



THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP
LE PARTENARIAT AFRIQUE-UE

AFRICA-EU ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STAKEHOLDERS' NETWORK

2 March 2021, Brussels – Belgium

FINAL DECLARATION

The representatives of African and EU economic and social stakeholders

In the framework of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES), the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) organises regular consultations to convey the views of organised civil society to the partnerships between the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) in the form of *Meetings of the African-EU Economic and Social Stakeholders' Network*.

On 2 March 2021, the EESC hosted the **seventh Meeting of the African-EU Economic and Social Stakeholders' Network**, a virtual event where speakers discussed the future of the EU-Africa partnership.

The seventh meeting is the first stakeholder event and paves the way for the AU-EU Summit. The seventh meeting was attended by key figures such as:

Denise A. O. Kodhe, Presiding Officer of the **African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council** (AU ECOSOCC)

Matshidiso Moeti, Regional Director for Africa of the **World Health Organization** (WHO)

Inma Vazquez, **Médecins sans Frontières** (MSF) representative to the EU and NATO

Salha Issoufou, **MSF Director of Operations** for West and Central Africa

Jocelyne Landry Tsonang, Representative of the **African Circular Economy Network**

Amadou Sako, External Advisor for Africa, **International Organisation of Employers**

Anselme Amoussou, Member of the **Economic and Social Council of Benin**

Anaïs Amazit, **AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub**

The participants, with particular attention to the Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Policy and Security Policy on *Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa*¹, published with a view to the Sixth AU-EU Head of State Summit of 2021;

1. On COVID-19, a new priority for the partnership

- 1.1 note that COVID-19 cases on the African continent account for only 3.5% of the global total, although the continent has 16% of the global population;
- 1.2 point out that despite the 3.9 million COVID-19 cases and 104 000 lives lost on the continent, with countries such as Algeria, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa severely affected, there have been fewer cases and deaths than the modelling initially projected;
- 1.3 point out that the COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on the state of health infrastructure, particularly in the countries struggling most in terms of limited human resources, access to essential supplies and local production capacity;
- 1.4 are impressed by the rapid response, which has drawn on lessons from past epidemics (such as Ebola and cholera), a strong continental and sub-regional coordination involving cross-border information sharing and points-of-entry screening, restrictions on movement and gatherings (including closing borders and schools) and the reorganisation of health facilities (including telemedicine) which has helped limit the spread and severity of the COVID-19 outbreak in African countries;
- 1.5 salute the early continental approach taken by the African Union, particularly the strategy developed by the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, the African Union's public health agency working to expand COVID-19 diagnostic capacities;
- 1.6 salute the coordinating role played by the WHO regional office which organised the first partnership coordination meeting focusing on key intervention areas (such as training 200 000 health workers). The WHO regional office has tackled support for national strategies and multi-sectoral taskforces, the establishment of a supply portal (which has facilitated the delivery of more than 3400 oxygen concentrators, 70 million pieces of personal protective equipment and 14 million test kits to African countries), the contribution to the global immunisation campaign and the Africa Infodemic Response Alliance which responds to misinformation about the vaccines;
- 1.7 recognise that local communities play a key role in encouraging people to abide by preventive measures (wearing masks, social distancing and washing hands) and delivering health kits to remote communities;

¹ [JOIN/2020/4 final](#) of 9.3.2020.

- 1.8 recognise the key role played by African non-state actors, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs) and the social partners, in filling the gap between governments and people and raising awareness;
- 1.9 recognise that NGOs are active in the fields of medicine and humanitarian aid and that the private sector plays a significant role in rapidly deploying facilities, such as screening and rapid diagnostic testing and critical care, improving management and facilitating access to essential supplies and transport;
- 1.10 point out that CSOs are not the enemies of governments but bodies which complement governments' policies, as demonstrated recently by the seminars held by the AU ECOSOCC;
- 1.11 consider that it is essential that policy makers and governments recognise the expertise and contribution of CSOs when it comes to precautionary health and safety measures, raising awareness about the need for vaccines, emergency preparedness, support for communities and the implementation of national policies;
- 1.12 understand the challenges facing African countries which are currently embarking on a new phase with the rollout of a massive immunisation campaign; stress the importance of equitable and fair *access to vaccines and specific needs such as training and adequate cold chain facilities*;
- 1.13 recognise the EU's contribution to the fight against the pandemic in Africa, through funding (EUR 8 billion since the pandemic began), the recent efforts made to ensure that low and middle income countries have access to vaccines through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility (COVAX Facility), the European Commission's willingness to set up an EU vaccine-sharing mechanism² and the new partnership between the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control;
- 1.14 consider it essential however that the Vaccine Global Access Facility (COVAX Facility) provides a fair allocation of vaccines to African countries, starting in 2021 with 600 million of the 2.1 billion doses allocated globally;
- 1.15 in response to COVID-19, call on the EU and the AU to work together, particularly at WTO level, to facilitate access to all COVID-19 technologies, protective equipment, potential treatments, diagnostics and other medical tools, by means of a temporary waiver from certain Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) obligations which will help mitigate shortages;
- 1.16 call for focus on boosting the manufacturing capacities needed at local level in Africa for essential health products and technologies;

² [COM/2021/35](#) of 19.1.2021.

- 1.17 flag up to the AU and the EU that equitable access to vaccines and treatments is vital to save the lives of the most vulnerable groups; some populations may not be covered under the COVAX facility, such as refugees, internally displaced people and asylum seekers;
- 1.18 point out that the COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on the need to strengthen Africa's health systems in the long term and call on EU Member States to earmark sufficient financial resources for health infrastructure in Africa in the 2021-2027 period;
- 1.19 points out that the COVID-9 pandemic has major consequences on economic development, with businesses failing and jobs lost, and that these consequences are hitting young Africans, who already suffer from a lack of prospects, particularly hard;
- 1.20 point out that the pandemic is having a devastating impact on livelihoods, particularly those of the most vulnerable people, since African economies are being pushed into recession for the first time in 25 years and projections show that Africa will be the slowest-growing large region in 2021;
- 1.21 point out that the COVID-19 pandemic is also affecting education, culture and mental health, since the traditional patterns of society are being hampered by social distancing and restrictions on free movement;
- 1.22 are very concerned at the reported increase in gender-based violence, even in countries with legislation against this, and stress the importance of education for young girls and women's empowerment;
- 1.23 based on the Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Policy and Security Policy³, call for the African-EU Head of State Summit of 2021 to provide for a sixth partnership on health under the future *Africa-EU comprehensive strategy* to boost local manufacturing capacity for essential health products and technologies.

2. **On the Green Deal, modelling a partnership for development and growth in Africa**

- 2.1 refers to the international decision to engage in a new type of development involving low-income countries, based on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the UN 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement agreed in 2015;
- 2.2 regret that Official Development Aid covers only one third of the USD 5 trillion needed every year, according to the OECD⁴;

³ [JOIN/2020/4 final](#) of 9.3.2020.

⁴ [Remarks of the Portuguese Presidency of the EU](#).

- 2.3 acknowledge the level playing field for investments under the SDGs and the need to involve new actors, particularly the private sector and business in the context of fierce competition for Foreign Direct Investment;
- 2.4 consider that the High Level EU-Africa Green Investment Forum⁵, organised jointly by the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union and the European Investment Bank (EIB), is essential for mobilising private and public capital in support of the green transition in Africa;
- 2.5 call for the co-organisers to include representatives of the African-EU Economic and Social Stakeholders' Network as speakers, with the view to sharing civil society's experience in creating new models and stimulating political debate; one such representative could be the president of the ACP-EU Follow-up Committee;
- 2.6 are well aware of the increasing importance of the circular economy in Africa-EU relations, and draw attention to the African Circular Economy Network (ACEN) made up of specialists in the transition for businesses, with representatives from North, West, East and Southern Africa;
- 2.7 highlight the challenges faced by African small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which account for 90% of all businesses; these challenges entail poor government policies, limited access to public procurement, corruption, delays in payments for goods and services, limited supply of raw materials, climate change and scarcity of resources;
- 2.8 believe that SMEs have the capacity to respond to societal challenges such as the SDGs and climate change through sustainable circularity, as demonstrated by many projects underway in Africa, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, energy, construction, transport, packaging, manufacturing and textiles;
- 2.9 call on the AU-EU leaders to ensure that the forthcoming new partnership takes into consideration the implementation of the circular economy in Africa; this will involve in particular a strong governance framework, better financing for SMEs, transfer of technology, support for academic programmes and research and a strong global cooperation framework on exporting waste;
- 2.10 reiterate⁶ the importance of focusing on the aspirations and concerns of young people in Africa-EU relations, and stress the need for young people to play an active part in the platforms addressing recommendations to political bodies;
- 2.11 point out that Africa is the continent with the youngest population, and support AU-EU youth-led initiatives in the fields of culture, sports, political participation, employment, environmental protection and the green transition, and digitalisation, such as the AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub;

⁵ [23 April 2021](#).

⁶ [17.7.2018: 5th Meeting of the EU-Africa Economic and Social Stakeholders' Network](#).

- 2.12 encourage multi-stakeholder platforms and small-scale projects developed, piloted and driven locally by young people, such as contributions to the Great Green Wall, Africa's flagship initiative aiming to halt the expansion of the Sahara Desert⁷;
- 2.13 consider that renewable and sustainable decentralised energy production and consumption should be encouraged as an answer to the challenge of access to energy, particularly in off-grid areas;
- 2.14 stress the need to involve, at all levels, civil society and networks such as the Africa-EU Economic and Social Stakeholders' Network in bringing attention to alternative models, particularly small technological and bottom-up initiatives in which local African communities can take ownership;
- 2.15 considering the Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Policy and Security Policy⁸, call for the African-EU Head of State Summit of 2021 to deploy a tailored small investment tool under the partnership for the green transition and energy access, which can meet the renewable energy needs of communities that are not connected to national grids.

3. **On the role of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in Africa's economic integration**

- 3.1 point out that in 2021, Africa has 6% of the earth's surface, a large and diverse stock of natural resources, but less than 5% of world trade and 15% of intra-continental trade;
- 3.2 point out that since the African Union-European Union Summit of November 2017, the EU has supported and contributed financially to the architecture, negotiation and implementation⁹ of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). This is an ambitious economic integration initiative and tool for structural transformation, as well as a unique opportunity for both Africa and the EU to deepen trade, foster investment and economic integration, and accelerate sustainable development;
- 3.3 reiterate¹⁰ that the entry into force on 29 May 2019 and the launching on 7 July 2019 of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) which aims to be the largest free trade area in the world, is a milestone;

⁷ Initiative responding to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCCD) initiative to restore 100 million ha of currently degraded land.

⁸ [JOIN/2020/4 final](#) of 9.3.2020.

⁹ [Pan-African Programme](#)

¹⁰ [17.7.2018: 5th Meeting of the EU-Africa Economic and Social Stakeholders' Network](#).

- 3.4 recognise that the AfCFTA could help alleviate poverty for 1 200 million Africans by creating businesses and jobs and speeding up industrialisation and competitiveness in a continent facing structural economic challenges, such as market fragmentation and lack of competitiveness;
- 3.5 expect to see short-term achievements regarding rules of origin, tariffs, digital payments and the elimination of obstacles to trade, which should be monitored by an African observatory;
- 3.6 acknowledge the importance of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) which are the building blocks of the AfCFTA, and the strategic EU-African Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) designed to contribute to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction in the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) region;
- 3.7 stress¹¹ that economic and social stakeholders should be consulted and involved systemically in EU-African national and regional Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and on investment policies, so that the whole of civil society, including economic and social stakeholders, is actively involved in drawing up, implementing, monitoring and reviewing these dynamic agreements and truly benefits from them;
- 3.8 flags up the challenges involved in correcting the weaknesses of the AfCFTA negotiation process, such as countries' ownership, supervision of tariff liberalisation and deregulation, inclusiveness (particularly for economic and social stakeholders such as trade unions, the private sector, researchers and public representatives), consistency with ILO and Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs) continental commitments and regional arrangements, socio-economic challenges and issues related to gender and human rights;
- 3.9 in order to overcome these challenges, recommend developing a vast awareness campaign for economic and social stakeholders, as well as civil servants, public representatives and representatives of young people and women, with a view to developing a common roadmap and action plan to accompany the implementation phase of the AfCFTA;
- 3.10 recommend tackling AfCFTA's concerns at national and regional level by holding discussions in the context of social dialogue and public debates, as well as establishing a multi-stakeholder framework with financial support to build the capacity of civil society;
- 3.11 point out that AfCFTA must uphold human and labour rights by promoting integration, creating a multi-stakeholder framework on the implementation of the agreement and supporting civil society, especially the expertise of economic and social stakeholders;
- 3.12 lastly, having learnt from the mistakes made in implementing the SDGs, recommend establishing a regional multi-stakeholder dialogue to accompany the implementation of the AfCFTA. This dialogue should include different actors, different backgrounds and different countries and civil

¹¹ [17.7.2018: 5th Meeting of the EU-Africa Economic and Social Stakeholders' Network.](#)

society groups, particularly within RECs such as ECOWAS, ECA and AU, but also at AU-EU level, in order to create a group of experts within organisations such as the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU)¹² and ITUC-AFRICA¹³ which can follow up on issues not yet negotiated;

- 3.13 draw attention to African airspace, which is a good example of the challenges facing the continent in terms of economic integration of a growing sector where 75% of traffic between Africa and the rest of the world is controlled by foreign companies, with limited continental demand, scarcity of financial resources, high operating costs and poor airport infrastructure;
- 3.14 are aware of the mitigated results gained by opening up Africa's skies, and stress the importance of the Single African Air Transport Market (SATM) launched in 2018 under the African Union Agenda 2063;
- 3.15 highlight SATM's possible benefits for growth, African consumers, tourism, direct and indirect employment intra-continental trade and continental integration;
- 3.16 ask for more social dialogue in this process, particularly on the ILO decent work agenda, which covers labour standards and rights, job creation and business development, social protection, and social dialogue.

¹² In FR: Organisation de l'unité syndicale africaine, OUSA.

¹³ The African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (*ITUC-Africa* www.ituc-africa.org).