



The 2021 Africa-Europe Foundation Forum

Highlights & Key Takeaways

Here are the AEF Forum's highlights, key takeaways and the network's strategic priorities in the lead-up to the Africa-EU Summit 2022:

A shared sense of urgency for a reimagined Africa-Europe partnership

The theme of the Forum was 'Ambition' which was reflected in the heated debates and powerful contributions, all indicating strong aspiration and commitment to enhanced cooperation and collective action for a reimagined Africa-Europe partnership.

The common thread running through all dialogues was a clear sense of urgency – whether for health, climate or other: the moment is now! We urgently need bold ideas and action to reshape Africa's and Europe's common future together. These need to be inclusive, trans-generational and sustainable to address today's environmental, economic, health, social and technological challenges. This is the time for a new chapter of the Africa-Europe partnership.

The lack of access to clean cooking solutions illustrates this: "How is it possible we're still talking about giving access to clean cooking to women?", asked Wanjira Mathai, Vice President and Regional Director for Africa at the World Resource Institute, noting that this issue has now been discussed for over 50 years and that urgent action was needed now to change this reality. Referring to the issue of deforestation for cooking, Tariye Gbadegesin, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer at ARM-Harith Infrastructure Investment LTD, called the situation "a state of emergency".

In the context of the pandemic resilience and the future of healthcare, Agnes Binagwaho, Co-Chair of the AEF Strategy Group on Health and Vice Chancellor and Co-Founder of the University of Global Health Equity, stressed: "It is now that we need to accelerate [efforts] to be ready to contribute to world production and knowledge to fight the next pandemic." On the same line, Gunilla Carlsson, Co-Chair of the AEF Strategy Group on Health and Vice-Chair of the Strategy Committee, highlighted the urgency to act now, cautioning against "the risk that the world's attention will leave before the problem is solved".

What role can the AEF play to act and shape the next chapter of Africa-Europe relations? Mo Ibrahim, Co-Founder of the AEF and Founder and Chairman of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation explained "We're not trying to create a talk show. What we're trying to do is to find a way to inform policymaking, develop business models and even promote certain projects."

Inclusive and transgenerational: a new dialogue with women and youth leadership at its heart

Bringing together actors from civil society, the private sector, youth networks, policy-makers and mayors, the Forum was a demonstration of the Foundation's role as a "network of networks" and a new form of dialogue. The participants, numbering around 500 included the members of the AEF Strategy Groups, the High-Level Group of Personalities and the Women Leaders Network, key personalities, partner organisations and representatives from institutions, foundations and think tanks, all exchanging in a common forum.

Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, highlighted: "Women are mobilised; [...] there has been such a strong presence of women in the conversation today and the world needs its women! We have to step up and I am glad we do! Good things will follow." With 75% of the Forum's high-level speakers having been women in key leaders' positions, the AEF is proud of the centrality of women leadership across its programming. Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, talking about inequality in care, highlighted that "when we employ women in the labour market, this is the fastest multiplier in terms of impact on growth". While women make up 70% of the global health workforce, they are routinely overlooked and chronically underfunded. Governments must protect, pay and value women frontline health workers. In the context of scaling-up clean cooking solutions, Hailemariam Desalegn Boshe, former Prime Minister of Ethiopia and former President of the African Union, stressed that "Income and economic empowerment of women cannot be separate from these initiatives".

Bringing together for the first time the youth leadership networks affiliated to the AEF, alongside other key partners, the Forum also marked the beginning of streamlining youth voice, agency and leadership across all levels of our work. The Foundation's ambition in the months to come is to raise young people's collective power to scale up the impact and priority of their work. The Special Dialogue on Youth was a success with over 160 participants.

What became very clear was young people across Africa and Europe want one thing above all: a seat at table. With the next AU-EU Summit on the horizon, youth representatives from both continents emphasised the need to move from token engagement to real policy impact. This means going beyond the usual silo approach to youth engagement, and mainstreaming youth leadership and agency across all sectors – from health and sustainability, to job creation and economic recovery. Mo Ibrahim reinforced that youth must play a central role going forward: "Putting young citizens in the driving seat of dialogue and debate is the way forward and critical to finding solutions to the world's most pressing challenges."

Ultimately, youth networks expressed the need for increased dialogue, mentoring and capacity-building – as well as appropriate financial support – in order to move to a new phase of youth engagement in Africa-Europe relations. A concrete proposal was the set-up of an advocacy platform for mainstreaming youth at the Africa-EU Summit.

An urgent need for expedient financial instruments to support pandemic resilience and the future of healthcare

The sense of urgency of investing in coalition-building and a far-reaching partnership across Africa and Europe when it comes to ending the pandemic and ensuring a sustainable global recovery was underlined at the opening session on health, with strong consensus emerging around the core message that “no one actor can face this alone.” High-level officials of development banks gave their backing to the work of the AEF Health Strategy Group to invest in new ways of financing healthcare, including through the proposal for health bonds. “We need to be more honest; we have to be much better on providing the right resources at the right time,” stressed Gunilla Carlsson.

Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, set the tone for the Forum by calling on Africa and Europe to reinvigorate their partnership and to “reach out, build alliances and amplify the voices of reason” when it comes to building back better together and investing in the health workforces of tomorrow.

This call was backed by African Union Commissioner Sarah Anyang Agbor, who underlined that “this is the right time to fund that global health alliance that will help us reach the desired pandemic resilience to avoid the mistakes of COVID-19.” State Secretary for the incoming Slovenian Presidency of the European Council Stanislav Raščan announced that the Presidency would focus on “a new comprehensive EU-AU collaboration on global health issues in all aspects” with human development at its heart.

In the immediate term, a focus needs to be on equitable vaccine distribution, as fewer than 1 in 100 people in low-income countries have received a first dose of the COVID vaccine. A TRIPS-waiver would be a crucial step to advance global equity, and SDRs and health bonds auspicious financing tools for investment in health systems. Between \$25 and 35 billion could be injected quite quickly through increased concessional lending capacity, noted Kristalina Georgieva. Maria Shaw-Barragan, Director of the European Investment Bank, explained how her organisation is seeking to promote quality bonds, by serving as anchor investors and offering technical assistance. In the longer term, building manufacturing capacity in Africa needs to be a priority. “It is not normal that a continent of 1.3 billion people produces only 1% of vaccines,” stressed Chrysoula Zacharopoulou, Vice-Chair of the Development Committee at the European Parliament and Co-Chair of the AEF Strategy Groups.

Urgent action and investment are needed with Africa’s health capacities being the lowest at global level: In average there are only 135.2 hospital beds, 3.1 ICU beds, 0.2 doctors and 1.0 nurses/midwives per 100,000 people. The significant brain drain in the health sector is exacerbated by COVID-19 and hits already dysfunctional, poorly funded and often overlooked African health systems particularly hard. Alongside investment, strengthening geographical and professional mobility, as well as updating skills and equipping the African workforce for the 4th Industrial Revolution, are key to making the most of and retaining human capital on the continent.

Clean cooking solutions: elevating an ignored climate, energy and health issue to new levels

With fewer than ten years until we reach 2030, the world remains far off track to meet SDG7 — which commits to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all. Nearly 2.6 billion people still lack access to modern cooking solutions, 900M of whom live in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the access deficit to clean cooking has risen by more than 50% since 2000. This means only 10% of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa has access to clean cooking.

The lack of access to clean cooking solutions has disastrous consequences for human health, forests, climate and local economies: 4 million die prematurely globally, it causes an annual cost of \$2.4 trillion to the world economy and 120 Mt climate pollutants are emitted per year with more than half being black carbon emissions. Mo Ibrahim and Mary Robinson, Honorary President of the AEF and Chair, Chair of the Elders and former President of Ireland, highlight that: “In Africa, there are an estimated 500,000 premature deaths each year from indoor air pollution, particularly amongst women and girls, and levels of respiratory infections amongst infants remain high, collectively accounting for a far larger toll than official Covid-19 deaths to date.”

The Africa-Europe Foundation’s call to action for achieving universal access to clean cooking by 2030 has now been signed by over 65 leading African and European personalities. The manifesto was widely received and endorsed by the stakeholders attending the Forum.

Kandeh Yumkella, Co-Chair of the AEF Energy Strategy Group and former CEO of Sustainable Energy for All, underlined the importance of this milestone for global players on climate: “We are so inspired to see that more than 65 high-level personalities from Africa and Europe have already signed on to this manifesto. Of course, we have to take it now to another level, starting with New York in September for the UN high-level dialogue.” He also stressed the importance of increased public and private investment in clean cooking solutions. \$4.5 billion annual investment is required to achieve clean cooking for all, which means \$2 for every person without access in 2019. The annual investment currently lies at only \$131 million.

Dymphna van der Lans, CEO of the Clean Cooking Alliance, echoed the sentiment, expressing appreciation to the leadership of the Africa-Europe Foundation for bringing this important issue to the attention of world leaders: “To have this level of attention to the issue of cooking has not happened before. I continue to be grateful and inspired by the attention that we’re getting right now.”

Reshaping the multilateral architecture by giving cities a place at the table

By 2050, two-thirds of the world's population will live in cities. Engagement with cities was put into global perspective by Louise Mushikiwabo, Secretary General of Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, who highlighted "There has to be a change of mind in the way we work in the international world". She spoke about the importance of "a nimbler form of multilateralism", underlining that "we have got to create agility in the way we do business and create an understanding that people need cities to work beyond the rules and processes of the multilateral world in order to contribute to solving the global challenges of the 21st century." On the same line, Marta Foresti, Director of ODI Europe, stressed the need for cities "to engage and discuss and talk about influence together with other global leaders".

European Commission Vice-President for Democracy and Demography Dubravka Šuica committed to ensure cities are given "greater space to act and contribute in decision-making, [including] new opportunities for access to financing to deliver results on the ground, and a citizen-centred, bottom-up approach to regional cooperation". The Vice-President, responsible for the Conference on the Future of Europe, also announced she would be working with the Africa-Europe Foundation "to shape a meaningful engagement of cities and mayors" in the lead-up to next year's EU-Africa Summit.

Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, Mayor of Freetown, opened the dialogue on cities with insights into how cities in Africa and Europe can "chart a path forward by developing practical approaches that deal with the realities we face as Africa and Europe, from COVID-19 to climate change and human mobility". This is a path Freetown is already walking as a pioneer for the "Mayors Dialogue" initiative co-founded by Mayor Aki-Sawyerr with 23 city leaders from both continents who are calling for a central role in a strengthened Africa-Europe partnership. She further stressed that our current multilateral institutions were created around the concept of nation states. According to her, this no longer fits today's realities and local policies can often be much more effective. The important role cities are playing was also underlined by Tariye Gbadegesin: "Nigeria has a GDP of about of about \$400bn and, of that, Lagos is \$110bn and contributes about 17% of the GDP."

Mo Ibrahim, Chairman of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation and Co-Founder of the Africa-Europe Foundation, confirmed that cities would be adopted as a central pillar of the Foundation's work, underlining: "Our focus will be on getting things done and in this perspective, mayors are doers, on the ground in daily contact with people and key to transforming dialogue into action." He added, "going forward it will be critical to find ways in which cities can access finance and invest in sustainable actions in the face of climate change and common challenges." Having served as a mayor herself for two successive terms, Vice-President Šuica stressed "how effective mayors and cities are when it comes to implementing policies that have a direct impact on people's lives." Building on this unique implementation power of cities, Mohammed Adjei Sowah, Mayor of Accra, highlighted the opportunities of tackling the challenges of climate change at a local level.

Addressing complex and contentious issues underpinning a real Africa-EU partnership

The discussion on LPG for clean cooking for a just transition, the politics of agriculture and the green transition are an illustration of how to take on complex issues underpinning our cross-continental partnership, not shying away from difficult discussions. We need to focus not only on convergent but also on divergent issues.

Jean-Paul Adam, Director at the UN Economic Commission for Africa, highlighted that the topic of clean cooking is symbolic of the complexity involved in Africa and Europe working together on climate issues: “Too often, the conversation around climate change is dominated by the race towards zero emissions... it’s a goal that mobilises the whole planet, but in the African context we must make sure that the road to net zero is also the road that is the fastest to achieve zero hunger and zero poverty.”

The AEF Strategy Group on Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems met to outline a first set of proposals stemming from the last six months of dialogue: opening access to finance and mentorship for early-stage agri-entrepreneurs and SMEs; co-innovation and professional development through an Africa-Europe knowledge hub network and exchange programmes; and territorial transformation through landscape restoration and advancing livelihoods in the Sahel. In heated discussions, participants also debated other areas for action, including through adequate technology and institutional innovations and boosting performance of the processing sector.

On growth, job creation and the green transition, youth representatives cautioned that these words take on different meanings across both continents. Industrialisation, boosting manufacturing capacity and creating a conducive environment for SMEs were seen as urgent priorities. The green and economic transitions should not be skewed towards European notions of success.

In a frank discussion, youth leaders also highlighted that there can be no one-size-fits-all solutions. Eurocentric and ready-made approaches to solving young Africans’ problems were called out, highlighting the need for homegrown, African-led solutions based in real-world context. Europe has the opportunity to be a partner which listens and recognises the structural power imbalances within certain governance architectures which create obstacles for young people to hold their leaders accountable.

But not only complex and contentious issues are at the heart of the AEF’s debates. There is also a commitment to open up breathing space in terms of the agenda and provide a platform to address issues which currently do not necessarily get the attention and traction they deserve and need. Transport and an increasing use of inland waterways is an example. The Forum’s participants committed to raise the centrality of such issues in the public discussion.

Overall, the Forum was a success in many regards: not only has it been a moment to grow our ‘network of networks’, it also allowed to increase the buy-in on the different priorities discussed and led to clear high-level commitments and the definition of the next steps, be it in the context of health investments, clean cooking, cities engagement or youth leadership.