

The 2021 Africa-Europe Foundation Forum

28 June – 2 July 2021



Over the course of a week, the Africa-Europe Foundation explored the big issues facing the two continents. Its first-ever annual forum, held under the theme of ‘ambition’, comprised a full programme of eight debates held in Brussels and streamed online. Members, leaders and partners of the Foundation and its five Strategy Groups – Health, Digital, Transport and Connectivity, Sustainable Energy, and Agriculture and Food Systems – convened virtually for a free and frank exchange of views around health, climate, cities, youth, and An Africa-Europe Climate Alliance. Against the background of climate challenges and a devastating global pandemic, the Foundation sought to define its strategic priorities for the coming months and in the lead-up to the Africa-EU Summit 2022.

Monday 28 June

An Africa-Europe Health Alliance: Pandemic Resilience and the Future of Healthcare

Sustainable health leveraging the strengths of two continents

COVID-19 continues to rage across Europe and Africa, causing thousands of deaths while disrupting lives and economies. Yet this health crisis has spurred greater dialogue between both continents, with positive developments especially for vaccine response, healthcare growth and broader development in Africa.

‘An Africa-Europe Health Alliance: Pandemic Resilience and the Future of Healthcare’ kicked off a week of events under the umbrella of the first Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) Forum. Livestreamed from Brussels on 28 June 2021, the event featured high-level participants from key institutions on both continents, with the goal of shaping new political and investment initiatives to boost the healthcare systems of tomorrow.

“This is the first opportunity of the AEF’s Strategy Group on Health, launched six months ago, to share some of our insights and ideas on harnessing the strengths of our two continents together to deliver sustainable development, health and wellbeing for both Africa and Europe,” said **Tamsin Rose**, the debate moderator and Senior Fellow at AEF. She also highlighted how the AEF aims to develop an Observatory for Future Health Workforces for Europe and Africa.

“We’ve issued two statements on equity of vaccines, because that clearly emerged as an issue of great importance,” said Rose. She noted that equity is a core theme that runs through the AEF, both within and between the continents of Africa and Europe, yet this equity has been tested as never before due to the COVID health crisis.

Uniting around vaccine response

“It’s urgent that Africa and Europe come together with health as the centrepiece of our partnership”, remarked **Agnes Binagwaho**, Co-Chair of the AEF Strategy Group on Health and Vice Chancellor and co-founder of the University of Global Health Equity. She called for strategic autonomy for Africa in the field of health, notably in treatment, quality care and enhanced products including vaccines. Binagwaho’s wishlist – “to leverage health on both continents” – also included more human resources for healthcare, particularly through more education in Africa, plus a focus on building a stronger public health system.

Gunilla Carlsson, Co-Chair of the AEF Strategy Group on Health and Vice-Chair of the Strategy Committee, echoed these words, adding that a key lesson learned from the pandemic was that health is all about an investment in individuals and the fact that nations do matter. “Health must be embedded in our societies on a scale that we’ve perhaps not had, because it’s not only about illness, it’s also about wellbeing,” she commented. However Carlsson also warned that the world has a short attention span. So there is a risk that current efforts – aimed at fixing the health infrastructure and resources problems identified during this pandemic – may never come to fruition.

Debate participants all agreed that coronavirus vaccines are now crucial for Africa. “The COVID-19 crisis has reignited the debate about Africa’s relationship with Europe. We must reframe the way we talk about this relationship, particularly in terms of vaccine distribution,” said **Zeinab Badawi**, Chair of the Royal Africa Society, International Broadcaster and member of the advisory board of Afrobarometer. She noted that Africa has 16% of the global population, yet only produces 0.1% of the vaccines against this pandemic, a situation that could be considered “vaccine apartheid”.

“COVID has exposed the tragedy of underfunding health and other sectors and the short-sightedness of vaccine nationalism,” said **Sharan Burrow**, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). She recommended more investment in the healthforces of Africa and Europe, but cautioned that many care jobs in Africa are dominated by workers in the informal sector, with no fixed contracts. “One solution could be a new social contract and rebuilding the labour market. We should also link this market to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly for jobs in the healthcare and care sectors, so we can forge a more inclusive future,” said Burrow.

Health-focused funds from international lenders

On the plus side, new COVID-19 vaccine manufacturing hubs are being planned in several African countries, thanks to European and wider international support. **Kristalina Georgieva**, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, outlined how the IMF has increased concessional lending for Africa by a factor of 13 over a year. She said that Special Drawing Rights (SDR) for more funding are now also being utilised, with a focus on health. Wealthier countries have contributed an additional \$24 billion – two-thirds of which came from SDR, underlining the opportunities to scale up this financial aid and boost impact.

The IMF intends to increase its concessional lending capacity through its existing Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRAGT). “I believe some \$25 to 35 billion could be injected quickly and turned into investment in health systems in countries fighting the pandemic,” said Georgieva. But she indicated the goal is to create more capacity and to build resilience as part of IMF’s drive for work on sustainable recovery. This could come from the creation of a Resilience and Sustainability Trust, which is still under discussion.

“This pandemic must be a frontline objective collectively, so the IMF, WHO, World Bank and other multilateral financial institutions are creating a ‘war room’ for coordinating money to fight the pandemic,” said Georgieva. She noted too that while today’s pandemic is a key focus, with the IMF mobilising \$50 billion to bring it to an end, the Fund also intends to collaborate on pandemic preparedness and prevention.

Placing hope in health bonds

We must be creative in helping Africa during this pandemic, said **Maria Shaw-Barragan**, Director of the Department in the European Investment Bank for Lending in Africa, Caribbean, Pacific, Asia and Latin America. She explained how the EIB has been issuing health bonds in cooperation with the European Commission since 2019, and that these could reinforce vaccine manufacturing in Africa. The EIB also offers de-risking, to support the pooling and joint procurement of vital pharmaceuticals and biotech products made by African private sector companies. The debate moderator added that mutual health insurers are also willing to offer support in these areas. However, only 15 African countries currently self-finance health and the pandemic is limiting public investment in that field, so health bonds are a welcome new funding mechanism.

The debate explored ways of better supporting Africa’s healthcare workforce, which is expected to see a shortfall of 18 million workers by 2030. Better training and improved terms and conditions are one solution. Several speakers also recommended that Europe should financially compensate Africa, whenever key African healthcare professionals are “poached” by Europe.

“Europe supports the building of Africa’s health workforce, yet during this pandemic it has emptied our continent of doctors and nurses. This doesn’t solve Europe’s health problem, but it does create a problem for Africa,” said Binagwaho. She remarked that the cost of this poaching was around €4 billion in 2016, a sum that exceeds Europe’s support to Africa. This problem could be partly resolved by creating an Observatory for Future Health Workforces for Europe and Africa, as it would map the opportunities for building a more resilient health system over the next decade or so for both continents – including more pharmaceuticals manufacturing in Africa.

“Having a healthy population is the biggest possible investment one can make, not least because it increases a nation’s GDP,” said **Chrysoula Zacharopoulou**, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament’s Committee on Development and rapporteur in the European Parliament for the future EU-Africa Strategy, as well as Co-Chair of the Covax Facility Shareholders Council. She praised the European public health model and called for Africa to create something similar for universal healthcare.

Europe fully committed to African health priorities

“Europe has made it a top priority to build a stronger, more ambitious and modern partnership with Africa,” said **Stanislav Raščan**, Slovenia’s State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This should aim at sustainable development, with health cooperation on COVID and other health issues being a priority. A further goal is to scale up health research, innovation and collaboration between the two continents – since “the pandemic has highlighted global gaps in health systems and basic services.” He called for integration of WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) into longer term health systems, because of the old adage that “nobody is safe till everybody is safe”.

Numerous debate participants voiced support for tapping far more into Africa’s extensive medical knowhow, since this is a continent with widespread experience of dealing with pandemics such as HIV. Several also suggested making greater use of Africa’s traditional medicine and unexploited rich biodiversity for health purposes. A representative of the faith community underlined how it provides between 30 and 70% of health services in Africa, so this group should not be left out of any future health plans. Refugees too should be part of the conversation, as they are often forgotten yet especially vulnerable to COVID.

Sarah Mbi Enow Anyang Agbor, African Union Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology, noted that the AU is committed to various partnerships, including rapid research and development in the fields of COVID diagnosis, testing, treatment and vaccines. “Africa and Europe have come a long way in ensuring the wellbeing of our citizens through joint efforts. We now need preparedness for future pandemics through partnerships and international financing,” she said. Georgieva from the IMF fully agreed, while adding: “There is a pathway to succeed in tackling this pandemic and to build the resilience of health systems, but only if we recognise we are all in this together and work together.”

Tuesday 29 June

An Africa-Europe Climate Alliance for Clean Cooking Solutions

Clean cooking movement finds a fresh head of steam

Fast and smoke-free cooking on modern stoves is just a pipedream for 2.8 billion people globally. A new manifesto on clean cooking solutions, developed by the Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) and partners, aims to make those solutions a reality by 2030. It has already attracted 65 key signatories in three months, so hopes are high. However the path to success depends largely on building further momentum and engagement through public and private support, financing and technological innovation.

‘An Africa-Europe Climate Alliance for Clean Cooking Solutions’, livestreamed from Brussels on 29 June 2021, was part of a series of events organised during the first Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) Forum. Leading government and business experts from both continents debated ways to drive clean cooking – which avoids burning charcoal or firewood – up the international agenda. They agreed that now is a timely opportunity to deliver on clean cooking solutions, which are highly linked to climate

and development, ahead of the AU-EU Summit in 2022 and the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) this autumn.

“Our AEF Manifesto is a 10-point political agenda aimed at promoting full clean cooking. It has huge transformative potential for the environment, people’s health and the lives of women and girls,” said **Tamsin Rose**, the debate moderator and Senior Fellow at AEF. She said the scale of the challenge hasn’t been acknowledged, hence the importance of finding more signatories for the manifesto plus champions to amplify the message. The debate widely endorsed the suggestion of turning to African ‘first ladies’ as clean cooking champions, based on their earlier success raising the profile of HIV/AIDS treatment and more.

Stepping up government support

“Governments must create an enabling environment for clean cooking. That could include public-private partnerships to boost technology and investment, such as with electricity providers,” said **Kandeh Yumkella**, Co-Chair of the AEF Strategy Group on Energy and former Chief Executive Officer of Sustainable Energy for All. He noted that 85% of sub-Saharan Africans, with the exception of South Africa, still use charcoal and firewood for cooking. Governments across the continent should treat clean cooking as a priority equal to that of electrification, with appropriate energy access programmes for their populations.

“Our dream is to make clean cooking solutions that are affordable and accessible to those who do not have it, just as we’ve driven electrification through mini-grids and other off-grid solutions,” added Yumkella. In his opinion, that will require bigger public investments and subsidies, as well as fiscal incentives for clean cooking technology suppliers.

Other participants recommended making clean cooking more of an energy-for-development issue. Women and girls for instance are disproportionately affected, often spending many hours daily gathering biomass to power stoves and feed their families. Clean cooking based on alternative fuels would empower women in many ways, not least by giving them more time to pursue higher value jobs.

“By offering universal access to clean cooking solutions, we can make tremendous progress on women’s empowerment as well as climate, health and the environment,” added **Sheila Oparaoch**, ENERGIA International Coordinator and Programme Manager. She described the AEF clean cooking manifesto as timely and urgent, especially because the latest data suggest that the world is not on track to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goal 7 (affordable and sustainable energy for all) by 2030. “Your manifesto is aspirational, but it must be backed by integrated planning at all levels and for all sectors, and must leverage gains made in modern energy supply,” she added.

Jeffrey Rugare, Founder & Group CEO of Global Solar Pvt Ltd, agreed there is a need to concentrate more on energy-efficient clean cooking. Other related key issues include electrification and the affordability of clean cooking solutions for marginal communities.

“We believe this Manifesto should be embedded in the just transition, whereby no-one gets left behind,” remarked **Dymphna van der Lans**, Chief Executive Officer of the Clean Cooking Alliance. She would like to see governments add clean cooking to their nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and national energy plans. They could also create ‘delivery units’, working across agencies and departments, for their clean cooking efforts. Stable fiscal policies could also encourage clean cooking businesses to thrive and make the technology more affordable. Lastly, development stakeholders should support countries to quickly roll out clean cooking: this could include support for policies, funding and the growth of sustainable markets for clean and affordable clean cooking solutions. She added that clean cooking can also help to tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis, since around half of African forests are being depleted due to the search for cooking fuels.

Many others in the debate expressed their support for the AEF manifesto. **Ed Brown**, Research Director at Modern Energy Cooking Solutions (MECS), liked its messaging about the potential of electric cooking and the suggestion that there are different clean cooking solutions for different places. “It’s a good manifesto, but may I suggest it be slightly amended?” asked **Cécile Leemans**, International Relations Officer, DG Energy, European Commission. She proposed the text should also consider European research efforts on providing the right appliances for the African market, such as energy-efficient off-grid appliances that can run without placing too much stress on micro-grids in rural areas.

Cleaner cooking means better health

Some 2.3 million people globally die prematurely due to noxious fumes (also known as household air pollution or HAP) produced by dirty cooking fuels as well as inefficient or dangerous stoves. That is around three to four times the total of deaths globally from HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria combined, according to a World Bank report in 2014. Clean cooking solutions reduce respiratory problems, which is especially important during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Ideally, all cookers should be fully electric and this must be a long-term goal. As this is not possible across much of Africa, especially in rural areas, ‘transition fuels’ such as Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) are the way forward for the continent’s poorest and most vulnerable communities.

KOKO Networks, a private company in Kenya, is successfully rolling out pay-as-you-go access to this fuel, starting in Nairobi with LPG canister distribution machines in shops and hairdressers. The company claims that LPG is non-polluting and 40% cheaper than charcoal and 10% cheaper than kerosene, both of which are considered ‘dirty fuels’. “This pay-as-you-go business model is accelerating the LPG transition for clean cooking, by creating last-mile distribution of bioethanol fuel,” noted **Patrick Worms**, Senior Science Policy Advisor of World Agroforestry (ICRAF) and the President of the European Agroforestry Federation. He said that policymakers mainly worry about dirty cooking’s impacts on deforestation and respiratory disease. Yet women in Africa charged with cooking for their families have more practical concerns. They appreciate the cleanliness of clean cookers (e.g. less dry-cleaning of children’s school uniforms) and the fact that meals are prepared much faster on LPG-fuelled stoves.

“Too often, the conversation around climate change revolves around the race to zero emissions. But in the African context that also includes the goal of zero hunger and poverty, so clean cooking should be

part of the solution,” said **Jean-Paul Adam**, Director, Climate Change, Natural Resource Management and Technology at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

Yet it is clear that African governments must step up subsidies and policy support for transition fuels and clean cooking in general. Electricity suppliers should also ensure their networks, particularly solar micro-grids in rural areas, can provide enough power for both cooking and lighting.

A new magnet for investment

Clean cooking is an area of growing interest for companies in Africa, said **Tariye Gbadegesin**, Managing Director and Chief Investment Officer of ARM-Harith Infrastructure Investments Limited, a West African private equity fund. But she lamented the lack of ‘bankable projects’ for private investors in Africa. She also believes that the private sector will invest more in clean cooking if governments focus more on clean cooking, which today means LPG. **Najma Mohamed**, Policy Director of Green Economy Coalition, called for finance mechanisms that are innovative and inclusive. She offered the example of a solar panels project in an informal settlement in South Africa, where a local municipality identified ‘energy access funds’ that could be used to install solar home systems.

“The sad thing about clean cooking is that we’ve gone backwards in the last decade. In 2010, 760 million Africans lacked access to it, whereas that figure now stands at 917 million,” remarked **Tracey Crowe**, Chief of Staff at Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL). She said part of the problem is the lack of finance for the sector, with billions needed today to ensure progress. Crowe advocated building viable clean cooking markets in order to support companies, especially through public subsidies.

“Clean cooking faces the last-mile challenge, if it is to reach millions more people with transition fuels like LPG,” noted **Alessandro Galimberti**, Senior Socioeconomic Development Expert - Technical Advisor for Climate Change and Energy-Clean Cooking, AVSI Foundation. He pointed to the example of Burundi, where rural areas can only dream of clean cooking solutions. That is why he recommends stronger engagement from local government and massive nationwide awareness-raising campaigns about clean cooking.

Hanaan Marwah, founder of Gridworks at CDC Group, agreed with many others in the debate that governments have an essential role to play in ensuring that clean cooking is the lowest cost solution. Yet although many companies express interest in supporting this sector, they say it’s “not in their remit”. Jean-Paul Adam highlighted how biomass-based cooking simply locks in low-value economic activity. Clean cooking however provides opportunities for more sustainable livelihoods, with space for more small businesses and the private sector. He said they could be supported by a variety of financial instruments and de-risking, such as through government-issued sustainable bonds.

In closing the debate, Rose said there is an “urgency and a window of opportunity for clean cooking” as we go through a reset post-pandemic: “There are lots of new funds... but we need to embed clean cooking into societal resilience, and we need new technologies and political commitment.”

Wednesday 30 June

Cities, New Narratives and the Next Chapter of Africa-Europe Relations

City-to-city cooperation to address local citizens' needs

By 2050, two-thirds of the world's population will live in cities and every country's population will likely have doubled. This makes the role of cities and mayors critical in resetting the relationship between Africa and Europe in the post-COVID-19 recovery. Mayors across the two continents are already working together to find solutions to major challenges, most notably climate change, employment, healthcare, housing and transport.

'Cities: New Narratives for a Stronger Africa-Europe Partnership' was the third in a series of events organised under the first Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) Forum. Livestreamed from Brussels on 1 July 2021, the event featured mayors, leading city experts and politicians from both continents.

A key question put by the moderator **Dharmendra Kanani**, Chief Spokesperson at Friends of Europe, at the start of the debate was: How can cities be a linchpin for a new narrative for a stronger Africa-Europe relationship? He looked forward to hearing about ways of scaling up and amplifying partnerships between cities on both continents, in order to better support people and their livelihoods.

During the debate, participants stressed the role that mayors can play in strengthening collaboration between Europe and Africa in an ongoing COVID-19 context. "Last year showed the need to work together and find global solutions," said **Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr**, Mayor of Freetown in Sierra Leone, referring to issues ranging from the pandemic to migration to climate change. She explained that cities can chart a path towards this by supporting and jointly developing practical approaches.

Mayors in mutual support system

The Mayors' Dialogue on Growth and Sustainability is a recent city-led initiative for mayors in Africa and Europe. According to Aki-Sawyerr, it has already been joined by over 20 mayors from the two continents and they are advancing cooperation between cities. In one practical example, Freetown entrepreneurs are building a dynamic fashion industry and new jobs with help from Milan, Italy's famous fashion hub. "The Mayors' Dialogue helps us to make the most of the opportunity for city-to-city collaboration to achieve global goals," said **Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr**.

Employment is also being boosted in Freetown thanks to the planting of a million trees, an innovation to help boost fruit cultivation and support the city's transition to a green recovery. "The key is for mayors and cities to share experiences and learn from each other," said Aki-Sawyerr, who noted that Freetown is now doing this with other cities in Africa. She added that the voice of cities is also being elevated in the fight against climate change, thanks to work in the C40 Cities network, which brings together almost 100 cities worldwide.

Informal sector as a key target

“It’s important for African cities to share knowledge and experience and support each other,” said **Mohammed Adjei Sowah**, the Mayor of Accra. He pointed to the challenge of the informal sector, which is also an Africa-wide problem for authorities. In Accra, this sector accounts for 80% of the city’s workforce and 90% of new jobs created. City managers would like to be able to track and tax those workers, but so far they can only count on national efforts to get people in this sector registered and identified. Yet the mayor said the city has enjoyed some success in making the informal sector – from fishermen to farmers – aware that their activities can contribute to city flooding. He added this is part of efforts to mainstream the city’s climate activities generally.

While acknowledging that Africa’s fast-growing cities face many challenges, **Edlam Abera Yemeru**, Chief on Urbanization at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), preferred to talk about the opportunities. He called for more support for local governments in Africa to unlock opportunities, such as in the informal sector, where an estimated five jobs can be created for every house built to address housing shortages. He also expects the food processing sector to create great opportunities in cities for investors at all levels: “Some 160 million people will enter the labour market in Africa in the next decade. Cities are central to creating safe and productive jobs.”

A new form of multilateralism operating at local level

Participants also emphasised the importance of adopting practical approaches to cooperation and focusing on delivering results for local citizens.

“We have got to create agility in the way we do business,” said **Louise Mushikiwabo**, Secretary General of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Rwanda. “The pandemic and health crisis shows how complicated or easy things can be, depending on how much we are able to adjust and adapt.”

Adaption requires a shift of mindset in the international world in the way we work, said Mushikiwabo: “We need to change the software of the international collaborative mechanism. To solve the problems of our citizens, we have to be ready to adopt new rules or bend the rules that exist so that we can develop practical solutions.” She added that OIF includes some 400 mayors and 300 cities, working together in an organisation created in 1979. So African and European cities can contribute a lot by collaborating, especially on issues such as water, electricity and transport.

In many cities, there is tremendous pressure to upgrade the urban fabric, such as informal settlements, slums, or access to water. “City learning is therefore very important – it is about how to move forward to ensure viability and having liveable cities,” said **Mo Ibrahim**, Chairman & Founder of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation and Co-Founder of the Africa-Europe Foundation. “Mayors are key because they [unlike the more remote central government] are in daily contact with people and see the challenges of daily life in front of them,” he added.

“It’s crucial to work on a more efficient cities network, in order to reinforce their voices and to face challenges like climate change and the COVID pandemic,” said **João Ribeiro de Almeida**, President of Institute Camões. Networked cities will also be better positioned to deal with social inequalities and poverty, as Africa becomes more urbanised – with 100 cities expected to have populations of one million or more by 2025. He also spoke about Portugal’s presidency of the European Council over the last six months, including a push to get the EU to diversify its global partnerships, mainly with Africa. “Human development is directly linked with the quality of life in cities, so we are strengthening our support for Agenda 2063 and working with the African Union on many areas, including the green transition,” he added. Lisbon notably hosted the High-Level EU-African Green Investment Forum last April, an initiative partly aimed at helping African cities to create jobs, reduce inequality and create sustainable livelihoods while fostering economic growth.

Raising local voices to international level

“We all agree that cities matter a great deal in the development of our societies and are a tangible example of the democratic process,” noted **Dubravka Šuica**, European Commission Vice-President for Democracy and Demography, in a video message to the event. She noted that city mayors had been at the forefront of efforts to tackle the COVID health crisis and recovery efforts, before adding that she knew from first-hand experience how effective mayors and cities are when implementing policies that directly impact people’s lives. Šuica said she is committed to strengthening the partnership between the EU and Africa and helping cities to have a “voice within the international system”, as well as easier access to finance so they can deliver results on the ground.

“The European Commission is focused on three transitions in the coming years – green, digital and demographic – all of which resonate with Africa,” said **Colin Scicluna**, Head of Vice-President Dubravka Šuica’s Cabinet. He praised the “rich dialogue” between the two continents but acknowledged that the cities and local communities level is one that the EU needs to focus on more. “We must encourage more people-to-people and city-to-city contacts, to be able to learn from our respective experiences – and this should be a two-way street, with Europe also learning from Africa.”

Scicluna said the Conference on the Future of Europe is all about engaging more with citizens. Although this exercise could not be exported directly to Africa, it does show the value of boosting representative democracy – an area that both European and African cities can help to boost. “We can’t take a helicopter view of issues, we must zoom in to the local level and listen to the real issues... be they job security, healthcare, education or the environment. These issues are similar, whether you live in Scandinavia or Sub-Saharan Africa.”

Speaking on behalf of Barcelona’s mayor (Ada Colau), **Marta Foresti**, Director of ODI Europe, was delighted that The Mayors’ Dialogue on Growth and Sustainability – which is hosted and supported by ONI – is “active, energetic and making real progress.” However she called for cities to be helped to engage more with, and further influence, other global leaders. Foresti also read out a statement from Mayor Ada Colau, who called cities a decisive level of government: “They can reinvigorate the partnership between Africa and Europe by making progress in areas where cooperation has at times

been insufficient.” Colau cited the example of Barcelona working with Maputo in Mozambique, to create sustainable, green and inclusive urban centres.

The fight for city funding

Cities across Africa struggle to find the money they need for projects, noted several participants. The moderator said there is a general “lack of venture capitalists with social purpose”, while Mo Ibrahim reckoned that finance is key for cities to tackle slums and to upgrade housing.

“Our fund is working globally to solve financial innovation to support climate infrastructure for African cities,” said **Tariye Gbadegesin**, Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer at ARM-Harith Infrastructure Investment LTD and member of the AEF Women Leaders Network. She noted there are “big bankable opportunities for infrastructure, especially with a climate link, in urban centres.” Given that cities contribute so much to a country’s GDP (in Nigeria, the top four cities account for a quarter of the nation’s GDP) thanks to economic activities, cities can contribute significantly to poverty alleviation and job creation.

As for the difficulty of financing cities, Gbadegesin replied that her company is trying to create a “blended finance instrument” that cuts across regions and development financial institutions (DFIs). This would target climate infrastructure – such as for adaptation and mitigation – in African cities.

African cities should find African solutions rather than replicate those of European cities, remarked Aki-Sawyer, pointing to a micro-enterprise waste management scheme for informal settlements in Freetown. She concluded that spatial planning and urban sprawl in African cities could be vastly improved if cities were allowed to take charge themselves, instead of relying on nations’ central governments.

Thursday 1 July

Special Dialogue with Youth Leadership Networks

Fostering better EU-Africa cooperation through youth voices and agency

Engaging more with young people is essential, given that around three-quarters of Africa’s population are under 35 years old and 40% are under 15 years old. But can young people play a leading role in all areas of cooperation between Europe and Africa, from health and climate to education, employability, mobility and peacebuilding? Do glaring disparities between the two continents – especially Africa’s struggle to access funding and resources – make that aspiration unrealistic?

These questions gave food for thought in the ‘Special Dialogue with Youth Leadership Networks’, organised under the first Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) Forum. Broadcast online from Brussels on 1 July 2021, the event featured young participants from both continents.

Moderator **Dharmendra Kanani**, Chief Spokesperson at Friends of Europe, explained that the discussion would focus on what young people today want out of the relationship between Africa and

Europe. How can their voice and activities be mainstreamed into policymaking in everything from governance to infrastructure, ahead of the African Union-European Union Summit in 2022? “The AEF wants to understand young people’s expectations, needs, barriers and opportunities... so we can include their voice, actions and capacity to make decisions around policy and other areas,” he added.

Mo Ibrahim, Chairman & Founder of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation and Co-Founder of the Africa-Europe Foundation, said that the AEF specifically aimed to build a bridge between the European and African continents. Youth are a key part of that and he invited them to be more active and to become a force, even if that means forcing doors open by the power of voting. He remarked that some members of the Mo Ibrahim Future Generation Network had told him that they are “already the future” and they want to see change now!

A seat at the table and a clear voice

Finding ways to ensure that young people, in all their diversity, have a voice in policymaking was a recurring theme. For example, there was a call for young people to be involved in interinstitutional exchanges between universities and institutions in Africa and Europe. Exchanges between Africans and Europeans in civil society organisations should be stepped up. Europeans, both young and old, also have much to learn from listening to Africans.

“Within the next three decades, 41% of the world’s labour population will be young Africans. The Africa-Europe partnership now needs to be mainstreaming youth in the conversation and the policies being drafted,” said **Mandipa Ndlovu**, a researcher at Leiden University.

A concern raised by **Gabriel Klaasen** (Africa Climate Alliance) is that solutions proposed for Africa are often Euro-centric. A better approach would be to invest more time and resources finding African solutions, whilst understanding that Africa comprises individual countries and different communities rather than being a homogeneous continent. **Mary Fitzgerald**, a journalist specialising in Libya, replied that Europe is equally diverse, underlining the need for a more nuanced approach to its relations with Africa. She added that this conversation between the two continents was also being driven by renewed interest in decolonisation.

Eleanor Batilliet from the One Africa Europe Task Force called for youth to be included in all five of the AEF Strategic Groups. She also wanted more focus on improving the quality of education: “Labour markets are going to change quickly with AI and the energy transition. We need educational reform that prepares youth for the future. That means investing in digital skills, creativity, critical thinking and promoting cross-cultural exchanges.” Others, including **Marjus Cevoli** and **Mohamed Ramy**, called for new joint exchange programmes for education and training, targeted at young Africans and Europeans.

Digital as a bridge-builder

Merryl Omondi from the One Africa Europe Task Force pinpointed digital transformation as a key area for more cooperation. “Let’s establish a coalition for innovation and industry, with three tiers of membership – including start-ups, to facilitate the transfer of technology from both continents and to

support research commercialisation,” she remarked. **Denis Young Odhiambo** (Fellow for the Digital Cluster, AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub and **Abiy Shimelis** (Now Generation Forum) saw digitalisation as an opportunity to leapfrog ahead, enabling Africa to take advantage of the latest and greatest technology without having the established infrastructure owned by Europe and other developed parts of the world. Once again, Europe could help Africa to harness this digital potential, including AI and big data.

The COVID-19 crisis was discussed repeatedly. **Manal Benani**, a medical doctor and an advocate from Algeria, felt that too few young health professionals were invited to key decision-making meetings during the pandemic. She also recommended that youth experts be involved in reporting, analysis and research, “so that we get to know their concerns and proposals.”

Eyeing a healthy continent, **Mandipa Ndlovu** noted that Africa includes 18% of the world’s population but it remains barely protected and is squeezed out of the vaccine market. In her view, “We cannot be talking about building potential partnerships when Africa is facing a grave vaccine shortage. We must push that conversation forward, as a healthy Africa benefits Europe too.” She also argued the COVID pandemic revealed that “capacitating the healthcare system” emphasises the urgency to support all African systems – including the economy, agriculture, food and security. Another participant worried that Africa’s lack of vaccines could result in restrictions being imposed on south-north mobility.

Throughout the dialogue, African participants called for more vaccine manufacturing in the continent. **Ma Soukha**, from the Now Generation Forum, said: “Africa needs to industrialise, because manufacturing companies create jobs.” This is especially important given that Africa must create 22 million new jobs a year, just to keep pace with the growing population. Soukha added that too often African resources are simply exported abroad, one notable example being timber. She called for European support to help Africa “move up the value chain” by processing more of its own products on the continent.

A European Commission representative – **Martin Seychell**, Deputy Director-General, INTPA – underlined the need for youth to be heard more and to be more active in key decision-making. He noted that Jutta Urpilainen, EU Commissioner for International Partnerships, is very committed to EU international partnerships that engage with and empower young people. The Commission has therefore set up a youth sounding board for international partnerships and will have 25 youth representatives. Several African countries are already replicating this idea. The Commission has also nominated a special advisor for youth (from Ethiopia) and set up an African Union-European Union Youth Cooperation Hub to design and develop projects. Some 17 projects in Africa and Europe currently benefit 150,000 young people.

Seychell said there is clear momentum for more youth involvement, noting that around half of the participants at European Development Days 2021 were under 35. However, a recent Commission survey found that 91% of youth want to be in decision-making but two-thirds of those said they lacked access. This is something the Commission must try to fix. “The EU is working with the African Union to mainstream youth and co-create policies by and for youth,” he concluded.

“We need to give youth more than a voice,” said **Bitania Lulu Berhanu**, Special Adviser on Youth for EU Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen. “They must be embedded in systems within Member States and African development partners. This will boost sustainable leadership and collaboration.”

Cultural renaissance

Africa has tremendous potential in art and culture, but this is under-utilised. Mo Ibrahim reckoned this sector should be included more in the AEF strategy groups, while Mary Fitzgerald argued they could be part of a new focus on storytelling – which is a powerful way to reach people and to create new ideas. According to Abiy Shimelis, “Art and culture would help Europe and Africa to build a new and shared vision – a much-needed forward-looking vision. For a cultural renaissance to happen however, Europe and Africa may need to rethink their partnership.”

Tackling climate change is important for both continents, argued many participants. **Taman Mhoumadi**, from #DiasporaVote, and other participants said that businesses should become a greater part of the solution by becoming more sustainable. She also warned about the dangers of Africans losing knowledge and expertise – as is happening in the textile industry, due to imports of secondhand clothes from Europe.

The moderator ended the event on a positive note: “We’ve heard much in this special dialogue on youth to give us hope and optimism for the future. AEF will continue these dialogues in September 2021 and on a regular basis.”