

Commissioner Urpilainen's dialogue with civil society organisations and local authorities ahead of the meeting of AU-EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Kigali


Online global meeting held 21 October 2021

Executive Summary

On the initiative of EU Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen, and in the framework of the Policy Forum on Development, civil society organisations (CSOs) and local authorities (LAs) discussed the future of EU-Africa relations. This meeting was held ahead of the meeting of AU-EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs convened on 26 October 2021 in Kigali, Rwanda, in the framework of the Africa-EU Partnership and in view of the next EU-AU Summit due to take place early next year.

The key messages stressed by civil society and local authority representatives in the dialogue were the need for ministers to focus on:

1. **People-first: a people-centred, not growth-oriented, recovery:** participants pointed out the need to put people-centred recovery in the centre of all actions, with a **human rights** approach. In the current context, strong emphasis was put on health as a top priority and strengthening health systems. There was agreement about investing also in universal social protection, education, decent job creation and a just transition.
2. **Inclusiveness:** ensuring active, meaningful and comprehensive participation of diverse civil society organisations and local authorities; securing representation for women, youth and children at all levels of decision-making. Meeting participants stressed a sense of **urgency** in the need for engaging civil society actors in this process, a strong desire to participate in consultations leading up to the summit itself (and Africa-Europe week) as well as a **recommendation for the establishment of a bi-continental civil society platform**. In addition to repeated emphasis on women, girls and youth, participants stressed the need to include groups who are often left out of such processes including indigenous people and local communities, faith-based organisations, small businesses and smallholder farmers.
3. **Room for more subsidiarity:** local responses and local economic development are essential to the recovery process. **Local adaptation is important for building community resilience** and will be key to target fall-out from the pandemic and limit and address future loss and damage from climate change. Local aspects are also fundamental to fostering peace and security by increasing resilience to climate change and scarce resources as well as inclusion of multiple actors at local level to support conflict resolution via dialogue.
4. **Pursuing a "just transition" towards a greener, interconnected world:** The **green and just transition** should **foster resilience**. Participants pointed out the urgency of protecting natural resources, biodiversity and finding nature-based solutions. Looking ahead, African and European partners are encouraged to take an inclusive and integrated approach to conservation and equitable economic development in Africa. Food security and nutrition were raised as pressing issues; therefore, sustainable and green economic models, with a focus on the sustainable food production models, particularly those based on agroecology, and with a social inclusion component, are needed for sustainable and resilient growth. As well, participants stressed the importance of realising the potential of digital technologies and ensuring digital literacy for women and girls. Digital technology can be leveraged to redesign critical global supply chains and strengthen sustainable value chains at both regional and continental levels.

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5. **Bringing about a more business-friendly climate:** The **business and investment environment** needs to be improved and **target inclusive, sustainable and green growth**. Investment should target SMEs, in alignment with SDG8 (economic growth and decent jobs), placing **worker's rights, social protection** and just transition at the heart of strategies. Challenges such as policy coherence, informal economy, weak governance and corruption, tax evasion and poor domestic resources mobilisation must be addressed to foster this investment climate.

Detailed report

I. Introduction and methodology

The meeting was opened by **Marlene Holzner** (Head of Unit of Local Authorities, Civil Society Organisations and Foundations), who welcomed participants stating that the European Commission was eager to hold a discussion on the Africa-EU Partnership following the adoption of the *March 2020 Joint Communication: Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa*. She added that Commissioner Urpilainen was particularly keen to sustain an open dialogue with civil society and local authorities around this topic.

In a video message addressing participants, **Commissioner Urpilainen** stated that the Covid-19 pandemic was a turning point which disrupted the status quo and magnified inequalities. This situation calls for a deepening of the partnership between the EU and Africa, based on ambitious goals: vaccine access, renewed attention to climate change, digitalisation and combatting inequalities. The EU is committed to building back better, in collaboration with youth, CSOs, LAs and the private sector. The Commissioner stated that the purpose of the meeting was to gather civil society organisations' and local authorities' input ahead of the ministerial meeting in Kigali.

The introduction was followed by a presentation by **Domenico Rosa** (Head of Unit, Strategic Partnerships with Africa and with ACP countries) who provided an update on the AU-EU Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting, followed by clarification questions (see section II).

The participants then moved into a plenary discussion, where speakers were encouraged to make contributions addressing four key questions (the same questions being debated by the ministers in Kigali). The respective contributions can be found under each question in section III of this report.

II. State of play on the AU-EU Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting and key issues at stake

Domenico Rosa (Head of Unit, Strategic Partnerships with Africa and with ACP countries) updated participants on the AU-EU Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting. He opened the presentation by stressing that the EC was keen to pursue the dialogue with CSOs and LAs, for which the ministerial meeting offered an opportunity.

Mr Rosa stated that while the *March 2020 Joint Communication: Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa* remains the EU's proposal for a reinvigorated Africa-EU Partnership, the pandemic has brought health and access to vaccines to the forefront of our agenda, together with other common challenges. The ministerial meeting, first opportunity for a physical meeting among EU and African partners at political level since the 2017 AU-EU summit, will be a chance to discuss common priorities and challenges.

Mr Rosa informed participants that the discussion at the ministerial meeting would centre on two joint discussion papers: **(1) Cooperation on mobilizing investments for African structural sustainable transformation and investing in people** (a focus on building back better) and **(2) Cooperation on strengthening resilience, peace, security and governance**.

Under the first theme, the focus will be on Africa and the EU's capacity to respond to the challenges of the 21st century, with three main lines of action:

1. People first – investing in human development – health, education and employment



- a. **Health:** Building resilient health systems; increasing capacity to respond swiftly to current and future health issues; increasing funding for healthcare systems in Africa and increasing local manufacturing of material and equipment.
 - b. **Education and employment:** Inclusive and quality education at all levels; better aligning skills and learning outcomes to labour market demand and new emerging sectors, in particular in digital, green and climate-friendly technologies.
2. **Strengthening the governance and business environment** by improving the regulatory environment (for economic activity and investment); increasing intra African trade and trade between Africa and the EU; and strengthening sustainable value chains at both regional and continental levels.
 3. **Critical economic sectors for a strengthened and sustainable recovery.** Key challenges to be tackled in a comprehensive way to ensure other priorities flourish, include sustainable energy access; sustainable transport solutions; digital transformation; research and innovation; and sustainable food systems development, environment and biodiversity.

With regards to the second theme, the focus will be on **addressing the impacts of the pandemic** (increase in conflicts, disruption of normal activities, postponement of elections, surge in human security threats), while strengthening resilience, fostering peace and security and improving governance. Looking ahead, it will be important to:

- Support African peace efforts and further integrate good governance, democracy, human rights, the rule of law and gender equality in action and cooperation
- Synchronise efforts in those fields and in preventing conflicts as prerequisite of socio-economic development
- Reinforce the nexus between peace, security, development and humanitarian spaces
- Strengthen political institutions to foster a culture of democracy and peace
- Reinforce partnerships and consider a multilateral approach

Mr Rosa closed the presentation by informing the participants that the questions which they are invited to input towards are also up for discussion in the ministerial meeting.

Participants were then invited to pose **clarifying questions** ahead of the plenary discussions. Participants welcomed the consultation process and the EU's engagement with civil society organisations. They asked if a similar consultation process would be held by the EU with African and European civil society; if the process would be improved in the future to provide more time for input; if the EU would sponsor a bi-continental civil society forum, given its existing engagement to organise a business forum; and if feedback from the current meeting would be passed onto the Commissioner in time for her trip to Kigali. Mr Rosa stressed the political commitment to dialogue which the current meeting illustrated. He confirmed that a civil society forum was foreseen ahead of the EU-AU Summit next year, for which the EU would provide logistical support. Finally, he confirmed that Commissioner Urpilainen would receive the conclusions of the discussions and take them into consideration before addressing the ministers in Kigali.

The floor was then opened for a **plenary discussion**, centred around four questions.

III. Plenary recommendations from CSOs and LAs according to the four guiding questions

Question 1) How can the EU and Africa work together to strengthen human capital and contribute to more prosperous, inclusive and resilient societies?

Participants urged the EU to adopt a **human rights** perspective when considering this question, pointing out that shrinking space for civil society is an issue both in Europe and in Africa. They called for EU-Africa relations to build human rights into all five partnerships and explicitly affirm the role of civil society and human rights defenders in shaping EU-Africa relations; create an enabling environment for civil society and address an increasing crackdown on



human rights defenders; prioritise collaboration at multilateral human rights fora and act in defence of crucial human rights gains at multilateral level. They stressed that the EU should support and promote civic space and fundamental freedoms, take a comprehensive and intersectional approach to gender justice and invest in the promotion of good governance to eradicate corruption. In addition, participants stressed the need to address **humanitarian issues** (e.g., internally displaced persons, the protection of humanitarian space, the humanitarian impact of climate change, the protection of migrants) to strengthen the resilience of populations.

With regards to **migration and mobility**, participants urged the EU to approach it as a tool for sustainable development and promoting prosperity in Africa, with a focus on creating sustainable solutions that address local and regional challenges around democratic processes and the rule of law, socio-economic development, youth engagement, gender equality, climate change and access to services. They stressed that migration policy must be human rights based and consider the agreements reached under the Global Compact for Migration and Global Compact for Refugees, such as implementing measures to advance refugee rights and enhance self-reliance. They urged the expansion of mobility schemes for labour migration including for low-skilled workers, diaspora engagement, facilitating family reunification, implementing AU and ECOWAS free movement agreements and for an increase in the resettlement of refugees from Africa to Europe. In addition, safe legal pathways and dedicated search and rescue operations to end the loss of life at sea should be set up.

Participants urged for greater **engagement with civil society** and increased policy making transparency. In particular, marginalised groups such as women, children and youth, small-scale producers, the urban poor and indigenous peoples should be included into meaningful consultations. African partners are invited to increase the numbers of women in positions of power and use GAP III to demonstrate the advantages of the gender transformative approach for creating resilient societies and the digital transformation. To engage young people, permanent spaces for dialogue and direct exchange between young Africans and Europeans should be created. Finally, Team Europe Initiatives should be elaborated in a transparent and inclusive process to ensure that these flagship programmes contribute to human development and poverty reduction.

Calls for greater **local level engagement** were made, with the EU urged to reinforce human capital by investing in local projects to build stronger, more resilient societies; and recognising the unique position of local authorities as autonomous political entities with a democratic mandate to develop local public policies.

Participants urged the EU to promote **investment in public services** as key in strengthening the human capital of Africa, paving the way to prosperous and inclusive African societies. **Health** was a key priority area, with participants urging the EU have a dedicated pillar on it, to take a One Health approach and push for universal health coverage (UHC) to prepare the continent for future health crises, including through domestic resource mobilisation. In the short term, the EU was urged to address the ongoing pandemic, including through ensuring equitable access to vaccines, which could be aided by issuing waivers on vaccine patents. Others stressed the importance of addressing the mental health challenges brought about by the pandemic and the technology transfers and other forms of capacity enhancement which will be crucial to building resilient health systems in the long-term. Participants urged the EU to adopt a multi-sectoral and human rights-based approach to health – including sexual and reproductive health and rights and global health research and investment. Strengthening community-based epidemiological surveillance and first aid, supporting emergency preparedness and response approaches to health crises were also stressed as key contributors to reducing the unmet needs of vulnerable or marginalised groups. **Education** was highlighted as another priority area, especially in view of the impact of the pandemic. The EU was urged to promote inclusive education, support the innovative and creative capacities of young rural Africans and approach youth training as a driver of change. However, some participants wondered how the EU's intention to support the resilience and quality of health and education systems could be realised at a pan-African level in cooperation with the AU on systems that are the responsibility of national governments and how these will be translated into concrete actions within national indicative programmes and Team Europe Initiatives.

It was pointed out that introducing a global tax regulatory framework and supporting efforts to mobilise domestic resources will allow African governments to support universal **social protection** and reinforce safety nets. The EU and AU should address structural inequalities, including gender inequalities and meet or exceed funding commitments beyond 20% for human development. Participants also called for a new social contract for Africa, with a focus on



workers' rights, social inclusion, decent work and respect for the climate. Establishing floors that include income guarantees and ensuring access to housing, water and sanitation and food security is paramount. Strengthening child-sensitive social services should be promoted as a cornerstone of cross-sectoral Team Europe Initiatives in Africa, with children and their caregivers identified as key targets.

Participants suggested that to go towards reaching these objectives, the EU must provide support to **agriculture**, in particular supporting family farms in adapting to climate change, engaging in an exchange of technological know-how and promoting local production through sustainable agri-food systems and environmentally friendly agricultural practices. It would be beneficial to involve farmers' organizations in the partnership at all levels. In particular, participants stressed the need to support women smallholder farmers and those who struggle with energy access.

The EU was urged to invest in a **green and just transition** as well as **nature based solutions** to build the resilience of societies and their prosperity. To do this, the EU should build awareness and capacity of youth groups to engage in conservation and provide support to youth-led innovative conservation initiatives. Participants further called for the EU to support African governments and local populations in tackling biodiversity loss and environmental degradation through the implementation of the upcoming Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) as well as relevant capacity building and technical and scientific cooperation, technology transfer and innovation. As part of strengthening communities' resilience, loss and damage due to climate change should also be addressed.

Question 2) Within the scope of priorities of Africa and the EU, how can both practically support the critical economic sectors for a sustained economic recovery and increased investment and trade?

Participants stressed that **local economic development** will be an essential element in the post-pandemic recovery process, as cross-continental value chains must be strengthened, beginning with local businesses. They called for the EU to support regional and intercontinental integration, specifically the African continental free trade area, to improve intra-African trade and harmonise trade between the two continents for economic growth and the creation of decent jobs. In addition, facilitating private investments will ensure that value is created locally with techniques and competences being shared between Europe and Africa. Finally, participants called for a specific reference to sustainable and resilient business models such as cooperatives to be made under discussions on private sector support.

To promote an enabling environment for businesses to start and grow, participants stressed the importance of **local governments**; they will also play a key role in the recovery process by strengthening value chains and ensuring local economic development. The importance of strengthening **democratic and participatory governance** and EU support to AU mechanisms and civil society initiatives was also underlined.

Participants called on the EU to ensure policy coherence to avoid prioritising e.g., trade interests over development; rather, the EU should invest in sustainable, inclusive and green growth. While improving the investment climate and business environment was seen as an important goal, attracting foreign direct investments (FDIs) should not be the sole focus and the **private sector** should be expected to demonstrate that the support provided to their investments from the External Action Guarantee and the European Fund for Sustainable Development achieves concrete SDG indicators and is aligned with SDG 8 in particular. Participants called for strategies for sustained economic recovery to be fully owned by local actors and policy reforms to be designed in close dialogue with local stakeholders including trade unions, women entrepreneurs, cooperatives, farmer organisations and any other CSO and LA actors concerned. Grassroots community enterprises, cooperatives, and SMEs and start-ups should be supported given their ability to bring marginalised parts of the community into the work force and should be able to benefit from the External Action Guarantee.

The establishment of a friendly business environment and an adequate investment climate should be accompanied by a **just transition** characterised by improved labour rights and environmental standards. Participants called on the EU to push for the formalization of the informal economy, in which women and youth are overrepresented, on the basis of ILO recommendation 204. As current rural infrastructure is insufficient to allow the conditions for sustainable economic recovery, implementing a public and private investment policy is crucial, in addition to fair and progressive taxation systems. Social dialogue should be at the heart of the development and implementation of all policies, to



ensure compliance with freedom of association, collective bargaining and the right to organize (ILO Conventions 87 and 98). Finally, participants called for investment in entrepreneurial and financial skills development for women, green skills transition, green jobs creation and partnerships for a digital and data transformation.

A critical economic sector in need of EU support was identified as the **renewable energy sector**, which participants stressed must be democratic and inclusive of grassroots and women's organisations. They also called on the EU to support stronger environmental and human rights safeguards within national planning processes to ensure that energy and infrastructure developments avoid damaging ecosystems. The need for genuine partnership with regards to the EU-Africa green energy initiative and in providing sustainable capital for climate-friendly investments was also stressed.

With regards to **agriculture and the food sector**, participants called for support to be channelled into promoting sustainable consumption and production while promoting economic models that ensure fairer prices and better incomes for consumers and producers. Africa should be supported in achieving its ambitions for nutrition and food security, especially through the AU's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). Participants urged the EU to shift its policy and investment focus to strengthening local markets and short supply chains and sustainable food production initiatives which support diversified, ecologically and socially sustainable food production models. In particular, the potential of agroecology and its track record of success in producing food with low input costs, creating jobs for youth, providing healthy diets, and making farming communities more resilient to shocks was underlined. Participants stressed the need to support smallholder farmers, especially women and youth, who are not likely to be reached by private financing and who need support to increase their production and access markets; smallholder farmers should also be involved in ongoing consultation processes. Finally, participants called for development funding to sustainable food production to be increased and aligned with initiatives such as the Maputo and Malabo Declarations.

Question 3) How can the EU and Africa improve and focus their cooperation more for economic recovery?

To tackle energy access problems, climate goals, and inequalities requires a **comprehensive approach** combining the application of renewable technologies and a focus on sectors as diverse as agriculture and forestry, digital technologies, energy, oil and gas, infrastructure, water and sanitation, tourism and conservation. Participants stressed that green and just recovery packages provide good prospects for decent job creation, reduce exposure to future impacts of climate change and increase economic productivity thanks to providing renewable energy in rural communities. In addition, many impacts of a green recovery would have long term health benefits for populations; protecting natural habitats would reduce the likelihood of future pandemic threats.

Participants stressed the need for commitments to supporting dedicated **adaptation and resilience programmes**, including addressing loss and damage issues that result from climate change. They urged the EU to call for national adaptation plans to make commitments on infrastructure and investments in resilience.

Participants further suggested a need to strengthen the focus on youth, children and women who are the pillars of African growth in the future and today are the most affected by poverty, malnutrition and conflicts. The EU was urged to provide **support for women's sustainable energy initiatives** in the form of small-scale individual or community-owned off-grid projects as well as efforts and mechanisms for tackling inequalities within and between communities, countries and regions. Strengthening the capacities of CSOs, especially women's organisations, to enhance the intersectional and gender analysis of macroeconomic policy would also contribute to boosting recovery. The issue of industrial farming and sponsored legislation pushing for genetically modified seeds affecting **communities' right to exercise their faith** when it is linked to nature was also brought up, calling on the EU to urge the recognition of communities' right to exercise their beliefs. Finally, **decentralising power** including budget resources, skilled staff, and capable managers to the district and county levels was stressed as essential for a swift recovery.

Question 4) How can EU and Africa deepen their partnership in the field of peace and security, especially in the regions where tensions and vulnerabilities are the highest?



To support **peace and security**, the EU was urged ensure that the peace support operations and capacity building actions promote conflict prevention and human security as a primary objective and focus on supporting civilian conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities. Any assistance to African security forces should be conditional on anti-corruption measures, gender sensitivity, human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL) compliance, and the existence of robust mechanisms for civilians to report abuses. Participants emphasised the critical importance of conflict sensitivity, and addressing the linkages between democracy, inclusive governance and peace, including for health issues. They called on the EU to ensure that linkages between humanitarian, development, peace, and security efforts be context-specific and consistent with humanitarian principles and development cooperation objectives. Finally, the strengthening of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) was called for.

Participants urged a deeper **decentralised peace cooperation between regions and cities** to support exchanges of knowledge and expertise, capacity-building, and improvements of local and regional governance. They stressed that localised capacity building in the field of peace and security responses is key to ensure that regional responses are activated when a crisis situation occurs. They further called for a specific plan to respond to the humanitarian, peace and security crisis in the Sahel by adopting an integrated and inclusive approach with a focus on the protection of civilians, access to basic services such as education and health, and upholding the rights of children in armed conflict.


The EU was urged to recognise the **linkages between the climate crisis, peace and conflict**, and address them. The lack of access to **food** in a conflict situation was also stressed, as well as the need to mainstream support to **gender equality** and include concrete short- and medium-term commitments for the implementation of the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda. The issue of **land grabs** in creating tensions affecting peace and migration was brought up, with participants calling on the EU to put an end to the financing of large-scale land acquisition projects, corporate agribusiness operations, and speculative investments by public development banks.

Finally, participants called for the EU to guarantee the active, meaningful and inclusive **participation of diverse civil society** in discussions on peace and security and in the monitoring of peace and security activities, including peace support operations. In particular, women, youth and children, faith-based organisations (FBOs), religious leaders and local communities should be more engaged on peace and security topics; their organisations should also be financially supported.

IV. Concluding remarks

Concluding remarks were then delivered by PFD and INTPA representatives. Speaking on behalf of the PFD as a CSO representative, **Tanya Cox from CONCORD** urged the foreign ministers meeting in Kigali to focus on prosperity and wellbeing for people and planet. She stressed that humans are not 'capital' and that the economy does not exist without them. To create prosperous, resilient societies, there is a need to go beyond a focus on creating jobs and centre on the needs of people. Ms Cox urged a discussion on how to best support African industrial development and the African free trade area in order to move away from the colonial model of exporting raw martial and importing processed consumer goods. She noted that this will require a long-term strategic vision and reforms that go to the very heart of the system which currently works in favour of the EU. Ms Cox concluded that foreign ministers will need to focus on the balance of power, the context and the relationship between the EU and AU to create a true partnership.

Speaking on behalf of the PFD as a LA representative, **Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi from United Cities and Local Governments-Africa** stressed that the pandemic is far from being over and combatting it is the first priority. He suggested that the focus must therefore be on healthcare, including prevention and prioritising the health of the environment. Secondly, efforts must be directed towards the development of human resources, leveraging the potential of African youth and promoting a new social contract based on decent work, local economic development, and a climate and energy transition. Mr Mbassi stressed the need to end Africa's dependence on the global market, in particular for food and essential services. He further underlined the need to involve all actors in discussions on peace and security, cooperating with civil society to prevent conflicts and ensure post conflict management and treating migration as a development issue.



Domenico Rosa, Head of Unit, Strategic Partnerships with Africa and with ACP countries, thanked participants for their input and stated that it largely aligned with EU positions when it comes to focusing the recovery on green issues and human development. He stressed that the consultation exercise demonstrated the willingness of Commissioner Urpilainen to maintain an ongoing discussion with civil society. **Marlene Holzner**, Head of Unit of Local Authorities, Civil Society Organisations and Foundations thanked the participants and closed the meeting.