliver energy locally.

A commitment towards policy and legal reforms on both sides to ensure people's participation, full accountability and sustainability in the management of natural resources and to respect traditional land use and safeguard local communities' access to land and water.

The assurance that private investments and private sector support and incentives are implemented in respect of African countries' strategic choices and public policies and in alignment with the UN guiding principles on Business and Human rights, the OECD DAC Blended Finance Principles and the Kampala principles on effective private sector engagement.

A core priority on African SME's and young and women entrepreneurs in business environment reforms and private sector support with the objective of nurturing, maintaining and upgrading sustainable SMEs in both urban and rural areas.

A commitment towards progressive taxation policies and measures to curb corruption, illicit financial flows and tax evasion with the aim of increasing domestic resources and putting in place redistributive policies aimed at social protection and effective public health, education and vocational training systems for all.

High ambition and means to protect and expand the space and create an enabling environment for civil society and human rights defenders who essentially contribute to democratic governance and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Gender appropriate actions and focus across all strategic sectors and a special attention to enabling women's organisations and other CSOs in their struggle to transform unequal power relations, and the structures, laws and norms that underpin them.

A Triple Nexus approach to Development, Peace and Humanitarian Action to work more coherently on common and human security and towards people-centred and context specific peacebuilding in full respect of International Humanitarian Law, human rights and humanitarian principles.

Primacy to voluntary returns of migrants supported with adequate financing, best practice sharing and sustainable reintegration programmes and solid human rights safeguards in the operationalisation of readmission agreements to avoid situations of refoulement or chain refoulement.

An expansion of labour migration projects and legal migration channels on the basis of an evaluation of on-going projects and the scaling up of the well-functioning pilots into long-term programmes.

¹ The positions stated in this document reflect the opinion of the majority of members of the ACT Alliance EU working group on Development Policy and Practice but do not necessarily imply agreement by all of them

Introduction

This paper is based on ACT Alliance EU's analysis of the joint EC/EEAS communication, Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa. We believe that a comprehensive strategy between the EU and Africa must be based on the priorities and objectives of both sides, and aim for mutual support in reaching the goals of the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement on climate change while respecting the international HRs conventions and global standards countries are party to. It should involve all actors and sectors of cooperation including civil society organisations and community-led initiatives so that no one is left behind.

Our paper was developed in light of the current Covid-19 crisis that creates new challenges for both continents and highlights the need for a fairer, people-centred partnership. It is the occasion to re-think the relationship in all its aspects as it is important to address not only the impacts and lessons from the crisis but also its structural causes. Our recommendations aim at contributing to that reflection with the vision to create open, equitable and resilient societies that have the resources and flexibility to react to crises and to mitigate their consequences.

Partners for a green transition and sustainable energy for all

While the partnership on a green transition is welcome, we encourage the two Unions and their member states to continue broadening their narratives and adopt a more holistic context analysis and response to climate change and environment degradation that integrates a strong social and human perspective.

We recommend the EU to not only support the implementation of African partner's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), as suggested in the communication, but also their National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). The EU should substantially scale up its support for adaptation under the Nairobi Work Programme on Adaptation (NWP) and for loss and damage under the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss & Damage (WIM).

We welcome the commitment to support access to renewable energy, and stress that this commitment should cover both urban and rural, poor and rich areas, including both on-grid and off-grid solutions. Energy provision should focus more strongly on decentralised micro-generation – small-scale renewable energy technologies that deliver energy needs locally.

To regenerate natural resources (terrestrial and marine) and ecosystems on which livelihoods depend, and to reverse biodiversity loss and fight environmental crime, it is particularly important to promote and spread local and/or indigenous knowledge which encourages nature-based solutions. In addition, the EU-Africa partnership should commit both parties to the full transparency and accountability and community involvement in the management of natural resources, such as minerals, oil, timber and wildlife to allow resource-rich countries and their populations to further benefit from them.

Partners for a transition towards sustainable food systems and agrobiodiversity

We deplore the complete omission of the Africa-Europe agenda for rural transformation in the EC-EEAS communication. We consider that the future EU-Africa agenda should include a prominent partnership on agriculture and rural development with a long-term perspective to promote synergies between food security, climate/environmental measures, economic development and job creation. In particular, the EU should scale up its support for small-scale producers/farmers and its assistance to sustainable agriculture and small-scale fisheries, in particular agro-forestry and agro-ecological practices respecting traditional use of land, seas and rivers, and ensuring access to land, water, fishing grounds and open source seeds to African farmers, especially for women and youth².

To ensure synergies in the future strategy, commitments should be made to implementing the UN Decade on Family Farming Global Action Plan and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working

² For more detailed recommendations see <https://actalliance.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CSO-contribution-to-AU-EU-agricultural-Action-Agenda-Feb-2020.pdf>

in Rural Areas, including the right of affected communities to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) when it comes to land-related investments.

Partners for a sustainable economy at the service of the whole society

Although the consequences differ between the two continents and by country, the current health, social and economic crisis linked to the COVID-19 pandemic is the occasion for common reflection on a new more equitable economic model focusing on boosting well-being for all through sustainable production and consumption, industrialisation and trade within Africa and Europe.

The EU can contribute to this shift by making sure that the investments for which it provides guarantees, facilitation and protection contribute to reducing poverty and inequalities and implementing the SDGs and Paris Agreement³. The EU must require companies to adhere to human rights due diligence and high environmental standards and to pay their fair share of taxes. Investments should be selected and implemented transparently against strong social and environmental criteria. They should not aggravate the debt crisis and should be supervised by an independent mechanism, involving civil society, in the country of destination. Complaint mechanisms must be in place, local communities affected by the investments must be informed and their prior consent must be obtained in case of potential impact on their environment, rights and livelihoods.

The COVID 19 crisis has made it clear that expectations on public health systems are and should be high and the EU should support its African partners' efforts to upgrade their public services through ODA grants, technical assistance and domestic resources mobilisation rather than blended finance. Investments and private sector support and incentives must be implemented in respect of African countries' strategic choices and public policies and in full alignment with the UN guiding principles on Business and Human rights. They must be guided by the ECE Guiding Principles on People-first Public-Private Partnerships in support of the UN SDGs⁴, the OECD DAC Blended Finance Principles⁵ and the Kampala Principles on Effective Private Sector Engagement⁶.

From our perspective, improvements to the investment climate and business environment on both continents should primarily benefit domestic economic actors, and should avoid focusing on measures that attract foreign direct investments. The reforms should be designed and conducted in close dialogue with local stakeholders including SMEs and cooperatives, workers unions and farmers' organisations, women entrepreneurs and other civil society actors concerned. The communication rightly highlights Africa's need for sustainable jobs. Yet, it omits the fact that up-to 70% of the jobs are likely to be established at the SME's level. African SME's should be a core priority of the business environment reforms and private sector support with the objective of nurturing, maintaining and upgrading sustainable SMEs in both urban and rural environments. This requires the EU to make fundamental changes in the current business models of blended finance and take on riskier projects. ODA should not be used to subsidize private partners who could otherwise access financing on their own, which is usually the case for European companies.

With regard to trade, EPA negotiations should be suspended and EPAs signatories should start a discussion to jointly decide the way forward in the new context of the African Continental Free Trade Area. The future partnership agenda should give precedence and fully support intra-African value chains, trade and regional and continental integration on the African continent. Based on its own integration experience, the EU should support African countries in mitigating the negative effects that trade liberalisation may cause in a space in which labour, fiscal and social regulation is immensely diverse and sometimes weak.

³ For more recommendations on private sector in development, see <https://actalliance.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Letter-Jutta-Urpilainen-FINAL.pdf>

⁴ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/ceci/ppp/Standards/ECE_CECI_2019_05-en.pdf

⁵ <http://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/OECD-Blended-Finance-Principles.pdf>

⁶ <https://effectivecooperation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Kampala-Principles-final.pdf>

Partners for human development and social protection

With regard to education, the joint agenda should build on the African Union recognition of an urgent need for improvements within education and for aligning it with labour market demands. The green and sustainable economic, social and industrial transition in Africa will require a broad range of skills and a massive investment in education and vocational training. Such investment could include enhanced support to inclusive public education systems ; capacity building and quality training for teachers; the development of research and innovation capacities; harnessing the interaction between education, science and technology for improved learning, including e-learning ; setting education accreditation standards in Africa and engaging in mutual recognition; providing (young) entrepreneurs, women and men, with quality training and while doing so, standing for and spreading a culture for social and environmental responsibility.

An important lesson from the COVID crisis is to support and encourage African states in the implementation of progressive taxation systems and measures to curb corruption, illicit financial flows and tax evasion with the aim of increasing domestic resources mobilization and putting in place redistributive systems aimed at social protection and public services for all. Based on existing successful experiences, it is essential to support the establishment and reinforcement of national social protection floors⁷ or safety nets in more fragile contexts, and to partner with civil society actors who are at the forefront of actions in support of the most deprived. Although much has been learned in a number of African countries through the Ebola crises, the commitments to strengthen health systems in a sustainable manner are still to be fulfilled and EU-Africa cooperation in public health needs to be taken to the next level.

Partners for peace, resilient and inclusive societies and democratic governance

Currently, we observe many unnecessary and disproportionate measures put in place by governments to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, which violate human rights and reinforce the trends of shrinking and closing space. However, civil society performs indispensable work in times of crisis, e.g. in providing social services and mitigating the negative effects of the crisis. Additionally, civil society needs to have the fundamental rights to report on negative effects, human rights violations and to call for the correction of unnecessary or unsuitable measures, but also to make the voices of the marginalised heard in decision-making processes.

This situation once again highlights the importance of a strong commitment for the respect of international human rights treaties, fundamental freedoms, rule of law and civic space in any measure, programme or agreement jointly undertaken or adopted by the EU and its African partners.

The future partnership should more explicitly and strongly emphasise the role of civil society, recognising that a diverse and free civil society is both a democratic asset and a prerequisite to successfully reach other development goals in the strategy. Both partners should raise their ambition and means to safeguard, protect and expand the space for civil society and human rights defenders. Special attention should be paid to the space of women human rights defenders and women's organisations and to their struggle to transform unequal gender power relations, and the structures, laws and norms that underpin them. The new strategy has the potential to progress towards gender justice if it promotes gender appropriate actions and focus across all sectors from health, including SRHR, education, food security, water and sanitation to economic and trade policy, digitalisation, migration policy, agriculture and the green transition.

In its ambition to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and to support its African partners in doing so, the EU should prioritise the LDCs and the most fragile contexts and make sure that no one is left behind. The EU should make an even stronger commitment to work together with its African partners to tackle the most vulnerable contexts in Africa and to overcome fragility.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) and Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) in particular are also key actors of conflict transformation, peace building and reconciliation. The Triple Nexus approach for Development - Peace

⁷ The ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)
https://www.ilo.org/secsoc/areas-of-work/legal-advice/WCMS_205341/lang--en/index.html

and Humanitarian Action should be integrated to go beyond the current focus on state security and stabilisation and to work together more coherently on common security, human security and, a people-centred and context specific approach of peacebuilding in full respect of International Humanitarian Law, human rights and humanitarian principles.

The implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda are two crucial elements of that approach and should be better highlighted in the future joint agenda including by emphasising the importance of consulting and involving women's and youth organisations, as well as individual women and young people from CSOs and FBOs.

Partners for migration and mobility

We welcome the holistic approach to migration in the EC Communication that is in line with the Global Compact for Migration. It is great to see the positive acknowledgement of mobility and the need for more regular channels. However, leading the way to a joint EU-AU strategy should not start by putting African leaders into a position where they support the `Fortress Europe` style externalisation and security focused policies that the EU has been pursuing since 2016. The narrative needs to change to open a conversation that takes the interests and needs of both continents equally into account.

EU focus on return and readmission is not new, the primacy to voluntary return is positive but tools for implementation, financing, best practices and sustainable reintegration are missing, even though civil society has shown their positive impact. The operationalisation of readmission agreements which remains a priority for the EU should be conducted with solid human rights safeguards to avoid situations of refoulement or chain refoulement.

It is essential to put in place labour migration projects and legal migration channels into the centre of the communication, and it would be useful to evaluate and draw conclusions of ongoing projects with the aim to scale up the well-functioning pilots into long-term programmes. The COVID crisis also highlights the importance of seasonal regional and international migration for people's livelihoods and food production.

The necessity to enhance support to African countries hosting displaced populations in alignment with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework of the Global Compact on Refugees is crucial since a huge number of forcibly displaced persons are hosted by African countries and their number will likely grow significantly due to the diverse impacts of climate change.

Partners in strengthening rules-based multilateralism

At this point in time, the communication's explicit focus on strengthening a rules-based global order and multilateralism is of utmost importance. We furthermore welcome the fact that the strategy stresses how the three pillars of the UN must be at the centre of this as well as the commitment to support the AU's application for enhanced observer status in the World Trade Organisation. It is also important for both partners to work together on fairer international taxation agreements and regulations and more equitable decision-making in the realm of global tax cooperation.

While the focus on public diplomacy is highly relevant, its impact will be dependent on the EU and the AU's own principled adherence to international agreements including the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the active promotion of international law including human rights law and refugee law across all policy areas.