



Concept note

AU-EU High Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD) - Plenary meeting on science, technology and innovation

18 June 2020

Special focus on COVID-19

European Union (EU) President Von der Leyen said: *“The virus knows no borders. This global challenge needs strong international cooperation. We all know that only together we can stop the worldwide spread of the coronavirus”.*

African Union (AU) Chair, President Ramaphosa said: *“This is a health emergency of truly global proportions, yet developing countries are particularly vulnerable to its impact. We require coordinated and consistent international action so that all countries are sufficiently capacitated”*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is a crisis of unprecedented scale that requires unprecedented solutions. Research and Innovation play an essential role in addressing the crisis in the short-, medium- and long-term and collaboration between the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU) is key.

The current context can benefit the AU and EU, by raising our ambitions for collaboration and enhancing the long-standing Research and Innovation (R&I) cooperation that is characterised by an ecosystem of both bilateral and multilateral relationships and programmes across our continents.

This meeting on R&I is the first in a series of high-level meetings, preparing for an EU-AU Research Ministers’ Ministerial on 16 July 2020, and culminating in the EU-AU Summit in October of this year (28-29 October 2020).

Overall objective of the HLPD Plenary on 18 June 2020

Engage with the HLPD Senior Officials from both the African Union and the European Union on ongoing R&I activities and identify short-, medium-, and long-term R&I actions most suited to jointly addressing the COVID-19 crisis and particularly its effects on human health, food and nutrition security, and the social and economic fabric. At the same time, the interplay of cascading risks and challenges – including the adverse consequences of climate change – could be explored, and how adopting an integrated approach to risk management and preparedness is an effective way to build long-term resilience of economies and societies. Furthermore, this crisis could also be an opportunity to deepen R&I cooperation, e.g. by promoting common principles regarding open access, science advice for policy, human capital development and gender issues.

What do we aim for?

In the **short-term**, our priority is to address the COVID-19 crisis, and cooperate to mobilise and guide investments, and focusing delivery towards equitable access for new COVID-19 testing and diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines. We propose to do this through:

- Raise more funding for the **European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership** (EDCTP) that is building the capacity of Sub-Saharan-African countries to

conduct robust clinical trials. Following the Ebola outbreak, it has set up two clinical research networks, ALERRT and PANDORA, which are now gearing their efforts towards COVID-19. The COVID-19 emergency call of 03 April produced some 63 excellent proposals, for which there is insufficient funding available. The funding gap for these proposals is estimated to be 25 MEUR.

- Promote a consensus on and commitment to immediate **open access** to scientific publications and to open and FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) research. The European Commission has launched a pan European Research Data Platform on SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 to allow the scientific community to share, analyse, and process data rapidly, openly and effectively across the globe. The African Open Science Platform is top on the AU agenda and once modalities are in it can contribute significantly to the AU-EU cooperation in R&I.
- Promote a key role for **science advice for policy**, building on the experience acquired in the current crisis through initiatives such as the INFORM COVID19 model¹, the project “Healthcare and WASH vs COVID19 outbreak in Africa”², and the training and technical support in response to the COVID19 pandemic provided through the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence (CoE) Initiative³, the work of the Technical Working Group of Science, Standards and Regulations of the Africa CDC, and the Advisory Committee of ASRIC.
- Encourage a **gender** focus in all research efforts, considering that women and other vulnerable groups carry a different kind of burden from COVID-19. Inequities disproportionately affect their wellbeing and economic resilience during lockdowns.

In the **medium- to long-term**, the socio-economic impacts are expected to be even more devastating, especially in Africa and we propose to pay special attention to the role that R&I should play in the recovery of the crisis through:

- A renewed focus on the **European and African Green Recovery**. Green recovery is crucial, as Europe and Africa would lose out twice if we mobilise investment to restore the old economy before we make it green and sustainable.
- Actualize the implementation of the **EU-Africa R&I Partnership on Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture** and the **EU-Africa R&I Partnership on Climate Change and Sustainable Energy**, with funding from Horizon 2020 in the Green Deal call and the future Horizon Europe.
- A stronger focus on **innovation** through initiatives such as the Africa Europe Innovation Platform, the EU-Africa Digital innovation hubs, and others, showcasing digital solutions with links to the Digital Education action plan.
- Highlight **human capital development**, including researchers’ mobility and training, through the Erasmus+ programme, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), and the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme, as a key factor to tackle current and future crises and contribute to development of skills for more resilient societies. The MSCA fund more than 100 projects in relation to infectious diseases and COVID-19, allowing to inform better policies and strategies, and building resources in the fight against COVID-19 and infectious diseases.

¹ The INFORM COVID19 model has been developed by the JRC in close collaboration with WHO and other UN agencies on the basis of INFORM the global and open risk assessment tool for understanding the risk of humanitarian crises.

² The project provides support to African Research Institutions on Water Science and outlines African country profiles regarding the implementation of WASH and Healthcare services and other socio-economic aspects in relation with the mortality of endemic lower respiratory infections.

³ The EU CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative is the largest European civilian external security programme, with a budget of €155 million for 2014-2020, under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP); 61 partner countries are grouped into 8 Regions with Regional Secretariats, covering both close and wider neighbourhood of the EU.

Background

In a special Bureau meeting on the COVID-19 crisis of the AU-EU High-Level Policy Dialogue on Science, Technology and Innovation on 12 May 2020, participants stressed that research and innovation are essential elements for sustainable development. The actions taken by the EU and the AU so far in fighting COVID-19 were much appreciated. However, the effects on health and all other elements of the crisis, like food and nutrition security, and the socio-economic implications would justify enhanced cooperation and implementation of support activities at field level by EU and AU policy makers and researchers.

Participants agreed that sharing of experience and joining R&I efforts to address the short, medium and long-term health and socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis in Africa is most urgently needed. The expected socio-economic consequences of COVID-19 in Africa call for additional R&I collaboration most notably in areas of food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture, open science, science advice for policy building, innovation, and climate change and sustainable energy, all with appropriate gender awareness components.

On 04 May 2020, the European Commission launched the Coronavirus Global pledging event that so far registered €9.8 billion in pledges from donors worldwide. What began on 4 May will culminate in a final Global Pledging Summit on Saturday, 27 June. The aim of the pledging event is to gather significant funding to ensure the collaborative development and universal deployment of diagnostics, treatments and vaccines against coronavirus. Likewise, the African Union on the 26th March 2020, created an African Union COVID-19 Response Fund with the aim of strengthening the continental response to COVID-19 and mitigating its socio-economic and humanitarian impact on African populations.

The agenda for the meeting of 18 June is as agreed during the HLPD Bureau meeting on the 12th May 2020.

History of the AU-EU High Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD) on Science, Technology and Innovation: adopted at the 2nd Africa-EU Summit in Tripoli in 2010 as an important element of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES). The dialogue serves as a platform for regular exchanges on research and innovation policy and aims to formulate and implement long-term priorities to strengthen Africa-Europe cooperation on science, technology and innovation. The dialogue is co-chaired by the European Union (European Commission, DG Research and Innovation) and the African Union (Member State holding the chair of the AU Specialised Technical Committee on Education, Science and Technology) and brings together the S&T representatives from the 27 EU Member States and the 55 AU Member States. More information on: <https://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/index.cfm?pg=africa> or <https://au.int/sw/node/26690>