

No decision about us without us!

Africa-Europe Week CSO Forum outcome document

to All Heads of State and Government and

Dignitaries attending the 6th EU-AU Summit

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Introduction

Today's efforts by the AU and EU to create an equal and fair partnership are entrenched in past colonial and postcolonial cooperation. They are challenged by structural and systemic inequalities between the two parties. The success of today's efforts will depend upon a recognition of the past, an awareness of the present and a commitment to a mutually beneficial transformation towards the future. Building a transformed partnership will necessitate a continent-to-continent approach as well as a meaningful engagement with key actors such as civil society in all its diversity, with priority voice for the people's organisations mandated to represent major sectors of the population. It is highly regrettable that in the framework of their partnership, the EU and AU have failed to reach out to civil society organisations until the very last moment, underscoring the lack of inclusivity and transparency of this process. In so doing, you have excluded the voices of the millions of people who will be directly affected by the decisions you take. On the other hand, you will likely prioritise the interests of the few over the well-being of the majority and you risk leaving millions even further behind.

We, African, European and diaspora CSOs, take this opportunity to express our concern that such a flawed process can but reinforce current imbalances of power and privilege. CSO participation is crucial to ensure that cooperation between the AU and EU promotes joint priorities, that flagship initiatives resonate with local realities and possible existing solutions, and that no one is left behind. As it is, the EU continues to disregard African Union priorities as set out in the Agenda 2063, cherry-picking those elements which suit it. The EU, despite its commitment to forge a people-centred partnership, does not appear to be putting people first. For its part, the AU's policy decision-making could benefit from more inclusive and transparent dialogue with civil society and people's organisations.

As a result of such an imbalanced partnership and of shutting out civil society, the Summit's long-awaited outcome has insufficient emphasis on the key, systemic issues for African countries such as widespread unemployment and especially of the young people, imbalanced trade relationship, debt cancellation, food sovereignty, land- and resource-grabbing, human rights violations - including economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights - the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and vaccine and medicine inequity.

Civil society exclusion is symptomatic of the past and the present, but there is still time to use the EU-AU Summit as a moment of transformation toward the future.

Civil society key asks

The AU-EU partnership should be based on equality, inclusivity, mutual accountability, shared values and prosperity. A partnership reset is urgently needed. To this end:

1. The EU and AU should work to transcend the traditional colonial and post-colonial, North-South, donor-recipient framework within which relations have thus far been established. This must entail a thorough review of systemic and structural issues which underpin the currently imbalanced AU-EU relationship - in areas such as trade relations, debt, illicit financial flows - and which exacerbate rather than improving equity of international governance. Rules governing world order must be established fairly and democratically. Respect and promotion of universal human rights must be at the heart of the EU-AU strategic partnership. The review should also address recovery post-COVID19 and joint priorities such as promoting equitable access to COVID19 vaccines, enhancing human development, promoting gender equality, tackling the climate crisis and reducing Africa's dependency on food imports.
2. The EU and AU should establish clear governance mechanisms within which to reset the partnership, encompassing a broad multi-actor approach, joint decision-making via transparent and participatory processes, timely, accessible and available information, implementation, monitoring and accountability structures. This should include a meaningful, long-term engagement with African, European and Diaspora CSOs. The voices of people most affected by decisions, must be at the core of an effective and transformational AU-EU partnership. The partnership should reinforce the role of public policies and effectively regulate corporate sector influence and investment. The establishment of such governance mechanisms should start with agreement on an inclusive monitoring and accountability system regarding the outcomes of this Summit.
3. The AU-EU partnership should recognise and build on the diversity, knowledge and skills within the African and European continents. To this end, the AU and EU, in dialogue with civil society organisations, regional economic communities and local authorities, should draw up a clear roadmap to respect and deliver on the localisation agenda, ensuring a transfer of power and resources to local actors who are directly involved in ensuring the political, social and economic progress of a nation, while respecting the planetary boundaries. In all decisions and actions, the EU and AU must recognise and promote human rights, a people-centred approach and territorially embedded social and solidarity economies.

Thematic messages

Below the thematic messages from the thematic sessions at the CSOs Forum.

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Theme: Food sovereignty and rural transformation

Land justice for Africa

For most Africans, land, water and forests are not tradeable commodities; they are a gift from God and our ancestors. Yet Africa has been persuaded to transfer huge tracts of land for agriculture, timber, oil, and mineral exploitation, often in deals funded by European taxpayers' money. These land grabs lead to land degradation, loss of biodiversity, livelihood breakdown, and human rights abuses. Women are particularly vulnerable. **We call for an end to the financing of large-scale land acquisition projects and speculative investments by European and African public development banks. Instead, we urge the AU & EU to strive for land policies that ensure the just and sustainable use of land for the hundreds of millions of Africans who rely on it, particularly women.**

Agroecology for sustainable food systems

The industrial food system is broken. It is failing to feed us while destroying our environment and livelihoods. Yet the EU spends only 2.7% of its agriculture budget on transformative agroecological approaches, but 80% propping up conventional agriculture. We call for a reversal of this head-in-the-sand attitude. **We urge the EU and AU to invest in transformational change, dedicating at least 50% of agriculture budgets to researching and growing agroecology, and creating a favourable policy environment for the growth of vibrant, prosperous, healthy and resilient family farming communities.**

Promoting family farming, the right to food and peasants' rights

Family farming ensures up to 70% of Africa's food supply, maintains its biodiversity, and creates jobs and wealth. Yet small-scale farmers, fishers and pastoralists do not receive the support that they need to carry out their functions. African governments do not respect their commitments from Malabo and the UA-UE partnership risks privileging agribusiness and technological solutions. We call for a participatory audit of the UA-UE partnership in order to guarantee that the policies and investments it promotes place food security and family farming at the center and defend the right to food for all.

Local food systems and rural transformation

Africa imports about \$ 35 billion in food products each year thanks to the conditions that have pushed national governments to promote the production of commodities destined for exports rather than food for domestic consumption. Covid 19 demonstrated the fragility of global food chains and reaffirmed the resilience of local food systems, which also create jobs for young people and women and revitalize rural economies. We urge the African and European authorities, in consultation with the producers' organizations and the CSOs, to orient the policies and investments of the UA-UE partnership towards strengthening and protecting territorial food systems.

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Theme: Decent work and informal sector in a digital world

Transforming Africa's Informal economy for Decent Work

AU-EU partnership shall tackle the factors that drive and sustain informality and promote decent work opportunities for all as in ILO Recommendation N204. Informal workers' representation should be promoted with the support of trade unions. Access to Social protection for all – including floors - is key to formalize jobs and to break the cycle of poverty and its feminization. Funding social protection entails ODA and fighting tax avoidance, illegal financial flows, and corruption.

Pursuing a fair regulated digital climate through inclusive and collaborative governance arrangements will preserve the rights of people, especially women, youth, migrants, rural and indigenous that are at the margins of digital coverage but dominant in the informal sector. We need to support business organizations in creating initiatives to create decent jobs, access to finance and push to formalize the economy. Attention should be given to capacity building to upgrade the whole value chain, which will lead to create more decent jobs and to support rural economy and enhance dialogue between all stakeholders; support a just transition to a green, blue and digital economy.

Decent work and Social Protection for All

Decent work, including the right to organize and social protection for all, is a pre-condition for Africa's small-scale cross-border trade to contribute to inclusive growth, respecting people's rights and the environment. All stakeholders, including informal cross-border workers organizations and trade unions, shall be involved in the design of public policies prioritizing formalization, decent work creation, with particular attention to women, young people and vulnerable groups, the safeguard of local livelihoods. Cross- border traders organisations shall be reinforced.

Better trade

The AU-EU partnership should ensure that trade, including cross-border trade, promotes decent work, a just transition to a Green, Blue, Digital economy, through the development of technical capacities and the exchange of good practices. This would require commitment to better trade, anchored in effective trade governance, with adequately financed border infrastructure and support services, considering specific contexts and realities. An inclusive and collaborative governance arrangement is needed especially to preserve the rights of those at the margins of digital coverage.

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Theme: Human Development through Health, Education and Social Protection

Respond to the COVID19 pandemic by ending vaccines injustice

COVID19 poses immediate and short-term challenges that require strong and concrete actions to end the pandemic everywhere. The EU and its member states should urgently **fulfil their pledges and scale-up the donation of longer shelf-life vaccine doses** to African partner countries. To **fight vaccine injustice**, we call on EU leaders to promote the sharing of licenses, technology and know-how and agree to suspend patents and waive IP rights for COVID-19-related medical tools. The EU and AU should support the efforts to **build a stronger ecosystem and an enabling environment for local production**, including harmonised regulatory framework, skills development, and adequate investments in Africa.

A long-term approach to strengthen health systems and achieve UHC

The AU-EU partnership should include a specific objective to **strengthen health systems and achieve UHC**, adopting a comprehensive, multi-sectoral, inclusive and rights-based approach to addressing global health challenges, recognising primary health care, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene and sexual and reproductive health and rights as critical to achieving UHC. **Digitalising access to health services** is an important factor in ensuring health services and drugs are accessible even in humanitarian contexts and far-reaching areas. The AU and EU should **strengthen their collaboration on global health research and innovation (R&I)**, which is paramount to end current pandemics such as COVID-19, HIV, TB and malaria, AMR and prepare for and respond to future outbreaks and health challenges.

We call on the EU to renew its Global Health Strategy, aligned with the SDGs and with earmarked resources and clear objectives. In addition, AU Member States must strengthen their efforts to meet the Abuja Declaration commitment to reach 15% of budgetary spending on health, **mobilising domestic resources for their health investment plans**. The EU should also **increase bilateral and multilateral investments in global health**, with the primary view to reducing health inequities.

Finally, the EU and AU need to **fully engage with civil society and communities on global health**, in particular those groups that are most affected by health inequities, and fully involve them in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes.

Quality inclusive education at all levels

Quality inclusive education at all levels (from early childhood education, to primary, secondary and higher education, including technical, vocational education and training) is adequately addressed in the new AU-EU partnership, with significant investments to strengthen public education systems that respond to the needs of learners who face extra barriers accessing and thriving in education, such as children with disabilities, people with a migrant background, low-income families, women and girls. Considering current and projected shortages, investing in educators' training and professional development, salaries and working conditions is of utmost importance.

Child protection and children's rights at the core of the AU-EU Partnership

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused an increase in children and girls' exposure to different forms of violence, we ask AU and EU leaders to ensure a strong focus on child protection and children's rights in the AU-EU Partnership. In the Joint Communication "Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa", the EU committed to support concrete initiatives to reinforce civil society organizations for and with women and youth -including children- by ensuring their active involvement in decision-making processes of civic and political life, through a human rights-based approach, while protecting and improving their social rights. Moreover, the new EU Strategy on the Rights of Child foresees stepping up efforts to ensure meaningful child participation through an inclusive Youth Action Plan and to scale up child protection. In a similar fashion, Africa's Agenda for Children 2040, which elaborates on the vision of Agenda 2063 in respect of children, calls for cultivating child participation, based on the principles of representation, inclusion and accountability and for promoting and supporting community-based child protection interventions. We ask AU and EU leaders to live up to these commitments with clear deliverables and through a credible life cycle approach, with gender and age-sensitive actions targeting specific needs.

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Theme: Migration and Mobility

Governance

A 'partnership of equals' between Africa and Europe will require a participatory and inclusive approach enriched by lessons learnt. This implies a new collaboration framework that duly incorporates African priorities on free movement, involving CSOs in the implementation, from design to monitoring, owing to constant dialogue. Only such organisational and relationship paradigm shift would guarantee countries' ownership and policy coherence, transparency and accountability.

People-centred approach

We call for a people-centred AU-EU Partnership, based on dignity and African people priorities and aspirations. We want a rights-based, long-term approach to migration, focusing on harnessing its positive aspects and directing funds to sustainable and inclusive development. This will require implementing previous commitments on facilitating circular migration, broadening the scope of labour migration channels, reducing remittances costs and on promoting diaspora engagement, to name a few.

Humanitarian approach

A successful AU-EU partnership will require a humane, needs and rights-based approach to migration policies, based on international human rights law and the Global compacts. This implies access to services, durable solutions and protection for migrants and their families, including children, irrespective of their legal status. It is equally important to include local and diaspora voices, more specifically those of displaced women and children facing multiple, intersecting disadvantages, in humanitarian responses. In leveraging this partnership, the opportunity remains to increase safe legal pathways to protection, and expand options for legal migration, including by creating a legal migration framework based upon skill knowledge transfer.

Sustainable solutions

We call for a long-term solutions-based AU-EU partnership pushed by the radical willingness to create sustainable solutions addressing local and regional challenges. It has become evident that using financial support to stem migration to Europe is not constructive. The AU and EU should address regulatory barriers to economic inclusion of displaced people and focus on supporting and funding evidence-based programmes assisting displaced populations, including families and children, as well as women-led and women's rights organisations working on the front line and diaspora organisations responding in humanitarian settings.

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Theme: Equitable Green Partnership

Global crises, local solutions

The climate, biodiversity and health crises are global but impacts are local. Solutions should be led by local communities, Indigenous Peoples and CSOs, with particular attention to women and rural populations. The EU and AU need to meet and **go beyond international commitments** to prevent the worst impacts including by: scaling up new and additional climate finance, particularly grants for adaptation, and addressing loss and damage; by increasing biodiversity finance; enabling early action; and **including these groups in local to global governance**. These groups should be empowered to lead on governance of EU Africa biodiversity and climate initiatives and their delivery through an increased share of earmarked funding and gender-responsive finance.

Policy coherence and integrated approaches

Integrated crises require **integrated solutions**. The most affected by climate, biodiversity and health impacts include vulnerable lower income households, rural communities and women: Partnership projects, programmes and initiatives should **combine human development (including food, water, sanitation and hygiene), climate, biodiversity objectives and be gender just**, to tackle inequalities, support better health and environmental outcomes and build sustainable livelihoods. The partnership should promote **policy coherence, be rights-based, support transition out of and exclude any support for climate or environmentally harmful activities** including fossil fuels.

Just and inclusive green transition

Transformative change and equitable economic development cannot be achieved by actors working separately. Finding **sustainable integrated solutions that promote a green economy, protect biodiversity, and embrace a just transition for all** must be built upon **inclusive dialogue that brings people into each step of the decision-making process and enables co-creation of ambitious objectives**. The partnership should target civil society in particular youth, women, and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, through empowerment and engagement, as knowledge custodians and agents of change for a transition where **people and nature are a cornerstone of poverty reduction and economic development**.

Sustainable jobs and livelihoods

Ensuring socio-economic benefits from Africa's green and just transition are maximized for communities will require redrawing power relations and overcoming structural inequalities between the EU and Africa. The partnership should **protect existing jobs, support workforce expansion in transition fields, coordinate with industries and develop education and training**. This should include **100% decentralised renewable energy access, productive sectors to support sustainable livelihoods, transition out of fossil fuels, agroecology, resilient food systems, employment in circular economy, and investments in natural capital and sustainable conservation**. To this end, the EU should make an ambitious and time-bound financial commitment with strong safeguards against debt distress and improved access for SMEs, micro-level actors, and women's organizations.

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Theme: Governance, Peace and Security

Linking climate and conflict

While the convergence of climate change with conflict may lead to worsening violence and grave humanitarian situations, the response should not be securitized. Climate change mitigation/adaptation initiatives offer a triple nexus opportunity to work across conflict lines.

The EU, AU and MS should **systematise a conflict sensitive approach to climate change programming**, to ensure sound understanding of conflict impact; **systematise climate analysis**

in peace and security interventions, to ensure sound understanding of climate impact; **increase efforts to promote and respect IHL** regarding the protection of the natural environment and the people who depend on it to survive.

A people-centred approach to climate security

There will be no climate security without climate and gender justice. Power inequalities in multi-stakeholder spaces, and push-backs against inclusion means that the voices of women, youth and marginalised groups as rights-holders are at times silenced in the climate and conflict space. The EU, AU and MS should **centre conflict and resource management policies on local experiences and expertise** (e.g. traditional stewardship and mediation practices) - **including of women and youth; build climate funding mechanisms that targets communities most vulnerable** to climate change, including those affected by conflict, and that **strengthen local leadership and climate adaptation**.

Hard security or hardly secure?

A focus on “hard” security approaches, including narrow counterterror priorities—though sometimes delivering short-term, tactical security objectives— often fail to address root causes or local concerns and exacerbate community grievances, conflict dynamics and governance challenges. The EU, AU and Member States should prioritise proactive conflict prevention and **centre security actors’ role as providers of shared security and protection services to civilians, in inclusive, participatory and trust-based partnership** with civil society and communities themselves.

The violence of exclusion

Fragility, social inequality and debt are closely interlinked, and drive exclusion. Failure to meaningfully engage traditionally excluded actors have resulted in key challenges and opportunities not prioritised or even identified in time at best, or violence at worst. The AU, EU and Member States should **agree on concrete action and benchmarks to meaningfully include** women, youth, religious actors, people with disabilities and other undervalued groups in **the new architecture for peace and security (APSA) and governance (AGA)** - accounting for both their **specific protection needs and capacities** as change agents.