



European Union- African Union High Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD) on

Science, Technology and Innovation

Focus on COVID-19

Virtual plenary meeting 18 June 2020

Conclusions

We, Senior Officials,

- **Recall** the essential role of Research and Innovation (R&I) in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic crisis;
- **Take note** of the AU Agenda 2063 driven by STISA 2024, Horizon Europe and the EU intention to step up cooperation in R&I with the AU and support the development of a knowledge economy in the AU, as expressed by the Communication ‘Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa’;
- **Recall** the need for adequate investments in R&I as enablers for sustainable societies and economies and as necessary path to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- **Recall** that AU and EU Heads of State and Government endorsed three long-term, co-owned and jointly funded Research and Innovation (R&I) Partnerships on (i) Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture (FNSSA), (ii) Climate Change and Sustainable Energy (CCSE) and (iii) Innovation (AEIP). An additional very important area of the collaboration is on R&I in Public Health. Substantial investment has gone into implementing all of these Partnerships.

We Hereby propose to our Ministers that:

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

1. Fostering AU –EU Science, Technology and Innovation Partnership Response to the COVID-19 Crisis

- **Acknowledge** the successful collaboration between the AU and the EU in the online Pledging event launched on 4 May to develop and deploy a vaccine, treatments and diagnostics against COVID-19, accessible to everyone, and **encourage** enhanced investments;
- **Encourage** stepped up support to multilateral initiatives such as the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovation (CEPI) on vaccine development, and the Global Research

Collaboration for Infectious Disease Preparedness (GloPID-R), also to consolidate their role as international coordinator of R&I in infectious disease outbreak;

- **Acknowledge** the work done by the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP), and its efforts to gear research towards COVID-19, e.g. with the two clinical research networks, ALERRT and PANDORA;
- **Welcome** the substantial joint investment of EUR 1.4 billion that has been channelled already to the implementation of the second programme of this Partnership (EDCTP2) that aims to develop medical interventions to combat poverty related and neglected infectious diseases;
- **Note** the emergency call for expressions of interest launched by the EDCTP on 3 April to support COVID-19 research activities with a total budget of 10 MEUR, including substantial additional funding from some EU and AU Member States, for research projects to provide novel, critical and timely insights into the COVID-19 outbreak in sub-Saharan Africa and/or potential avenues for its management or prevention; and two other calls, with a budget of 23 MEUR in total, were launched on 10 April to strengthen EDCTP's Regional Networks (18 MEUR) and for the training of epidemiologists in collaboration with the Africa Centres of Disease Control (5 MEUR);
- **Call** on all European and African Union Member States to reflect on the current need to increase their financial contributions to cover the immediate funding gap for the COVID-19 emergency call, estimated at 25 MEUR;
- **Recall** the crucial importance to contribute to the future orientation of the EDCTP and the development of and explore participation in the planned EU-Africa Global Health Partnership under Horizon Europe (EDCTP3).

2. Open science and open access

- **Commit** to promoting a consensus on and commitment to early and open sharing of research, to immediate open access to scientific publications and to FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) and open research data;
- **Call on** the European COVID-19 Research Data Platform and the African Open Science Platform to allow the scientific community to share, reuse, analyse, and process data rapidly, openly and effectively across the EU and AU Member States and the globe;
- **Call** on researchers and relevant stakeholders from Europe and Africa dealing with omics, preclinical, clinical and epidemiological data to access and reuse data on the European COVID-19 Research Data Platform to accelerate their work on COVID-19, as well as to submit relevant data that can, in turn, be reused by others, helping to fight the pandemic;
- **Call on** the HLPD Member States and the Commissions to identify potential future interactions and maximise alignment between the African Open Science Platform and the European COVID-19 Research Data Platform, as well as the European Open Science Cloud;
- **Encourage** broader exchanges (data, data platforms) in domains that are key to address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

3. Science Advise for policy

- **Acknowledge** the crucial role of scientific advice in the current COVID-19 pandemic, designing national and regional responses to crises;
- **Strengthen** joint efforts in growing this ecosystem to address other new and emerging science questions and **reinforce** the values of Science Diplomacy;

- **Support** the Joint Research Centre and work with partners to explore setting up an Evidence for Policy Centre in Africa and mobilise existing expertise to this effect.

4. The Gender dimension in COVID-19 R&I

- **Highlight** the importance of the gender dimension of the AU-EU STI cooperation. Welcome the willingness, in the short-term, to exchange information and experience on the integration of the gender dimension into response to the current COVID-19 outbreak; and welcome the willingness, in the medium-term, to explore stepping up collaboration in the future;
- **Recall** that the integration of the gender dimension to respond to the current COVID-19 outbreak could help mitigate acute and long-term inequities of its socioeconomic consequences;
- **Encourage** female scientists to use opportunities to facilitate mentoring and coaching in research initiatives to grow the STEM sector for others;
- **Explore** the opportunity to partner and facilitate a platform/award to showcase women in science in the collaboration;
- **Welcome** the publication by the EC of a study on the impact of sex and gender in the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the **medium- to long-term**, the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis are expected to be even more devastating, especially in the AU and we therefore should pay special attention to the role that R&I should play in the recovery of the crisis through a renewed focus on the **green and sustainable** dimension of the recovery in Europe and Africa.

5. The EU-Africa R&I Partnership on Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture (FNSSA)

- **Welcome** the substantial joint investment of 286 MEUR that has already been channelled through several instruments (Horizon 2020, European Development Fund and Development Cooperation Instrument through DeSIRA and AU Research Grants) to the implementation of this Partnership;
- **Acknowledge the impact of** COVID-19 pandemic on Europe's and Africa's agriculture and food systems and **welcome** the EU-Africa R&I Partnership on FNSSA's most recent initiatives to lessen the current and expected impacts and transform agriculture and food systems, inter alia by providing greater resilience in the long term. Investment in this R&I Partnership should be stepped up in Horizon Europe and other instruments, with particular focus on resilient food systems and food system governance;
- **Underline** the need for coordination and alignment with other similar initiatives and invite them to closely collaborate with the FNSSA working group by promoting clustering of projects towards more relevant investments and stronger impact;
- **Strengthen the importance of** the R&I Partnership on FNSSA to explore food systems governance and transitions (incl. agro-ecological approaches) as well as the "one health approach" based on a systemic perspective linking ecosystems, animals and humans' health, as a basis for their future exchanges;
- **Encourage** the inclusion of key multidisciplinary and cross-cutting areas including innovation as well as the gender dimension.

6. EU-Africa R&I Partnership on Climate Change and Sustainable Energy (CCSE):

- **Welcome** the joint investment of 84 MEUR that has already been channelled into the implementation of this Partnership;
- **Welcome** the establishment of the Experts' working group of the EU-Africa R&I Partnership on CCSE, gathering experts on climate and energy;
- **Recognise** the importance of promoting coordination between initiatives in the field of climate resilience and adaptation to reduce risks and vulnerabilities;
- **Call** for sustained efforts to speed up the implementation of the CCSE roadmap, both for climate resilience and adaptation and for sustainable energy and climate mitigation and **welcome** the recent progress of the EU-Africa R&I Partnership on CCSE, in particular the expected call for demonstration projects in Africa introduced in the proposed Horizon 2020 Green Deal call of the EC; the joint commitment of 30 MEUR for an AU-EU Joint Research Programme on renewable energy meant to start end of 2020; and the launch of a pilot climate platform to strengthen the links between the EU-AU R&I projects in the domain of climate change; the strong collaboration regarding monitoring of climate impact through Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) in Africa and through the international initiative Group on Earth Observations (GEO);
- **Take note** of the willingness of the European Commission to give a renewed impulse to the EU-Africa R&I Partnership on CCSE by exploring opportunities for joint research notably on circular economy, energy efficiency in buildings, climate-health nexus, green hydrogen and climate services; **call** the HLPD Member States and Commissions to explore the various paths towards this end;
- **Encourage** the inclusion of key multidisciplinary and cross-cutting areas including innovation as well as the gender dimension.

7. Innovation & Technology

- **Acknowledge** the cross-border nature of innovation demonstrated by stakeholders' response in addressing COVID-19 challenges. The innovation sector – especially startups and innovative SME's – are expected to play an important role in the economic recovery of both continents and to foster and strengthen engagement of industry and private sector;
- **Encourage** cooperation to strengthen adaptive capabilities - rapid and accelerating technological change as well as inclusion of innovation in the informal economy;
- **Leverage** the role of innovation in COVID-19 recovery, in key sectors including energy, green economy, sustainable cities as well as public sector innovation;
- **Welcome the establishment of** the Experts' Working Group of EU-Africa Innovation Partnership; which is in line with this active cooperation and call for more dynamic innovation, digitalisation and connectivity, as outlined in the Recommendations set out by the AUC's Digital transformation strategy and by the EU in the Global Strategy for Africa communication;
- **Recognise** the added-value of the AU-EU intercontinental cooperation in the innovation, digitalisation and connectivity sectors. The Africa-Europe Innovation Partnership pilot programme demonstrates the relevance of its method.
- **Recognise** the commitment to reinforce and adopt a short-term relief instrument for tech-hubs and key entrepreneurial ecosystem actors;

- **Welcome** the initiative's aim to further develop Pan-African networks of Digital Innovations/Tech Hubs through the strengthening of local digital innovations and start-up ecosystems; both Horizon 2020 calls "*Africa-EU Innovation Hubs*" (Call ICT 58) and network centre (Governance 20-2020) will serve the development of a mutually beneficial cooperation between African and European Digital Innovation Hubs to strengthen their long-term sustainability and call on these initiatives to build on the Africa-Europe Innovation Partnership pilot programme.
- **Welcome** the support to the African Research and Education networks infrastructure, through programmes such as AfricaConnect.

8. On Human Capital Development, including researchers' mobility and training

- **Recognise** human capital development, including researchers' mobility and training, as a key factor to tackle current and future crises and contribute to development of skills for more resilient societies;
- **Highlight** the importance of cooperation between higher education institutions in this context;
- **Explore** potential opportunities in key areas of interest to both Africa and Europe, in such critical domains as the digital agenda, the green economy, innovation which are crucial for socio-economic recovery;
- **Collaborate with** African initiatives to further enhance the human capital development programs and exchanges;
- **Take note** of the increasing efforts to promote and better coordinate existing fellowships and doctoral training programmes to reinforce the EU-AU cooperation including the Erasmus+ programme and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) and the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme;
- **Welcome** the substantial level of cooperation already achieved through the Erasmus+, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) programmes and the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme and **invite** both Commissions, EU and AU Member States to increase efforts for further exploiting opportunities offered by these programmes, notably by mobilizing African stakeholders and supporting applicants accordingly;
- **Welcome** working on the establishment of a return grant mechanism meant to fight brain drain and support MSCA African researchers who wish to pursue their research in Africa.

Therefore:

- **Propose** to our leaders at the AU-EU Research and Innovation Ministerial of 16 July 2020 and the EU-AU Summit in October 2020, to acknowledge the prominent role of research and innovation in our overall relations, and to consider additional financial resources, to the specific activities outlined in this paper clustered in four groups:
 1. **Public health**, which would include EDCTP
 2. **Green transition**, which would include the R&I Partnership on Food and Nutrition security and Sustainable Agriculture and the R&I Partnership on Climate Change and Sustainable Energy
 3. **Innovation & Technology**, which include policy and regulatory frameworks on leveraging new and emerging technologies to address the challenges and exploit opportunities more efficiently and sustainably
 4. **Capacities for science**, which would include open science, science advise for policy, gender and human capital development

- **Propose** to our leaders of the AU-EU Research and Innovation Ministerial of 16 July 2020, a Ministerial Declaration and **task** the HLPD Bureau to prepare a draft of this declaration;
- **Request** the HLPD Bureau to report progress on the implementation of the HLPD priorities and encourage Member States to proactively support the strategic working groups established under this partnership.