



AU–EU Innovation Festival, 15 June 2023 – Cape Town, South Africa Report

The first ever African Union (AU) - European Union (EU) Innovation Festival took place on 15 June 2023 in Cape Town, South Africa, and online. Hosted by the EU, the AU, and the Republic of South Africa, this event took place in the backdrop of the process of adoption of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda and in follow-up of the success of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda stakeholder event which took place in Nairobi (and online) in November 2022.

The Festival was jointly opened at high-level by the European Commission and South Africa's Department of Science and Innovation, followed by high-level addresses by South Africa's Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, the EU's Ambassador to South Africa, the African Union Commissioner and AUDA-NEPAD. In due course the festival further facilitated an informative overview presentation of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda and provided a vibrant platform for showcasing and discussing innovations in the context of the joint political priorities and cooperation in the fields of Public Health, Green Transition, Technology and Innovation as well as Capacities for Science.

The Festival attracted in total more than 450 participants from both Africa and Europe. Sector-wise the most represented sector of participants' background was higher education and research, followed by start-ups and incubators, private sector, governments and non-governmental and civil society organisations.

The outcomes of the Festival would guide the translation of R&I into tangible products, services, businesses and jobs, and thus contribute to the implementation of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda.

The Festival's [recording](#) (password: Aueuinovationfair#23!) and [presentations](#) are accessible online.

High-level opening

Under the moderation of **Ms Nienke Buisman**, European Commission's Deputy Director for International Cooperation in Research and Innovation (R&I) at Directorate-General Research & Innovation (R&I), and **Dr Monica Ebele Idinoba**, African Union Commission's Principal Scientific Officer, Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, all participants in Cape Town and online were welcomed to the first edition of the AU-EU Innovation Festival. The high-level attendance of the Festival and the value of the long-standing cooperation between the two continents in R&I were well acknowledged.

The first opening remarks were made by **Ms Maria Cristina Russo**, European Commission's Director for International Cooperation, at DG R&I. Ms Russo highlighted the fact that the Festival built on the success of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda Stakeholder Event of November 2022 and remarked the joint

needs and gaps that the AU-EU Innovation Agenda aims to address. She further informed the audience on the ongoing process of adoption of the final version of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda which, once adopted, from the EU side will be supported by the Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package as well as Horizon Europe. Furthermore, dedicated workshops would follow in the short run, to support the implementation of the Agenda. One key focus in this regard would be the empowerment of youth and women in innovation and entrepreneurship, which is also the focus of the Festival (with two dedicated Agora sessions). Ms Russo then emphasised that the EU will continue to work closely together with the AU and AU Member States for mutual ownership and benefits, making this a “Positive Agenda” for all.

Ms Russo’s intervention was followed by Mr **Daan Du Toit**, Deputy Director-General for International Cooperation and Resources at the South Africa Department of Science and Innovation (DSI). Mr Du Toit emphasised the strong bond between the Republic of South Africa and the AU. The participation to the Festival of South Africa’s Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, H.E. Dr Blade Nzimande, a champion for global partnerships, underpinned the importance of innovation cooperation and strongly supported the Innovation Festival. Mr Du Toit highlighted that the Festival is an excellent opportunity to reinforce international cooperation in the field of innovation, bringing together science, business opportunities, and international stakeholders. Innovation cooperation could “bring sunshine and hope for the future” with the full commitment to joint undertakings by all the parties and stakeholders involved.

The opening remarks were followed by four high-level keynote speeches.

In his [address, South African Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, H.E. Dr Blade Nzimande](#) highlighted the long-lasting science and technology cooperation between the Republic of South Africa and the EU, which dates back to 1996. He underlined that this cooperation framework is strengthened by the AU-EU High Level Policy Dialogue on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI), which represents a key synergy for tackling the joint challenges of climate change, food security, health and energy. Science and innovation play a crucial role in developing new solutions in these fields, potentially contributing to enhanced trade relations and boosting employability for economic growth and development. Dr Nzimande welcomed the path taken by the AU-EU R&I Ministerial Meeting in the development of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda, which would play an essential role in fostering tangible impacts. From the African perspective, the Agenda aligns with other central AU strategies, namely the AU Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024 (STISA-2024) and the Agenda 2063. The AU-EU Innovation Agenda closely aligns also with the South Africa Vision 2030, its White Paper on Science and Innovation and the Decadal Plan on STI. Dr Nzimande underpinned that South Africa will continue to engage in joint AU-EU projects and partnerships such as the Long-term Europe-Africa R&I Partnership for Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture (LEAP4FNSSA) and the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP), as well as in EU educational programmes such as the Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA) and the Erasmus+ programme. These long-term platforms provide a remarkable potential for the development of international partnerships, promoting digital skills and supporting human capacity among other.

The address was followed by the showcasing of a [new promotional video](#) of the project “ENRICH in Africa”, which explained the opportunities the project provides to innovators and entrepreneurs.

After the video presentation, the EU Ambassador to South Africa, **H.E. Ms Sandra Kramer**, emphasised in her speech that the support of governments is needed for the Innovation Agenda to be successfully implemented. Ms Kramer expressed her confidence in the South African engagement as South Africa already is a strong advocate for the Innovation Agenda. In her statement, Ms Kramer highlighted that climate change, public health, the digital revolution, and the role of innovators and researchers must be at the centre of the business environment in order to allow for successful economic and trade

growth. A national system of innovation and knowledge should be created for R&I to easily flow to other sectors of the South African society. Success stories in this regard are the EU-SA Partnerships, supported by DSI, the Belém Statement, and the EDCTP. South Africa’s strong bonds to the European research system are also expressed by the number of projects funded by Horizon Europe, considering that it ranks 8th out of 214 nations with a total of EUR 28M in economic contributions. Additionally, with over 1,000 European companies in South Africa, investment relations between the EU and South Africa are proven to be robust - it is the case, for instance, of BMW IT hub, Siemens Mobility and Nokia – with the EU commitment of further account for 45% of direct investments. Bridging between the continents would also be performed in the future by the ENRICH in Africa Centre, opened in Cape Town on 14th June 2023. Ms Kramer closed her intervention acknowledging the relevance of the Innovation Festival and called for a second edition.

Ms Kramer address was followed by a statement by the African Union Commissioner, **H.E. Prof Mohamed Belhocine**. Prof Belhocine opened his speech with a reference to the African continent’s celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Organisation of African Unity, which led to the creation of the African Union in 2002. To reach its milestones, the AU is guided by the Agenda 2063 which aims to provide “the Africa we want” and to achieve inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development. The AU is engaged in sharpening its role as a global player, also thanks to major advancements in intellectual property rights and to the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Education, science, technology and innovation play a major role in driving the African continent and achieving its purposes. AU’s strategies aim to build resilient education systems and to increase investments in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Prof Belhocine further highlighted the current relevance of STEMs for the AU, since 2024 is the year dedicated to education. Moreover, Prof Belhocine emphasised the significance of policy discussion and the role of the AU-EU High-Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD) on STI with its long-term R&I cooperation. Currently, policy strategies are most strongly reflected in the forthcoming joint AU-EU Innovation Agenda, which aims to “make it real, generate impact, scale up, and jointly learn” and will guide the AU-EU cooperation for the years to come, resulting in benefits for both Europe and Africa.

Prof Aggrey Ambali, Senior Advisor at AUDA-NEPAD’s Office of Science, Technology and Innovation opened his address by conveying greetings on behalf of Ms Nardos Bekele-Thomas, AUDA-NEPAD's CEO. Prof Ambali expressed his reliance in the Agenda 2063 positive impact for the African continent, highlighting its strong foundation in STI, along with the long-lasting AU-EU cooperation, which has to be further strengthened to tackle shared challenges. Prof Ambali reminded the key function of the Innovation Agenda, actively supported by AUDA-NEPAD. The Agenda’s priorities match the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA) that guided the STI priorities of the continent for the last decade. The year 2024 marks STISA’s conclusion, and with the forthcoming review of the strategy, the Innovation Agenda will play a relevant part in guiding the evaluation process, keeping the momentum on youth empowerment, youth entrepreneurship and strengthening innovation ecosystems, since a greater need for youth engagement in entrepreneurship is demanded. Prof Ambali stressed the role of South Africa as one of the first countries to have invested in the Innovation Agenda, with the hope that other AU countries would follow the example for further investment and involvement in R&I, notably Ethiopia, Botswana and Rwanda.

Interactive overview of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda

The opening session was followed by an [interactive overview of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda](#). Under the moderation of **Ms Nienke Buisman**, European Commission’s Deputy Director for International Cooperation in Research and Innovation (R&I) at Directorate-General Research & Innovation (R&I), and **Dr Monica Ebele Idinoba**, African Union Commission’s Principal Scientific Officer, Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, **Mr Lukovi Seke**, Programme Officer at AUDA-NEPAD,

and **Dr Vincenzo Lorusso**, Policy Officer at the European Commission, the main content of the agenda was outlined. The session provided an opportunity for participants to grasp policy priorities for R&I collaboration between Africa and Europe, and to understand how they can contribute to reach the Agenda's goals.

The AU-EU Innovation Agenda represents the key policy framework for R&I collaboration between Africa and Europe, aiming to translate R&I endeavours into tangible products, services, businesses and jobs and to develop a long-term and sustainable operational AU-EU R&I cooperation model. The Agenda was in the process of adoption at the time of the Festival, and was conceived to become the pillar document for the AU-EU Cooperation in R&I for the next decade. Moderators highlighted that, together with the Agenda, the AU and EU's Member States and Commissions follow four joint objectives:

1. to translate innovative capacities and achievements directly into tangible outputs;
2. to foster and strengthen innovation ecosystems to enhance socio-economic impact;
3. to develop sustainable, long-lasting and mutually beneficial higher education and R&I partnerships;
4. to cater for public participations, transparency and inclusion.

These joint goals are the [result of a multi-sectoral stakeholder dialogue process](#) that took place between February and November 2022 and led to the final draft of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda in April 2023. Each objective has allocated actions differentiated into short-, medium- and long-term actions. The Agenda indicates four joint AU-EU R&I priorities: (1) Public Health, (2) Green Transition, (3) Innovation & Technology and (4) Capacities for Science. Additionally, a fifth thematic area of cross-cutting issues was introduced within the Agenda. The implementation of the Innovation Agenda is further accompanied by a living Roadmap Document which illustrates the governance structure of the Agenda and the monitoring and evaluation strategy. The Roadmap also includes an overview of past initiatives and projects, and a toolkit designed to guide initiatives and projects in assisting the implementation of the Agenda.

Two parallel Agora sessions on youth-led innovations and women-led innovations

Participants had the possibility to join one of two parallel Agora sessions. These sessions were built as 1 hour-15 minutes long discussions and followed an implementation-oriented approach, focusing on either [women-led innovations](#) or [youth-led innovations](#). Each Agora showcased testimonials by five successful women or young innovators from both Europe and Africa. During their testimonial, each innovator conveyed two types of messages: (i) the success story of their start-up, company, or innovative approach – what has worked so far and in which tangible results and outcomes they have resulted; and (ii) the bottlenecks, the hurdles that they have or are still encountering in their attempts to bring their products, services, solutions, or innovative approaches to a broader scale and to a larger public and pool of users. Each testimonial was followed by a round of interventions from the audience, providing suggestions on approaches to be possibly implemented to address the shortfalls shared by the innovators. By doing so, the aim of the intervention session was to generate a series of implementable actions for each innovator's case to further de-risk and scale up their businesses. In the follow-up dedicated Virtual Workshops foreseen for the last quarter of 2023, innovators, participants and future joining stakeholders will take stock and look forward to the next chapter as part of the implementation of the short-term actions of the Innovation Agenda.

Agora session on youth-led innovations

The Agora session on [youth-led innovations](#) was opened by Ms [Maria Cristina Russo](#), European Commission's Director for International Cooperation at DG R&I, who highlighted the role of youth and women as cornerstones for the innovation landscape. Ms Russo further emphasised on the high impact and rich contribution that Africa's youth population has on innovation, which inspire policy makers in developing framework conditions "for their ideas and work to flourish".

The first testimonial of the youth-led innovations was provided by Mr [Thato Kasongo](#), entrepreneur and founder of [Angular Creative Labs](#) in Botswana. Mr Kasongo is convinced that Angular builds consumer applications that can bring the power of the internet to Africa's least connected communities through AI. The start-up's success so far is the development of a job searching chat bot that connects people to job offers on the internet via SMS, without the need for a smartphone or internet reception. Angular Creative Labs established a commercial partnership with Orange Telecom, gaining visibility at tech conferences in Europe that helped growing its success. For the future, the team aims to connect rural communities to healthcare information, partnering with NGOs active in the field. The team expects to be able to scale up their business if supported by the right partners: raising capital for the start-up proved to be challenging, as Mr Kasongo started his business with personal savings only. Another challenge highlighted by Mr Kasongo was to seize the right moment for the transition from a start-up to a scale-up mindset, namely moving from an operational approach to strategic work. Mr Kasongo also underpinned the importance of partnerships, which are still limited in his business. During the interventions' session, a participant from the audience mentioned the importance of understanding the processes of technical, market and venture assessment, referring to a programme from Oklahoma University's Innovation Support Center. In another intervention, a co-founder of a scale-up consultancy referred to the transition phase moving from operational to strategic work, giving the advice of preferring operational short-term work over strategic long-term planning and recommending weekly dedicated follow-up on strategy and priorities while building stronger networks.

The second youth-led innovation testimonial was provided by Mr [Golden Nhunhama](#), co-founder of [CropFix by eAgro](#) from Zimbabwe. Mr Nhunhama advocates for a smarter life for farmers by unlocking access to affordable and effortless sustainable tech by using AI and machine learning, but he faces the hurdle of accessing to business partnerships for further uptake. As a 24-year-old entrepreneur, he faces a target group of farmers aged over 60 years who are not used to online approaches in farming, and often reluctant to take advice from a young founder. During the event, a networking opportunity and potential partnership was offered by a wine company, since its representative invited Mr Nhunhama for bilateral talks. Another suggestion from the audience was to investigate whether farmers are organised in networks or unions, so that Mr Nhunhama could engage with its leaders and explain the benefits of sustainable tech. It was suggested that these unions could then be used as multipliers to other groups of farmers by sharing success stories, potentially receiving attention from new investors. Lastly, Mr Nhunhama shared an additional challenge he faces, being that overall farmers are not financially privileged, with only the well-established farmers turning to science for improving their work.

Mr Nhunhama intervention was followed by [Dr Sabina Maglio](#), PhD student at the BioRobotics Institute at Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna in Italy. Dr Maglio presented a high-fidelity simulator to teach the umbilical cord care and placenta management. As not many simulators are currently being used in hospitals in Italy, the team developed a prototype of a new line of "simple" simulators with a cost-effective construction and easy to use. Dr Maglio mentioned the compromises made during the development of the simulator, as not all desired features could have been implemented. As the main goal was to teach medical personnel, Dr Maglio's team also encountered difficulties in finding enough trainers for their training courses, as well as funding opportunities. Although simulation is a growing

field in research, it is still limited and there is little dedicated funding available. As a result, Dr Maglio had to apply for more generic funding and start to compete with other research discipline, hindering securing funding. Currently, the simulator is limited in use to the research sector; however, Dr Maglio and her team are keen on bringing it to the market. Although there was no specific advice from the audience, one participant highlighted the difference between academic and entrepreneurial innovation, with the latter receiving less visibility. However, Dr Maglio highlighted that patents and well-defended intellectual property rights are a starting point to bring innovation to the market.

The next testimonial was brought in by Mr [Kelvin Chikezie](#), founder and CEO of Dexude Oy, start-up Community and ecosystem builder from Finland. Mr Chikezie believes that education must be fundamentally reinvented to be “live-first, expert-led, and community-driven”. A major success of Dexude is represented by the subscription of over 10,000 students on their platform, with over 1,000 courses and more than 100 trainers and the securing of a funding commitment. While there seem to be enough job opportunities, Mr Chikezie has identified the need for qualified talent. He also mentioned the major challenge of finding strategic partnerships to identify opportunities and up-skill students to successfully match their skills to the job market. Mr Chikezie, then highlighted the opportunity of using AI to design trainings, so that trainers could focus on the core aspects, and share their experience. He recognised access to public funding as a real challenge for his business. From the audience, a participant from Finland highlighted the governmental programme “Education Finland” that provides access to funding. Another participant advised to react to current crises referring to his portfolio, focusing on training and job opportunities, for instance in the areas of food supply and stable society. Understanding the target audience and their purpose for using e-education is crucial to identify opportunities for the target groups (in this case, students), and to offer training strategically. Moreover, Mr Chikezie was advised to build networks, including policy makers, to further promote his innovation. Lastly, it was recommended to use existing supporting mechanisms in both AU and EU, and Mr Chikezie was offered support by Member States’ representatives.

The final testimonial was provided by Mr [Dimma Maweje Muhammad](#) from Uganda, founder and team leader at [Maweje Creations](#) and Young Climate Prize Winner 2023. Mr Maweje is revolutionising the fashion industry by using plant-based materials and textile waste. One challenge he mentioned is the attraction of potential investors because the final product is not yet fully available. Mr Maweje also mentioned building trust in his production system as a challenge: he was advised to highlight sustainability aspects to potential new customers, since it is a current major concern in the fashion industry, as well as to discuss products with existing clients to meet their (future) needs. In this way, customers would actively turn into testimonials, by asking them recommendations, building strategic alliances, or by using testimonials for marketing and communications activities.

[Agora session on women-led innovations](#)

The second parallel Agora session was moderated by Ms [Covadonga Rayon](#) of ENRICH in Africa & Ms [Tshembani Khupane](#) from South Africa’s Technology Innovation Agency and focused on [women-led innovations](#).

The session was opened by Ms [Vinny Pillay](#) from South Africa’s Department of Science and Innovation. Mr Pillay strongly advocated for the importance of working together in international cooperation in order to collectively address challenges, create enabling environments and allow innovations to thrive. As a government official herself, Ms Pillay stressed that governments should provide instruments and structures, yet innovators have to make effective and efficient use of it. South Africa, for example, already has many strategic partnerships with the EU and EU Member States, but also with many African countries. South Africa’s [white paper](#) marks an important milestone in the promotion of STI, including SMEs support, addressing poverty, job-creation, innovation with social impact, and the benefits of grassroots innovations, while on the AU-level, the Agenda 2063 pleads for inclusive growth and

sustainable development. Ms Pillay then invited the audience to join the conversation on women-led and socio-economic challenges related to food and nutrition security, energy, and health and to discuss how the role of R&I and science (programmes) can leverage to address those issues.

The first women-led innovation testimonial was brought by Ms [Melanie Keita Mariam](#). She is the co-founder and CEO of [Melanin Kapital](#), a climate fintech platform that helps small businesses grow with cash management, CO² tracking, green loans and carbon credits. One of her biggest successes so far is having established a cooperation with the Kenyan branch of Absa Bank, together with the African Development Fund (ADF). This corporate partnership helped her grow the platform's customer base from 10 to 10,000 customers. Some bottlenecks brought to the attention included the access to talents, EU regulations and compliance rules such as climate reporting, and lack of funds. In response to the bottlenecks encountered, Ms Naadiya Moosajee, co-founder at WomHub, offered her support in to address the first issue and attracting STEM talents.

The second testimonials were [Dr Esther Kanduma](#), senior lecturer and research scientist at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, and [Dr Funmilayo Afolayan](#), senior lecturer at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Dr Kanduma and Dr Afolayan presented their innovative lab-in-a-suitcase science outreach programme designed to empower high-school girls in knowledge and skills applied to infectious diseases and vaccinology. Their aim is to mentor and inspire future vaccinologists and women scientists across Africa, and they currently operate in Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia, Zambia and South Africa. The starting point for their innovation idea was their objective of narrowing the gender gap in vaccinology, characterised by a significant lack of women. They have further expanded their programme to environmental learning and food and nutrition security. So far, they achieved to reach more than 15,000 pupils and 200 mentored teachers, to attract initial funding and to be nominated for nature innovation awards. Some challenges they face include teachers' discouragement because of infrastructures' inadequacy, the lack funds to re-activate teachers through scientific activities, the lack of labs to cater for demands and the need for more university's partnerships. With regard to the expansion, Dr Kanduma and Dr Afolayan were advised to get in contact with the Kumasi Hive BioLab that has a similar focus. A L'Oréal-UNESCO for Women in Science Programme representative invited the two academics to further discuss on the possibility of their involvement in the programme.

The next session was held by [Dr Okito Wedi](#), South African founder and CEO of [Crtve Development](#), a pan-African organisation that champions sustainable African-owned and led development through art, storytelling and creative campaigning to bridge the gap between African youth and development policies. . Some of the challenges she mentioned involve the mismatch between (social media) campaigning and the implementation of sustainable changes by government, as well as the obstacles of securing funding, often resulting in the need of addressing to the philanthropy. Her testimonial was responded by an offer from a L'Oréal representative for a potential collaboration with her organisation.

The fourth testimonial was [Dr Irith De Baetselier](#), clinical coordinator, scientist and STI reference centre coordinator at the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Belgium. Dr De Baetselier developed a new device for blood self-sampling called [Collect2Know](#). The major bottlenecks she occurred included searching for a developer, securing funding opportunities and dealing with the new process of patenting and regulations in the medical fields.

Lastly, [Dr Thilona Arumugam](#), L'Oréal-UNESCO Women in Science Laureate of University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, shared her purpose of improving Africa's health through African research. The academic success she obtained so far includes mentorships, research papers, a secured funding as well as being the winner of the L'Oréal-UNESCO Women in Science awards. Advice from the audience on how to stay successful in the academic world included to get good mentors and to learn from them, with regards to soft skills, funding applications, contacts with the respective business sector of

scientific field and international networks . A representative from South Africa’s Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) highlighted the availability of seed funds for researchers by the ministry.

The session ended with an offer from a L’Oréal-UNESCO for Women in Science programme representative inviting all testimonials to participate in a forthcoming international day held for the programme.

Finals of the “[ENRICH in Africa Open Innovation Challenges](#)”

In the [finals of the Open Innovation Challenges](#), three innovators for three of the four priority areas of the AU-EU cooperation in R&I were pitching for three minutes each, namely in two Public Health challenges, two Green Transition challenges and one Innovation and Technology challenge. The finals were moderated by Mr [Charles Thou](#) from Agorize for ENRICH in Africa and Mr [Thato Morokong](#) from South Africa’s Department of Science and Innovation. The latter highlighted that such innovations bring the Innovation Agenda to life and that new projects on the ground are much needed. The winners were announced during the closing ceremony of the event.

The first final round was the Sanofi healthcare access challenge, which called for innovative start-ups and entrepreneurs dealing with improving disease treatments delivery and access to healthcare in Africa. Mr [Jon Fairest](#), head of the Global Health unit at Sanofi, explained that Sanofi set up the challenge because they acknowledge the potential of African entrepreneurs. This was proved by a total of 300 participants across 50 countries who submitted a total of 175 projects. The three finalists were: (1) [Zuri Health](#), Kenya, that, for two years, has offered a holistic virtual healthcare experience through chatbot, web, app, and SMS across Africa to overcome the unbalanced patient-doctor ratio on the African continent. The SMS-service is of major importance, as over 65% of African population do not own a smartphone or have internet connection. Zuri Health won in this first challenge. (2) [PBR Life Sciences](#) from Nigeria developed a mobile app that connects patients with pharmacies for screening services. The aim is to counter the poor disease screening in Africa via real-world pharma market data. (3) [Inocul8](#) from Nigeria developed a mobile vaccination service in response to high death rates of children, which could be prevented through vaccines. The platform connects vaccination providers and recipients to bridge the gap in the vaccination service delivery.

The second round of finals was presented by United.b and their challenge on circular electronics. United.b works on solutions to fight e-waste and to create a more sustainable future for both Africa and Europe. Out of 115 projects from 40 different countries, the following three contested in the finals: (1) [OneGrid Energies](#) is a Nigeria-based business that manufactures low-cost rechargeable lanterns using locally-sourced recycled materials. The innovation responds to energy need in the African continent via a sustainable and healthy solution. The start-up took the win for this challenge. (2) [Reebirth](#) from France is on its way to become the leading African marketplace for buying and selling new and refurbished phones in Senegal and West Africa. With their start-up, the team wish to overcome the existing lack of trust, security and transparency in such services. (3) [Wastelocker](#) from Estonia focuses on specific and real-time contamination and mass metrics for businesses, governments, and the populations to determine waste flows.

[Mr Laurent Clément](#), vice president of EDF Africa, opened the third round of finals: the green transition challenge by EDF asked innovators for ground-breaking ideas about electric energy in the fight against carbon consumption. The three nominees included: (1) [eWAKA Mobility](#) from Kenya, a platform for commuter and commercial micro e-mobility fleets. It represents an innovative green response to Africa’s expanding transportation requirements since it aims to reduce high energy usage and CO₂ emissions from current transport models. (2) [Pylon](#) from Egypt built a system to transform conventional water and electricity companies into efficient, interoperable, and data-driven smart

utilities to counter energy waste, theft, and tampering that increase CO₂ emissions. This innovation was the winner of the third challenge. (3) [Planet Soar](#) from France and [Greenline Africa](#) from South Africa developed a thermal solar solution for a wide range of industrial applications to act on the heat production process in order to reach the UN goal of zero net carbon emission.

The Africa MedTech challenge by Sothema was opened by [Dr Taoufik Agoumi](#), director of Medical Affairs Sothema. The challenge encouraged applicants to leverage technology to develop innovative treatments and bring healthcare to the next level. Topics included big data, AI, API or robotics. Successful ideas could then be turned into real products by Sothema. The three innovations selected for the finals were: (1) [Datapathology](#) from Morocco that developed market digital solutions to help their customers in the delivering of pathological diagnoses, in a remote, faster and more reliable way via AI. (2) [BetaLife Health](#) from Nigeria is a health tech company that provides solutions for blood donation, health insurance, medical bills, and ambulance services. (3) [ARIR](#) from Morocco developed interventional radiology (IR) devices from local manufacturing which will reduce production costs by potentially downscaling import and distribution fees, allowing for greater customisation to meet the needs of the local market and promoting IR in Africa. This innovation was the winner for the Africa MedTech challenge.

The last final round of the session was the L'Oréal green sciences for cosmetics challenge. Mr [Philippe Rapold](#), Sub-Saharan Africa R&I hub leader at L'Oréal, explained that they were looking for innovations that develop sustainable and circular solutions to transform the beauty industry. The selected three finalists were (1) [Bantu Technologies](#) from Tanzania, that collects agricultural waste materials and convert them into bio mass which can be used in cosmetics instead of palm oil. Farmers who give their waste material are provided with a token amount for extra income. (2) [Skin Creamery](#) & [BAOM eco solutions](#) from South Africa is a biotech start-up that focuses on growing biofilms that mimic ordinary packaging materials. Using bacteria and yeast, they have grown alternatives to cellophanes, baking paper, cardboard, leather, sticky tape and more. Their aim is to tackle the global plastic pollution problem. They were the winners for the last challenge. (3) [Mrembo Naturals](#) from Tanzania is a young social company to empower women in embracing their natural beauty through organic cosmetics. Mrembo Naturals is focused on haircare, and it is the first Tanzanian natural haircare line with organic ingredients. The brand has also a social impact: 10% of the sales are granted to young women to receive education.

“AU-EU Innovation Fair - *Meet the innovators*” – Pitching session & exhibition of solutions

AU-EU Innovations Pitching

After a lunch-break, on-site participants gathered again for the [pitching session of AU-EU Innovation Fair](#) (at its second edition, following the first one of the [AU-EU Innovation Agenda Stakeholder Event](#) in Nairobi in November 2022). During this session, innovators and incubators who were selected through an expression of interest process presented their businesses. The entrepreneurs showcased in three-minute long pitches their solutions and innovations encompassed in the four priority areas of the AU-EU cooperation in R&I, namely Public Health, Green Transition, Innovation and Technology, and Capacities for Science.

The health pitching session included seven African and European innovators who presented ideas around innovative solutions for blood self-sampling for HIV and cancer tests, a supplement to protect diabetic patients against secondary tissue damage; a new method for protein production in Africa; smart logistics to access life-saving medicines; an umbilical cord and placenta simulator; and a new prostate cancer screening method.

Some of the innovation and technology pitches included solutions to access the internet via SMS/AI, a bridging platform to connect not bankable communities with funding, and a carpooling platform.

With a total of 12 innovations showcased, the Green Transition priority area attracted the most pitches. Solutions included sustainable diapers production from agricultural waste; plant-based clothing from banana-leaves to tackle fast fashion and climate change; a carpooling app; a device to detect toilet leaks to save water; a chatbot for crop testing with regular updates and live information for disease detection to counter harvest loss; a technology to bio-recollect brine wastewater for agricultural purposes; a one-stop shop for soil services to detect diseases; a thermal solar solution applicable to a wide range of industrial users to act on the heat production process; a new beekeeping technology to manage beehives, gluten-free flours and breads; and an electric mobility solution for African terrains.

The fourth priority of Capacities for Science was represented by three innovators, who pitched ideas on an online platform to get access to hundreds of vetted teachers nearby; a platform for STEM courses in schools that provides IoT learning/sensors tools to technical students; and a platform for live training courses.

AU-EU Innovation Fair - Meet the innovators

After the pitches, the innovations were showcased at an AU-EU Innovation Fair, which was open to all participants on site, allowing them to meet the innovators face-to-face. Coffee in hand, stakeholders from the private sector, policy makers, academia, research organisations, civil society and NGOs had the opportunity to engage in lively discussions with the pitchers about their innovations.

The hall, with around 30 stands, was only opened to the public after the pitches. It was divided into several aisles according to the four priorities: health, green transition, innovation and technology, and scientific capacity. The pitchers welcomed visitors to their stands and presented their real-life demonstrations and expertise. Among them, Mr [Sergio Occhipinti](#) presented his start-up company [NIB biotec](#), which is developing a reliable and rapid urine test for prostate cancer screening, while Ms [Lilian Jepkemboi Songok](#) presented [Gavo foods International LTD](#), a food manufacturing company based in Uasin Gishu, Kenya, that produces gluten-free flour and bread.

The pitchers were joined by representatives of innovative start-ups, including [Gilitics Media](#), a digital media company focused on providing authentic, inspirational content aimed at educating society on issues affecting their everyday lives and giving hope to the community by telling their stories, and [Jibu Music Africa](#), which helps distribute music, increase streams and manage revenue.

Closing

In the last session, [Dr Monica Idinoba](#) and [Prof Aggrey Ambali](#) took stock of the event, summarising the key take-aways from the various sessions and providing an outlook on what lies ahead for the AU-EU innovation cooperation. Dr Idinoba emphasised that the Festival was rich in innovative ideas and high-level interventions, with a special thanks to the DSI for hosting the event. She highlighted that such events make a great difference in both Africa and Europe, and that the remaining challenges for Africa should be overcome with strong solutions. Dr Idinoba ended her remarks with a wish for a second edition of the Festival.

Prof Ambali continued to highlight that the Festival was a great opportunity to present innovations, business ideas and to network. The Innovation Agenda would be a remarkable supporting document in setting the framework for these innovations and to guide the future cooperation between Africa

and Europe. The high-level support shown by South African minister Dr Nzimande at the Festival's opening and the support from various Member States were emphasising that the Innovation Agenda will guide towards the right path. Lastly, Prof Ambali stressed that the Festival was a full success for both organisers and participants, which also had the opportunity to briefly describe their experience.

Outlook

The follow-up of the first Innovation Festival will focus on the upcoming implementation of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda. In the short run, the process will be accompanied by several online workshops. Participants will learn more about the role of support organisations – such as ENRICH in Africa – in ensuring sustainable, youth-led innovations and entrepreneurship, and about the impact of gender equality and the strategies to maximise the role of women in AU-EU innovation collaborations. Moreover, several participants showed interest in cross-cutting issues to support effective innovation in climate change, sustainable energy, and social and technological innovations in climate resilience and adaptation, while others indicated local production, hydrogen economy, social impact to be of most interest. The feedback provided by stakeholders will be taken into consideration in the planning of forthcoming workshops focusing on the implementation of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda (following its adoption).