INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION IN HORIZON EUROPE:

A NEW APPROACH TO PARTNERING WITH AFRICA

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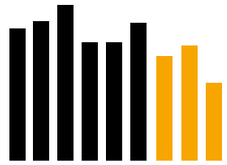
EU's new strategy with Africa & the role of R&I in the EU-Africa relationship

There is increased high level attention to EU-Africa relations and the current political leadership of the European Commission has prioritised upgrading the partnership with Africa.

In its communication towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa, the European Commission (EC) envisages working with Africa "to tackle together the challenges of the 21st century and to further our common interests and future."[1] Amongst the many areas of enhanced partnership foreseen in the strategy is an "EU-Africa academic and scientific cooperation."[2] This ambition should be given a substantive backing in the chapter on international research and innovation (R&I) cooperation within the upcoming Communication on the Future of Research and Innovation and European Research Area.

R&I is a crucial, effective and accepted driver for sustainable development and economic growth. The EU is a strong promoter of R&I in Europe and internationally and a valuable partner to low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), which are automatically eligible to receive funding from the EU's R&I framework programme.[3] Against the backdrop of the Covid-19 outbreak, the importance of international R&I cooperation and indeed the need for more international cooperation has once again been highlighted.

International R&I collaboration in particular with LMICs has decreased:



Funding for third countries[4] participation, especially from LMICs, has decreased in the current programme, Horizon 2020 (H2020). Data provided by the "Roadmap for EU-African Union S&T cooperation"[5] from 2018 suggests that four years into the H2020 programme the number of entities from African Union member countries involved in collaborative research projects had decreased compared to the previous framework programme, FP7[6]. Moreover, much of the emphasis of H2020 and of the future programme, Horizon Europe, is squarely geared towards industrialised and emerging countries.[7]

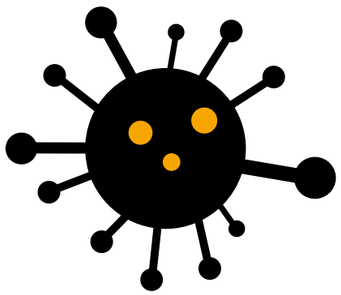
[1] Cf. European Commission Joint Communication "Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa" (March, 2020), available at: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/communication-eu-africa-strategy-join-2020-4-final_en.pdf
[2] Cf. European Commission (2020) / [3] The list of LMICs eligible for funding is updated every two years and annexed to the H2020 work programmes.
[4] Non-Eu, non-Horizon associated countries. / [5] Cf. European Commision: "Roadmap for EU-African Union S&T cooperation" (2018), available at: https://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/policy/africanunion_roadmap_2018.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none
[6] Cf. European Commission (2018), p.4 / [7] Cf. ECDPM (2019): "Refresh and Reload", p.8, available at: https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL_DP256-RI-II-.pdf

The EU's approach to international collaboration in R&I fails to identify Africa as a key partner:

The EU's eight year old strategy for international collaboration in R&I[8] aims to "complement the Union's external policies" in "developing countries" but does not identify Africa, and LMICs in general, as key R&I partners, nor acknowledges the potential contributions of their research and innovations to EU development and foreign policy objectives. The strategy mentions the aim "to contribute to the sustainable development of these regions and address challenges", referring to the "Millennium Development Goals and their possible successors".

However, the accompanying staff working document[9] does not include any indicators to measure progress on these objectives. As a consequence, the biennial implementation reports on the strategy do not provide information on R&I collaboration with developing countries, nor on the progress on the above mentioned set objectives.

Research priorities need rethinking after the COVID-19 outbreak:



- Health R&I needs to be a priority area for international collaboration in science, technology and innovation (STI). Infectious diseases do not respect borders and rapid response requires joint efforts to pool expertise and resources and allow for timely information sharing.

- The orientations document to the first strategic plan for Horizon Europe acknowledges that the "EU benefits from high visibility, leadership and standing in international fora on global health and global health security, especially in partnership with Africa"[10], which offers a great opportunity for increased collaboration in this area.

[8] Cf. EC communication on "Enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation: A strategic approach" (2012), available at: https://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/policy/com_2012_497_communication_from_commission_to_inst_en.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none
[9] Cf. European Commission: "Staff Working Document accompanying the Communication from the Commission 'Enhancing and Focusing EU International Cooperation in Research and Innovation: A Strategic Approach'" (2012), available at: https://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/policy/staff_working_paper_com_2012_497.pdf
[10] Cf. European Commission (2019): Orientations towards the first Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/research_and_innovation/strategy_on_research_and_innovation/documents/ec_rtd_orientations-he-strategic-plan_122019.pdf

Now is a good time to "refresh and reload" the approach to partnering in R&I with Africa:

- The new leadership in office, Commission president Ursula von der Leyen chose to visit the African Union for her first trip abroad, acknowledging that "It was a natural choice, as the **EU and Africa are natural partners**,"[11] and the communication "Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa" includes a proposed action to enhance the research and innovation partnership.[12]

- **The next EU R&I framework programme, Horizon Europe, is in the making**, and implementation should start in 2021. It should be guided by an EU strategy for international collaboration in R&I that is up to date, and that acknowledges the critical importance of EU-Africa collaboration in this field.

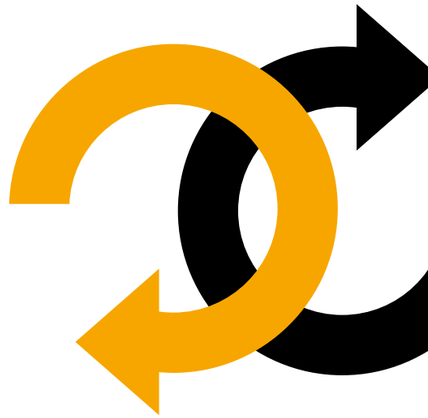
- There are a number of **success stories in EU-Africa R&I cooperation**, such as the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP), which has supported the development of life-saving interventions, and whose successor programme is currently under negotiation.

- Covid-19 has clearly shown the **need for effective and deep R&I collaboration globally**, and particularly with regions that Europe has a strategic connection such as Africa.

- Large parts of Africa have experienced **transformative development** in recent years, providing an important opportunity for new partnerships between Europe and Africa in strategic areas such as R&I. **Stability and job creation** in Africa depend to a large extent on endogenous factors such as quality education, R&I systems and thriving innovative enterprises, which can be encouraged by international cooperation with the EU and others.[13]

- The international environment for collaboration on STI is increasingly competitive. China, India, Russia, and the United States have all increased engagement with Africa in recent years. If the EU fails to recognise African research excellence, its potential for innovation and the value of international collaboration based on common goals, **the risk is that Europe will fall behind in relevance and also knowledge.**[14]

- The final orientation document towards the strategic plan that will guide programming of Horizon Europe recognises that "Africa will contribute the most to a rising population until 2050 and is a continent of opportunities where decentralised, digitally enabled solutions are flourishing". The rapid growth of the African population offers huge development opportunities, but **empowering a generation of young Africans** to build sustainable livelihoods requires substantially increasing the educational capacity of universities, including at the postgraduate level.[15]

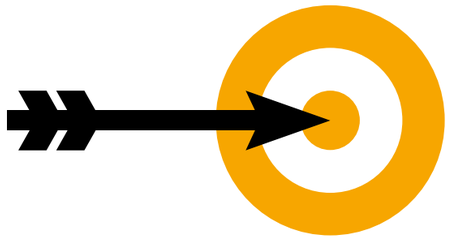


[11] Cf. Opening statement by President von der Leyen at the 10th EU-AU Commission-to-Commission meeting plenary session, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_20_342
[12] Cf. European Commission (2020) / [13] Cf. ECDPM (2019), p.3 / [14] Cf. ECDPM (2019), p.2
[15] Cf. The Guild of European Research Intensive Universities (2020): Developing equal, mutually beneficial partnerships with African universities: Recommendations for a new European collaboration strategy, available at: https://www.the-guild.eu/publications/insight-paper-one

Recommendations towards the upcoming EC communication on the future of the European Research Area and international R&I collaboration:

CLEAR OBJECTIVES AND INDICATORS

- **The communication should set clear objectives on R&I collaboration with LMICs**, importantly with Africa, focussing on addressing societal challenges, contributing to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and prioritising research areas neglected by for-profit sector investments.
- **The strategy needs to aim at increased international collaboration on health R&I**, in particular with Africa, to better anticipate, prevent, and deal with infectious disease outbreaks such as the current Covid-19, and to address the continuously high burden of poverty-related and neglected infectious diseases in sub-Saharan Africa.
- **The accompanying monitoring and evaluation framework needs to include indicators** to assess the progress towards the SDGs and the objectives on collaboration with LMICs, and importantly Africa. It should also foresee comprehensive reporting on the progress within biennial implementation reports.



A NEW APPROACH TO PARTNERING WITH AFRICA

- Bi-regional collaboration would benefit from a **politically strong agenda** endorsed by African countries, regional economic communities, and the African Union (AU).[16]
- The EU communication should include a **recognition of the innovations that are taking place in Africa** and of the contribution that collaboration with African partners could bring to global challenges, including and beyond the development of the continent.[17]
- **More demand-driven and locally relevant research** could be built on wider and more timely engagement with African actors. This would be in line with the spirit of the Joint Africa EU Strategy (JAES) and the Horizon Europe proposal for co-creating and co-designing some aspects of the programmes with society, including in strategic programming and specific projects.[18]
- **The commitment of AU member states to spend 1% of their national GDP** on STI remains unmet. The EU could help to raise the profile of R&I among African policy-makers, giving visibility to EU–Africa collaboration, showcasing successes and the contribution of such work to foster progress in Africa and beyond.[19]
- **The Communication should acknowledge the variety of actors that exist in the R&I space** in Africa and Europe and aim at leveraging this variety by better catering to the needs of the different actors, e.g. through increased support of networking, seed funding, etc..
- **Beyond regional level collaboration**, the EU should identify selected opportunities to work bilaterally with African countries based on common goals and interests, in collaboration with EU delegations and potentially member states.

[16] Cf. ECDPM (2019), p.3f / [17] Cf. ECDPM (2019), p.8 / [18] Cf. ECDPM (2019), p.8
[19] Cf. ECDPM (2019) / [20] Cf. ECDPM (2019) / [21] Cf. ECDPM (2019), p.9–10

INCREASED R&I COLLABORATION WITH AFRICA

- **The strategy should aim to enhance the collaboration with Africa** in all Horizon Europe clusters through targeted calls in the work programmes and fostering collaboration with and integration of African countries into R&I Partnerships and Missions.
- **R&I cooperation between European and African companies** should be fostered, for example through the European Innovation Council instruments of Horizon Europe. Europe can benefit from harnessing innovations happening in Africa and create a mutually beneficial partnership.
- **Enhance African researchers' participation in bottom up research activities** including targeted Marie Skłodowska Curie actions and European Research Council grants. Measures should also include expanded joint African-European doctoral and postdoctoral programmes for African researchers such as the African Union Research Grants.
- **Increase collaboration on health R&I to jointly address the burden of poverty-related and neglected infectious diseases** and other emerging infectious diseases to better prevent catastrophic outcomes of ongoing and future epidemics. The successor programme to the successful EDCTP therefore needs to be equipped with an increased budget, more visibility and political support.
- The EU should complement the clinical research activities of EDCTP by broadening its collaboration on health research with LMICs to also **foster more broadly fundamental research**.
- Increased collaboration through R&I programmes should go hand-in-hand with an **increased focus at DG DEVCO** on supporting the development of research infrastructure and funding to support the development of more centres of excellence in the health sector in Africa.

SYNERGIES WITH OTHER PROGRAMMES AND MEMBER STATE ACTIVITIES

- The strategy should foster **a more concerted approach between the EU institutions and member states**. Member states have a large presence in Africa but EU-wide coordination or even information exchange on R&I is limited.[20] Improved coordination is essential to raise the profile of Europe in R&I and could strengthen its added value as R&I partner compared to other players.
- The strategy should also **facilitate complementarities among EU, AU and member states R&I initiatives**, including those financed with official development assistance (e.g. the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument NDICI) and private development investments (e.g. the Africa-Europe Alliance for sustainable investment and jobs).
- **Synergies between the future NDICI and Horizon Europe** could be deepened, the former with a focus on development-enhancing actions; the latter maintaining its principles of openness and research excellence. Together, they should have a clear focus on SDGs, global challenges and building stronger partnerships between Europe and Africa. The profile of R&I related activities in DG DEVCO should be raised.[21]

Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW) is a global development organisation committed to creating demand for and access to health information, services, supplies, and economic empowerment for youth. We achieve this by engaging in advocacy, capacity development, and reproductive health initiatives, so that young people are empowered to lead healthy and selfdetermined lives. DSW also advocates for investment in research and innovation to fight poverty-related and neglected tropical diseases.

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