



**Draft minutes**  
**55<sup>th</sup> Bureau meeting of the EU-Africa High Level  
Policy Dialogue for Science, Technology and  
Innovation**  
**6 May 2021, 10.00-12.00 (Brussels time)**

***Co-chaired by: Nienke Buisman, Head of Unit F2 Africa, Asia,  
Middle East and External Relations Directorate for  
International Cooperation, DG Research and Innovation,  
European Commission; and Tinyiko Ntshongwana, Deputy  
Director Africa Multilateral Cooperation, South  
Africa Department of Science and Technology (on behalf of  
James Kasigwa)***

Date: 04-06-2021

Research and  
Innovation

### **Summary**

The 55<sup>th</sup> Bureau meeting of the EU-Africa High Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD) for Science, Technology and Innovation took place on Thursday, 6 May, 2021. The meeting was co-chaired by the European Commission (EC), DG Research and Innovation and, at the request of the African Union Commission (AUC), by the Republic of South Africa, Directorate of Africa Multilateral Cooperation, Department of Science and Technology. As previously agreed, the 55<sup>th</sup> Bureau meeting focused on showcasing the main initiatives taking place in the field of Europe-Africa cooperation in innovation, with the main purposes of taking stock of the current status of this cooperation, and reflecting about the path ahead. Accordingly, it was suggested that, as an outcome of this discussion, a joint EU-AU concept paper on a shared innovation agenda, could be drafted in the near future. This proposal will be the subject of discussion of the next HLPD Bureau meeting, scheduled for 1 July 2021.

### ***Actions/Follow up points:***

- List of participants added to the draft minutes of this Bureau meeting.
- The AUC will organise an internal meeting with all AU MS to discuss the preparation of a joint EU/AU innovation agenda.
- Welcoming the suggestion made by Algeria, the next Bureau meeting (1 July 2021) will host a discussion on the preparation of a joint concept paper on innovation.
- All presentations of innovation initiatives showcased in point “d.” and “e.” of the present Bureau meeting will be shared with Bureau members.

### **a. Adoption of draft agenda and minutes of last Bureau meeting**

Following a tour de table allowing to introduce attending representatives from the EC, AUC and EU and AU's Member States (MS), the minutes of the 54<sup>th</sup> HLPD Bureau meeting and the Agenda of the 55<sup>th</sup> HLPD Bureau meeting, were adopted unanimously. The seventh presentation under section “E” of the agenda (i.e. vii. ‘Boost Africa’ programme by AfDB/EIB) was requested to be brought forward and placed after the third presentation of the “Business incubator project (managed by European Business and Innovation Centre Network)”.

### **b. Short introduction EU and AU innovation policy frameworks**

The EC clarified that the main objective of the 55<sup>th</sup> HLPD Bureau meeting would be to benefit from all members' endorsement of a joint innovation agenda. For the EU, innovation is already mainstreamed into R&I programmes across the board, most visibly referring to the concept of “Innovation Union”. Within this context, the very recently launched European Innovation Council (EIC, est. March 2021) aims to strengthen innovation ecosystem across the EU. The EC has developed a comprehensive “Africa strategy” for innovation cooperation with the African continent, that sees innovation as instrumental for sustainable economic development. This strategy aims to establish win-win partnerships, linking innovators with incubators and fostering propitious ecosystems. Internal discussions are currently ongoing in preparation of a joint innovation agenda. Deeming innovation as a top priority for sustainable development, the AUC agreed on the relevance of developing a joint EU/AU innovation agenda as part of the HLPD. Accordingly, the AUC underscored that innovation is an integral part of the Africa 2063 Agenda, aiming to accelerate innovation and entrepreneurship in Africa.

Algeria highlighted the importance of providing, in a future meeting, an overview of the numerous initiatives launched in the area of innovation under the aegis and coordination of the AUC, so to assess how they could be beneficial to youth, students and entrepreneurs. Algeria acknowledged that many technological platforms indeed exist in Africa, and an effort

in terms of enhancement of human capacity and coordination is needed.

South Africa enquired the AUC on potential recommendations on the innovation policy framework, to be derived in the context of the review of STISA 2024. The AUC clarified that the review of STISA 2024, with special regards to innovation, is in progress. At the same time, the AUC stressed out the importance of coordination and participation while working on a concerted agenda as the one on innovation. In this respect, the AUC noted the attendance of the present meeting by only two AU MS (i.e. Algeria and South Africa). An enhanced AU-internal coordination was indeed urged; an internal meeting encompassing AU MS will be organised in the near future as a follow up action. For the AUC, defining key priorities to be discussed with the EU partners within the Innovation agenda would be key.

### **c. Joint EU/AU innovation policy framework**

The EC reported on the Working Group on Innovation (WGI), the third partnership of the HLPD, created by the SOM meeting in November 2019. This WGI is composed of experts from both the EU and the AU, representing a well-balanced mix in terms of thematic and professional expertise. Main objective of the IWG is to support the HLPD and especially the Senior Officials with regards to strategic decisions strengthening intercontinental cooperation in the innovation sector.

As a first step, the WGI is responsible for drafting a concrete roadmap. The exploration phase has started, leading to the attainment of a common understanding of the *lato sensu* definition of *innovation*, encompassing concepts of technological, digital, social, policy and possibly frugal innovation. The group puts into perspective national and regional innovation priorities. Considerable common priorities between the EU and AU were identified in areas such as: water, health, food security, green and sustainable transition, energy and digitalisation. Challenges and barriers were also pinpointed such as lack of funding and cooperation between public and private sectors. Next meeting of the WGI is fixed for 10 May, 2021. It is foreseen that the very first draft of the roadmap will be presented at the closing conference of the Africa-Europe Innovation Partnership (AEIP) pilot programme taking place on 29 and 30 June, 2021.

Algeria underlined the importance of working in coordination and possibly develop a joint concept paper on Innovation Strategy. The EC suggested that this idea could be discussed during the next HLPD bureau meeting. South Africa highlighted the importance of Innovation for both Africa and Europe as well as the value of creating synergies, while avoiding duplications, within this context. South Africa also noted the value of understanding the different nuances that the term 'innovation' may have in Africa and Europe.

### **d. AU innovation initiatives**

#### *i. African Innovation Outlook, AUDA - by NEPAD*

NEPAD reported on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Africa Innovation Outlook, launched in 2007, with the goal to provide evidence-based advice to policy within the African continent. The initiative covers several areas, across countries, relying on a vast network of experts. Three outlook reports were produced in 2010, 2014 and 2019, respectively. An assessment of the Gross Domestic Expenditure on R&D (GERD) was done at continent level. South Africa ranked at the top, with 0.7% GERD investment in 2019. Quality of data collected is key, and NEPAD is helping countries to improve in this respect. When looking at GERD according to type of R&D, Eswatini is focusing mostly (66.1%) on applied research, whereas Ethiopia mostly (74%) on experimental research. On the whole, although GDP in countries is generally growing, GERD is not increasing proportionally.

The share of women in R&D staff does not exceed 50% in African countries. When it comes to Innovation, out the 55 countries examined, an issue of methodology was identified. Extrapolation of data submitted to NEPAD is indeed essential. Ongoing work at NEPA aims to

assess if and how innovation can be piloted in business and entrepreneurship ventures. Moreover, in light of the importance given to the enhancement of data quality, one of the objectives for 2025 would be for MS to rely on web-based platforms to share and analyse the data on their R&D expenditure.

A copy of the presentation as well as the report of the Africa Innovation Outlook III (2019), will be shared with the Bureau members alongside these minutes.

Germany hypothesised if European and African countries could possibly join forces on gender-related challenges on innovation. NEPAD welcomed this possibility and pointed out to the initiative of *Women in Science*, which is not part of Africa Science and Technology Innovation Strategy (ASTI).

- ii. **ASRIC Committee on Innovation** excused, the presentation did not take place on this occasion.

**e. EU innovation initiatives with a focus on Africa.**

Short (~3 minutes-long) presentations were given for the eight initiatives here below, highlighting, for each of them, the main objectives, results obtained thus far and how these initiatives can support the HLPD.

- i. *EU Advisory Group – pillar on Innovation*  
The EC presented the very recently launched initiative on Advisory Group on R&I for Africa-Europe Cooperation, expected to be establishing synergies with the HLPD and aiming for a maximised impact in the area of EU-Africa cooperation on R&I. The official kick-off meeting of the initiative took place on 4 May, 2021, with the opening by DG from DG RTD, Mr Jean-Eric Paquet, together with the Deputy DG of DG International Partnerships (INTPA), Ms Marjeta Jager, and closing by the Ambassador of the EU Delegation to the AU, H.E. Ms Birgitte Markussen. The Advisory Group focuses on four thematic pillars: (i) public health, (ii) green transition, (iii) innovation & technology revolution and (iv) capacities for sciences. Leaders of the pillar on innovation are Professor Bosun Tijani from Nigeria and Professor Samir Abdelkrim from France. The presentation and the minutes of the kick-off meeting will be shared together with the present minutes.
- ii. *OACPS Innovation Fund* (the presentation will be shared with Bureau members) and *AfricaConnect* (slides were already shared following the 53<sup>rd</sup> Bureau meeting of March 2021);
- iii. *Business incubator project, managed by European Business and Innovation Centre Network* (the presentation will be shared with Bureau members);
- iv. *'Boost Africa' programme by AfDB/EIB* (the presentation will be shared with Bureau members);
- v. *Africa Europe Innovation Partnership (AIEP) Pilot* and *ENRICH in Africa* (two respective presentations will be shared with Bureau members);
- vi. *Digital innovation and ICT-58* (the presentation by EC's DG Connect will be shared with the Bureau);
- vii. *Innowwide and planned Africa Strategy by EUREKA* (the presentation will be shared with Bureau members);

- viii. *Strengthening Innovation and Start-up Ecosystems across North Africa/DG NEAR* - a final presentation was given by the EC, DG Neighbourhood (DG NEAR) on a call for proposals aiming to strengthen innovation also through support of the private sector. The initiative is still under planning and expected to be launched in 2022. As part of this call, two different pillars are being considered for job creations: 1) to sustain the start-up ecosystems; 2) support clusters' ecosystems. The initiative will work at different levels: 1) by adopting macro- support on policy reforms, 2) supporting business organisations (with training, capacity building, etc.) 3) and through demonstration of results.

**Conclusions –**

The AUC highlighted the importance of bringing all ideas and initiatives together, so to establish a way forward accordingly. In this respect, the EC suggested the possibility of putting ideas together, in the near future, in the format of a joint concept note. Ending remarks were made by the South African co-chair, underlining the relevance of outlining concrete actions on innovation in the next HLPD Bureau meeting.

***End of Meeting at 12:25 in Brussels, 13:25 in Addis Ababa, on 6 May, 2021.***