



CONCEPT NOTE

Science Advise for Policy

Introduction and background

Over last 30 years, the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (JRC) has been intensively working with African national partners, the African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Communities on providing scientific knowledge for policymakers in Europe and Africa, working on African policy issues and collaborating with African researchers. This knowledge has been summarised in the flagship report *Science for the AU-EU Partnership: Building knowledge for sustainable development*¹. The report clearly identifies the science-policy interaction as an area of particular importance in developing Africa's capacity to promote Science, technology and innovation (STI).

Capacity building for new skills and competences on evidence for policymaking is a concrete step in implementing the common strategic priority *Investing in people – education, science, technology and skills development*, as defined by the EU and African leaders in the joint Declaration at the 5th African Union –EU Summit, held in Abidjan, in 2017². Development of governments' capacities to use scientific knowledge for better policymaking and better governance is a key pre-condition for the achievement of the Agenda 2063³ goals, as well as the SDGs, the AU-EU Partnership⁴ and the Africa-Europe Alliance⁵. Aware of the importance of evidence-based policymaking for development, and to strengthen Africa's capacity to use STI towards the objectives of Agenda 2063, the African Heads of States and Government created the African Observatory of Science, Technology and Innovation (AOSTI), a technical office of the AUC, with the mission to champion evidence-based science, technology and innovation policymaking in Africa. Since its creation, AOSTI continues to engage the AU Member States, RECs, African parliaments (national and regional) and key partners including the European Union, and UNESCO Institute of Statistics among others for the collection, management and dissemination of STI indicators and policy instruments, and for STI advocacy in Africa.

The support to capacity building and skills development in Africa is confirmed as key in the partnership for sustainable growth and jobs of the new EU Strategy on Africa⁶.

The current Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the crucial role of scientific advice in designing national and regional responses to crises. Besides its support to EU evidence-informed decision making in the immediate response to Covid 19 and the definition of post-crisis recovery strategies,

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/science-au-eu-partnership>

² <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2017/11/29-30/>

³ <https://au.int/en/documents/20141012/key-documents-agenda2063>

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0004&from=FR>

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/state-union-speeches/state-union-2018/state-union-2018-africa_en

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/communication-eu-africa-strategy-join-2020-4-final_en.pdf

the JRC is currently engaged in enhancing the African capacities to respond to Covid-19 by actively supporting scientific networks throughout the continent.

The African Ministers in charge of Education, Science and technology in their Extra-Ordinary Session on 30 April 2020, strongly underscored the need for rapid responses from all disciplines of science, technology and innovation and deploy novel approaches to combat COVID-19 underpinned by evidence based policies and scientific advice for decision-making. This should be the hallmark practices for both current and future pandemics, and urged African institutions to join the entire world in the co-creation of knowledge and generation of cures, vaccines, new treatments, diagnostic tests and medical preventive systems among others.

The EU CBRN Centres of Excellence (CoE) Initiative, coordinated by the JRC, has been providing training and technical equipment to field epidemiologists, virology laboratories and technicians, infectious disease doctors, medical zoologists and entomologists whilst also supporting the development of partner countries' outreach capacity to provide diagnostics, sequencing, health medical (vaccination...) and non- medical (health promotion, social mobilization) services. Three interconnected projects are running in 5 CoE regions, among which the African Atlantic Façade, and North Africa and Sahel.

JRC is also actively supporting African Research Institutions on Water Science. In the short term, the project "Healthcare and WASH vs COVID-19 outbreak in Africa" is providing the capacities and technology to analyse the potential vulnerability of African countries to COVID-19 and the virus potential expansion due to weak Healthcare and WASH systems. There are similar action at MS level as Palop-4-Covid 19 (<https://www.ciencialp.pt/palop-4-covid-19/>) Longer-term assistance is being provided to develop capacities at technical and middle management level and for the post-pandemic assessments.

The above Covid-19-related experiences are confirming the importance of ensuring that decisions are based on scientific evidence, in both designing short-term responses as well as robust and resilient economic, social and health policies and systems in the post-pandemic reality. They also provide further evidence to the results of the JRC capacity building seminars organised in 2018 with African and other international partners for 140 best young or mid-career African scientists and policymakers.

Objectives

Based on the seminars' participants feedback and on the JRC's and African partners' knowledge and experience there appears to be both sufficient demand from African scientists and policymakers for further support to evidence for policy and sufficient skills within the Commission and partner organisations to set up an **Evidence for Policy Centre (EPC) in Africa**.

The EPC objective is to go beyond the knowledge sharing approach by supporting and facilitating the development of Africa-based and owned decision-support tools, skills and competences of scientists and policy makers on national and regional level. This is of particular interest with a view of ensuring evidence-based design of post Covid-19 health, social and economic policies.

The EPC would be primarily established as an on-line platform, led by joint African-EU consortia of partners, that would, with time, also lead and develop African made and placed skills, tools and competences for increased up-take of scientific evidence in policy making, as well as organise trainings events, peer-to-peer support and guidance and manage the growing community of practitioners. This will be well-aligned and o integrated within the African Observatory for Science, Technology and Innovation (AOSTI) of the AUC to ensure long-term ownership, operationality and sustainability as AOSTI is a continental repository for Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) statistics and indicators, and a source of policy analysis in support of evidence- based policymaking in Africa.

The focus of EPC's work would be providing general support and advice to African governments, regional institutions and scientists on evidence for policy and on specific policy priorities set by African governments according to their policy and societal challenges. Support would be available to both improve the up-take of scientific evidence in government but also to enhance the supply of evidence and to evaluate impact.

The established centre should serve as a focus point connecting African scientists and policymakers to global Evidence & Policy networks and resources, including helping them with access to pay walled research and attend international events. This will, among other things, encourage, support and ensure coordination and synergies with other evidence for policy cooperation projects/programmes.

In the realisation of the initial phase of the EPC, the following African partners have been identified: *International Government Science Advice Network (INGSA)*⁷, *Africa Evidence Network (AEN)*⁸, the African Observatory for Science, Technology and Innovation (AOSTI) of the AUC, *Africa Centre for Evidence (ACE)*⁹, *AUDA-NEPAD - African Union Development Agency*¹⁰, *INASP*¹¹ and the *African Academy of Science*¹². In the design and delivery of the pilot Member States including *Department of Science and Technology South Africa (DST)*¹³ has supported the initiative.

Funding

At the initial stage, the core administrative and project funding would need to be ensured from the EU Development and EU Neighbourhood policy initiatives, as well as EU R&I funding facilities. The long-term aim should however be the proportionate financial involvement of African partners.

A coherent pan-African approach to EPC must be ensured and closely coordinated between different Commission services. As a result, a sound, complete and coherent proposal for the EPC in Africa (encompassing its objectives, tasks and responsibilities, as well as its form and possible financial construction) should be prepared. In achieving this objective, the cooperation between the four DGs – DEVCO, NEAR, RTD and JRC – is crucial. This is of extreme importance in the light of the future Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF).

⁷ <http://www.ingsa.org/chapters/ingsa-africa>

⁸ <http://www.africaevidencenetwork.org>

⁹ <https://africacentreforevidence.org>

¹⁰ <https://www.nepad.org>

¹¹ <http://www.inasp.info/en>

¹² <https://www.aasciences.africa>

¹³ <https://www.dst.gov.za>