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Why Europe Needs Africa

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Introduction: Why Europe Needs Africa (and Africa Needs Europe)

David McNair, Kyla Denwood

In 2017, Africa's population under twenty-five years old surpassed the total population of Europe. By 2050, Africa will have added 796 million people to the workforce, while Europe's working-age population (aged sixteen to sixty-four) will decline by 156 million.[1]

Europe is aging while Africa's youth population booms.

This demographic transformation is perhaps the defining shift that could recast the fortunes of the two continents, which are separated, at the closest point between Morocco and Spain, by just 14 kilometers (less than 9 miles).[2]

Labor shortages and pension costs are already impacting the credit ratings of European countries,[3] while the massive demand for employment in the African continent will have significant implications—positive and negative—in terms of migration, stability, future market potential, and economic dynamism.

However, the demographic shift (highlighted in figure 1) is not the only long-term trend that could shape the Africa-Europe partnership.

Managing climate change, biodiversity, health security and pandemic preparedness, migration, and the rapid pace of technological innovation requires cooperation across borders.

In truth, almost all of the major threats and opportunities that Europe could face in the next century will require cooperation with Africa, either to limit harm or maximize opportunities.

Europe needs Africa, at least as much as Africa needs Europe.

Yet, the unspoken assumption underpinning Africa-related decisions of Europe's leaders—both inside and outside of the European Union (EU)—is that Europe is supposedly more advanced and that African countries are laggards. They are beset with problems, and need to be more like European countries in order to converge with a better way of living and managing their societies. This is borne out in the lexicon of "developed" and "developing" countries, in the indices regularly published by international institutions and think tanks, and in the objectives and goals of Europe's development cooperation with Africa.[4]

The premise of this compilation is that the European policy making community needs to flip this narrative and recognize that there are different development paths that are informed by context-specific factors, as well as common challenges that different countries and regions will need to grapple with together. From that perspective, cooperation between Africa and Europe should build on both continents' strengths to identify converging interests, compatible visions, and potential synergies.

Thomas Kuhn, in his seminal book The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, introduced the concept of a paradigm shift. Kuhn showed that "normal science"—periods of steady incremental progress in which researchers worked largely to validate their current paradigm—were punctuated by periods of disruption in which the old paradigm failed and a new one emerged.

The principle can be applied to policymaking and politics. Ideas harden into norms around which politicians and policymakers build careers, institutions build treaties, and media outlets build narratives. This is the status quo until these norms become obsolete and a new one emerges.

One can argue that the norms which have shaped the careers of many current policymakers are now out of date. In April 2023, U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan outlined a "new Washington consensus," implying that the old one, which had shaped a generation of economic and foreign policy making, had passed.[5]

A wave of populism led to the UK's Brexit referendum, the election of former U.S. president Donald Trump, and the emergence of right-wing political movements across Europe, a trend borne out in the 2024 European Parliament elections. The same wave has been accompanied by the growing influence of China, increasing geopolitical competition between the United States and China, and renewed confidence among African leaders and their electorate on the global stage.

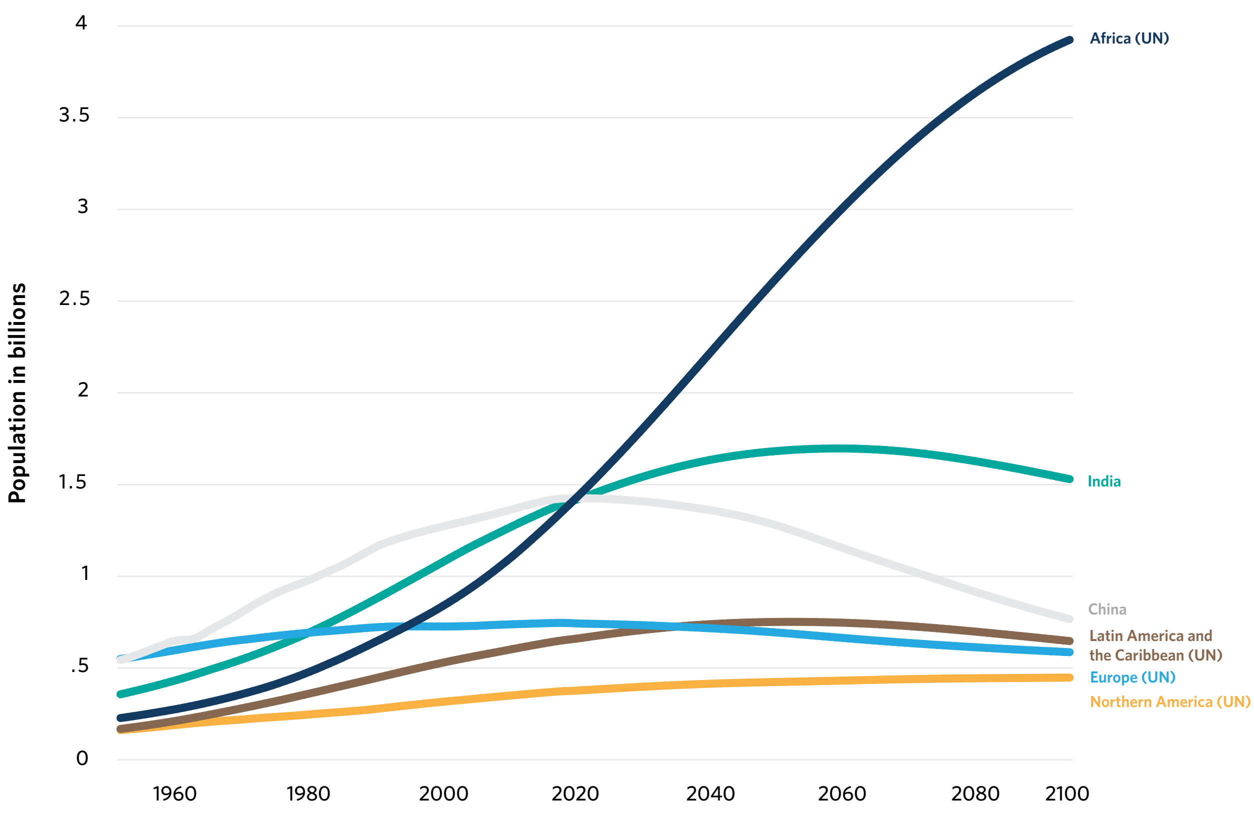
At the January 2024 Italy-Africa Summit, the chair of the African Union Commission called specifically for a "paradigm shift" in Africa-Europe relations.[6]

While it is clear that the old order is out of date, there is not yet a clear successor. Indeed, the moment may be less a paradigm shift and more an "interregnum": a period of transition between the collapse of an old hegemony and the establishment of a new one, during which the old powers lose their legitimacy and new ones have not yet gained enough power or acceptance to establish themselves.[7]

Regardless of the theoretical underpinning, policymakers in Europe and Africa find themselves navigating a new world, trying to find a path that protects and sustains their interests and values. And while many of these are shared, the risk is that we fall into a “beggar thy neighbor” approach whereby nations turn inward, pursuing their own domestic economic and strategic interests in a world where international cooperation on global challenges like climate change and pandemic preparedness are needed more than ever.

Europe’s responses to two major challenges—the COVID-19 pandemic, when it initially hoarded vaccines, and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, when it took its focus from Africa and diverted resources and political attention to Ukraine—suggest this is a significant risk. Evidence of African countries courting Russia and other powers to meet their food, energy, and security needs show that this risk is not one-sided.

Figure 1. By 2050 Africa Will Add 796 Million People to the Workforce, While Europe's Working Age Population (Aged 16-64) Will Decline by 156 Million



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition, https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/population-and-demography?facet=none&country=Africa+%28UN%29~Latin+America+and+the+Caribbean+%28UN%29~IND~CHN~Europe+%28UN%29&hideControls=true&Metric=Population&Sex=Both+sexes&Age+group=Total&Projection+Scenario=Medium.

There is, however, a significant opportunity for the two continents to navigate these choppy waters together.

In February 2022, leaders of the EU and the African Union (AU) convened a summit to discuss the future of continental relations.[8] European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen had previously stated that the relationship is a "partnership of equals," whereby the two continents work together to tackle common challenges.[9]

That rhetoric has been accompanied by project-level commitments and financial pledges of leveraged private capital. However, the rhetoric has been met with much skepticism from African leaders, who are looking for the delivery of unfulfilled financial commitments and a meaningful seat at the global decisionmaking table.

African leaders, buoyed by the reality that they can choose who they partner with, are increasingly bullish about their role on the international stage. It is no secret that China has spent the past two decades building influence on the continent through diplomacy and major infrastructure investments, committing an estimated $153 billion between 2000 and 2019 to African public sector borrowers.[10] India, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye are also taking an increasing interest in the region through diplomatic, military, and economic cooperation.

At the same time, leaders such as former Senegalese president and 2022 chairperson of the AU Macky Sall and Kenyan President William Ruto have called for reforms in global economic governance to reflect Africa's increasing role in the global economy—including successfully campaigning for an AU seat at the G20,[11] and pushing for reform of the credit rating agencies,[12] and shifts in the governance of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.[13]

The skepticism of some African stakeholders is warranted. Trading relationships between Europe and Africa are highly imbalanced, echoing a postcolonial extractive model. In 2021, 68 percent of goods exported from Europe to Africa were manufactured goods. The majority (65 percent) of imports from Africa were raw materials and energy.[14]

The February 2022 EU-AU Summit was strong on rhetoric, and headline commitments were significant. The EU pledged €150 billion in investments in Africa over seven years—a scale that is clearly framed to rival China's Belt and Road Initiative. But African leaders, such as South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, expressed skepticism in light of previous commitments on climate finance that were not delivered. In a post-summit interview,[15] Ramaphosa signaled that while Africa welcomed European investment, Africa would remain free to work with other partners.

Less than two weeks later, the partnership faced a significant test. Russian President Vladimir Putin launched an invasion on Ukraine, a move that reignited the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the transatlantic alliance and led to unprecedented steps from EU member states—but illustrated the complexity of Africa-Europe relations.

Four UN General Assembly votes—three condemning the actions of Russia and a fourth to expel Russia from the UN Human Rights Council—passed by majority,[16] but in each case, more than half of the countries that abstained from the vote were African. European countries were taken by surprise over Africa's perceived lack of support at the General Assembly.[17]

In June 2022, then Swedish foreign minister Ann Linde told the European Council on Foreign Relations that she discussed the issue with her South African counterpart, comparing Europe's support for the anti-apartheid movement with Africa's lack of support for Europe over Ukraine.[18]

African leaders then played an active role in 2023 by sending a presidential peace delegation to Kyiv. Notably, the nonalignment of many African countries positioned them to be neutral brokers in a peace deal.[19]

In late 2023, following Hamas terror attacks on Israel, von der Leyen's strong support for Israel contrasted with a number of African countries' strong condemnation of Israel's military operation in Gaza—most notably with the position of South Africa, which referred Israel to the International Court of Justice.[20] Since then similar divisions between African and European countries have been visible in UN General Assembly votes on Palestine.[21]

Notwithstanding these fault lines, there are significant potential benefits in getting the Africa-Europe partnership right (and risks in failing to do so). Both African and European policymakers are attuned to the risks of large numbers of young people without job opportunities and impacted by climate-induced weather events migrating in large numbers.

As the European electorate focus on domestic priorities and European leaders make the case for greater European sovereignty,[22] policymakers should consider the potential mutual benefits of greater cooperation.

The Case for a Strategic Partnership

While geography, history, and politics will play a critical role in the future of this relationship, the starting point lies in the greatest resource of the two continents: their people.

In Europe, the balance between the working age population and those dependent on them has been declining since 1985, and that trend is accelerating. As Europeans live longer, the cost of healthcare, pensions, and housing increases—costs that will be borne by younger generations that are fewer in number. Because there are fewer economically productive people to generate the necessary wealth and public revenues to support services, such as education, that are so critical to social mobility, many—young and old—are seeing fewer opportunities. This, in turn, is fueling a political nativism that is already hampering trade, migration flows, and international cooperation.

The UK's 2016 referendum on leaving the EU and the significant growth of populist and in some cases extremist right-wing parties in Belgium, France, Italy, and Sweden are both the symptoms of a structural transformation where some parts of European society are not benefiting from globalization. But it is also a movement driven by nostalgia. This is undoubtedly, in part, driven by Europe's aging population.

Signals from African leaders, in contrast, point to a continent looking forward. A long-term development plan (in the form of the AU's Agenda 2063) aims to create a pan-African single market, freedom of movement, and flagship infrastructure initiatives such as a high-speed rail network—a plan that mirrors the early ambitions of the EU.[23] Yet, it is a continent with major challenges when it comes to conflict, poverty, and vulnerability to economic and climate shocks.

The reality is that by working together, both continents can address the common challenges they face. The twenty-first-century economy requires people with technical skills and characteristics that can navigate rapid and constant change: resilience, determination, and an ability to collaborate. European countries, with their strong education systems and technical knowledge, lack sufficient numbers of young people with the dynamism to sustain the twenty-first-century economy.

Africa has the youngest population in the world, a population that is increasingly urban and entrepreneurial. Countries, corporations, and cultural trendsetters recognize the continent's investment potential. But what Africa has in terms of young people and cultural dynamism, it lacks in terms of infrastructure and investment to develop technical skills and build effective markets. Europe has that capital, experience, and technical skills.

A Change of Mindset

With the right frameworks and standards, Africa could supply the necessary labor to address Europe's challenges with aging. Europe on the other hand could help provide the financial capital needed to support Africa's human capital and hard infrastructure.

But efforts to maximize the benefits of such a partnership need changes from both parties. Europe will have to reframe fractious debates on migration in ways that are both pragmatic and politically salient. To succeed, Africa will need to address issues such as the high cost of capital and low level of investment, governance service gaps, and market fragmentation.

Achieving this new outlook requires a reframing of the nature of the partnership, beginning with prevailing narratives that shape the public debate.

Europe traditionally sees its role on the international stage in three ways: it is a global trade power and a provider of development aid; a political and security actor, supporting regional security through bodies such as the AU; and a normative power, supporting human rights and democracy, regional integration, and multilateral organizations.[24]

But in a world of increasing geopolitical competition, with transnational issues such as climate change, migration, and technology taking a prominent role, Europe has found itself in an increasingly complex environment where norms and standards that Europe sees itself as traditionally upholding—such as human rights and democracy—are being weaponized. For example, in the wake of Putin's invasion of Ukraine, European policymakers are increasingly concerned that they are losing a battle of hearts and minds in Africa, and they have proposed a more transactional approach to European aid programs.[25] By failing to live up to its own standards, or simply misunderstanding how it is perceived in the Global South, Europe risks its unique added value of standing up for human rights and using soft power to do so.

In Africa and across the Global South, views of Europe are shaped by history but also by present behavior. Europeans see their role as a standard setter on environmental and governance norms, so access to the EU's market has become contingent on environmental and governance standards. However, some in the Global South see these standards as self-serving protectionism. For example, in 2016, the EU pursued a heavy-handed approach to border protection in the Mediterranean Sea; that year, 3,800 migrants died trying to reach Europe. In response, Ethiopian policymakers noted how the EU's values-based approach to foreign policy had been devalued. The EU's role in hoarding vaccines at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and locking African countries out of access was seen as hypocrisy—and was not remedied by the EU's steps to donate vaccines or fund COVAX,[26] the World Health Organization's initiative to procure vaccines for the Global South. Steps to divest from financing liquefied natural gas in emerging markets while including gas in the EU's Sustainable Finance Taxonomy is a more extreme example.[27]

On the African continent, Europe's cultural exports—such as major football teams—are ubiquitous. But Europe's development cooperation presents a more nuanced picture. A recent poll of African young people showed that 76 percent believed that China brings a positive influence to the continent.[28] They considered Europe's cooperation to be of higher quality while valuing China for fast decisionmaking and timely completion of projects.[29] China's high visibility infrastructure strategy clearly has an impact on perceptions, while Russia's disinformation campaigns have negatively shaped Africans' views of European and U.S. foreign policy, with many blaming sanctions on Russia for Africa's food price inflation.[30] There is, however, a strong argument that Europe's positive role on the continent lacks visibility. For example, Ethiopia's Industrial Parks are funded by the EU, but awareness of that support is limited.[31]

On the European continent there remains a widely held belief that Africa is a continent of underdevelopment, poverty, and conflict, and among policymakers, the continent is frequently viewed as an aid program recipient rather than a strategic partner—a viewpoint that belies the diversity, vibrancy, and nuance of the continent. Economic migrants contribute more economically to their host states than native populations—and migrant remittances to poor countries now eclipse aid flows.[32] Yet, migrants are seen as a drain on the system. European citizens increasingly see aid as ineffective and view Africans as increasingly "ungrateful" for European generosity.[33]

Furthermore, many policymakers still see aid as an instrument of control, used throughout the post–World War II era to impose harmful austerity and policy conditions. AidData's 2021 Listening to Leaders survey demonstrates a disconnect between the priorities of leaders of so-called 'recipient' countries and how donors spend their money: Global South leaders prioritize education and employment, while donors prioritize inequality and gender.[34]

Despite the efforts of reformers within European member states and institutions, budgetary planning and bureaucracy mean change happens slowly. In addition, Europe's colonial history still looms large. Anti-French sentiment in West and Central Africa is part of a wider trend that views Europe's role in Africa as negative—a trend that has played into a series of coups in the region. Russia under the former Soviet Union provided tangible support to the decolonization movement in vast parts of eastern and southern Africa, and then provided support to the newly independent countries until the collapse of the Soviet Union. This history is very much alive in the minds of many African policy, media, and intellectual elites who studied in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia.[35]

In Africa the trend toward self-determination is clear. Agenda 2063, the AU's blueprint for turning the continent into an economic powerhouse, was agreed to in 2015.[36] A central pillar of this plan is the African Continental Free Trade Area, which entered into force in May 2019. Trading under the agreement began in January 2021 and is projected to raise incomes by 7 percent by 2035 and lift 40 million people out of extreme poverty.[37]

But this optimism belies the complexity of implementing these plans, the significant economic and social headwinds faced by African countries buffeted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and inflation and debt sustainability concerns. Forty percent of African countries are in or are at high risk of debt distress.[38] Youth unemployment remains a major concern; a third of South Africa's population is unemployed, and the pan-African unemployment rate has increased significantly since 2015. And conflict remains a major challenge in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Libya, northern Mozambique, Sudan and South Sudan, and countries in the Sahel.

These differential and nuanced reflections on the nature of the relationship between both continents must be addressed and the potential of a partnership made clear. To break from these narratives requires a different approach, one that moves beyond summitry and institutional negotiations and builds networks of creativity, commerce, problem-solving, and trust.[39]

The good news is that these relationships, initiatives, and ideas already exist in abundance. The aim of this compilation is to take some of the major challenges—migration and remittance flows, climate change and the energy transition, the investment in and governance of global public goods, and the management of digital technology and regulation—and reframe the opportunities and potential for collaboration.

Each of the authors takes this as a starting point, identifies examples of good practices that could be reflected and supported through institutional cooperation between Europe and Africa, and outlines where new kinds of approaches could not only deliver short-term impacts but also build trust, serve mutual interests, and meet the challenges the continents face today.

Jonathan Glennie and Hassan Damluji propose a new form of development cooperation, based not on charity or fighting poverty but on circular cooperation: partnerships based on consistent iteration, learning, and mutual problem-solving that offer potential for greater impact and improved trust and dignity between Europe and Africa.

Saliem Fakir lays out the opportunities for economic transformation presented by the energy transition and the geopolitical fault lines that need to be bridged to seize them. He makes the case that the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act and the EU's Green Deal are marked departures from global climate diplomacy toward state-led industrial policy; for the first time in a generation, the desires of the United States, Europe, and Africa to transform their economies and energy systems align. As such, he makes the case that Europe should leverage its assets and capabilities—through market-making regulation and development finance institutions—to increase investment in African climate infrastructure and make joint action on climate diplomacy a central pillar of the continent's climate strategy.

Marta Foresti and David McNair argue that debates on human mobility should move from fractious national debates about keeping people out and instead focus on enabling spaces of connection and collaboration. They highlight the ways in which creatives from the fashion, design, and music industries are collaborating across borders to create a vibrant economic and cultural landscape. But to build these bonds of creativity requires addressing visa policies. They propose a new, restricted, skills-based visa system to deepen these connections and investment in African and European creative cities partnerships.

Ottilia Anna Maunganidze argues that perhaps the most significant outcome of migration between Europe and Africa is financial flows in the form of remittances, which now eclipse official development assistance in volume. While Europe has made significant progress in reducing remittance costs, a number of challenges remain, not least the cost of some remittance corridors within Africa. She argues for the sharing of knowledge and technology and the harmonizing of international rules governing remittance flows.

David Luke argues that Europe and Africa are on course for a collision in trade policy because of the ways in which Europe's patchwork of trade agreements across the continent are inconsistent with Africa's ambition for a continental free trade area. He argues that the EU should grant duty-free, quota-free, unilateral market access to all African countries, with a unified rules-of-origin regime for a transitional period benchmarked against milestones in Africa's free trade area implementation and the gains emerging from it.

Jane Munga argues that the digital economy will shape the future of both continents. But in a world where technology and data are increasingly weaponized, Europe and Africa can work together on common regulation and frameworks governed by principles of freedom and prosperity. Europe can bring its experience in regulations and building common markets, while Africa can bring its digital innovation and the potential for widespread and rapid uptake of new digital technologies.

Fred Ngoga concludes the compilation by reminding readers that any partnership between Africa and Europe is made up of millions of personal experiences. He tells human stories to make the case that policymakers should listen first to the experiences of individuals navigating the legal, geographic, and institutional barriers between Africa and Europe and take a human-centered design approach to new policy frameworks.

The common thread that lies in all of these contributions is a need to step outside of current modes of thinking about geopolitics, development cooperation, and diplomacy and instead consider the ways in which a genuine partnership could build on what each party brings to navigating the current era of disruption and confusion.

Our hope is that our modest contribution helps politicians and policymakers, who carry a heavy burden of responsibility, to think differently about these problems.

CHAPTER 1

How Circular Cooperation Puts Reciprocity at the Heart of a New Africa-Europe Relationship

Jonathan Glennie and Hassan Damluji

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, European Union (EU) institutions spent $279 billion in global development cooperation, of which roughly 40 percent went to Africa.[40] Investments like these have achieved some important successes.

For example, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and Gavi, the vaccine alliance, are two initiatives which benefit from significant European contributions. Together, they helped contribute to saving more than 65 million lives.[41] A strong international focus on women's rights in development programming, including the education of girls, catalyzed paradigm and budgetary shifts in many countries receiving aid.

But as the second quarter of the century approaches, efforts to update aid and development cooperation seem tired. Initiatives to expand and improve international cooperation to meet the scale of the needs when it comes to climate change and development challenges come up against political barriers presented as inevitable facts that cannot be changed.

The dominant worldview that has shaped the Africa-Europe partnership—and the broader development cooperation landscape in which it sits—is based on vertical cooperation: the idea that so-called advanced countries support so-called developing countries with resources, know-how, and technology. In a rapidly changing world, this worldview is both outdated and inefficient. Other terminologies have been developed. Cooperation between countries in the Global South, often termed "South-South cooperation," is based instead on horizontal cooperation, and some have proposed triangular cooperation between countries and international institutions. Yet, even with these developments, partnership paradigms maintain a power dynamic of cooperation between donor and recipient.

We propose a new way of thinking about partnership: circular cooperation, where partnerships are based on consistent iterations, learning, and mutual problem-solving. In a world of rapid change and disruption, this model will lead to both greater impact and improved trust and dignity between Africa and Europe.

Time to Go Deeper

Throughout history, major crises have led to structural reforms. The Black Plague, for instance, led to daughters in Europe being granted land rights for the first time. A cholera epidemic in London in 1854 spurred action to address the city's "Great Stink" by designing the modern sewer system still in use today.[42]

World War I led to the creation of the League of Nations. The Great Depression yielded the New Deal in the United States. World War II led to the creation of the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions, and the Marshall Plan.[43]

The COVID-19 pandemic is one such crisis. In the wake of the pandemic, which killed more than 7 million people,[44] there is one consistent silver lining: a new readiness to name structural injustices. Whether related to race, gender, or geography, people around the world are calling for fundamental changes in global institutional architecture in a way that seemed peripheral only a few years ago.

Young people (in Africa, Europe, and elsewhere) seem particularly impatient with glossing over unpalatable historical realities or tinkering with manifestly outdated approaches. Whereas once society considered activists and advocates being radical (which, etymologically speaking, means getting to the root of things) as a surefire way to lose political support in global campaigning, it is now widely considered odd *not* to contextualize even the shortest-term objectives within a longer-term transformational narrative. Now, the world's largest foundations fund activities related to postcapitalism, postneoliberalism, and postcolonialism. For example, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation has a program entitled "Beyond Neoliberalism,"[45] while the stated goal of the Ford Foundation's International Cooperation program is to "promote social justice and disrupt inequality within systems of global governance and international cooperation."[46]

This debate is not new. But it has a renewed energy. In 1976, I. William Zartman, a professor at Johns Hopkins University, published an essay in *Foreign Affairs* arguing that, despite decolonization, the European Community intentionally maintained a level of African dependency through its trading, military, and aid cooperation.[47] If the world has moved from an era of *improving* aid to *decolonizing* it, what does such a transition mean for the partnership between Africa and Europe?[48]

In some ways, the cooperative relationship between Africa and Europe has already been evolving. There has been a shift from transactional engagements to more mature international partnerships, at least in rhetoric. Upon taking office, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen identified a "partnership of equals" with Africa among her top priorities.[49] European support for the African Union (AU) as a continent-wide body is refreshing for those frustrated by the history of fragmented bilateral relationships. Notably, European Council President Charles Michel was an early supporter of a proposal to grant the AU a permanent seat at the G20.[50]

But the progress at the beginning of this century—as part of the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation,[51] which emphasized country ownership, inclusive partnership, and transparency—has, if anything, been reversed as financial crises have deepened in both Africa and Europe, in part as a result of the pandemic.

In Europe, restricted budgets have meant an increasing focus on narrowly formed conceptions of quantifiable "results," which incentivizes investments in shorter-term, more easily measurable impacts and recentralizes decisionmaking in what are called "donor" capitals (despite the new language of "localization"). In Africa, officials of cash-strapped governments fly north in journeys reminiscent of the ones their predecessors made in the 1980s, to argue for stimulus packages and debt relief.

The arrival in both Africa and Europe of large-scale investment from China and other Global South giants has busied the geopolitical landscape, offering opportunity and risk in equal measure and providing African leaders with leverage in their negotiations with traditional development partners.

But the response of some Europeans is straight out of the playbook of twentieth-century power games. This repeated script was displayed at the Munich Security Conference in 2023, when Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said, "To leave Africa in Chinese hands is a big mistake for everybody here."[52]

Cultural attitudes are changing. African economies are evolving, European economies struggling, and major Global South players emerging. The old paradigm is dying, but a new one struggles to be born.

The Africa-Europe relationship is hemmed in by a narrative that prevents it from responding to the real needs of the two continents in the twenty-first century. For example, while the European Commission has changed the name of its Directorate-General for International

Cooperation and Development to International Partnerships, power dynamics and institutional mandates mean the focus remains on managing aid budgets while the trade-focused parts of the commission view their role as one defined by hard negotiation for European interests in what some consider a mercantilist approach to negotiating with African countries. Africa has already changed its approach to relationships with China and Russia, so without a significant paradigm shift in Europe's understanding of cooperation, progress will continue to be constrained.

Developed and Developing

Although the terms "first, second, and third world" are no longer the language for development economists, the fundamental division they describe remains at the heart of development cooperation in the idea that some countries are "developed" or "advanced" while others, the majority, are "developing" or "emerging."

The unspoken premise is that progress and resolution to human society's challenges are to be found in one part of the world—namely, Europe and North America—and other parts of the world need to look north for answers and help.

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were adopted in New York in 2015, appeared to have broken through this narrative with universal aspirations for all countries, not just so-called developing countries.

However, the development cooperation narrative has lagged behind. The headline outcome of the EU-Africa Summit in February 2022, while couched in language of common values and shared partnership, focused on the announcement of a €150 billion EU investment package for Africa.[53] South African President Cyril Ramaphosa's response was to doubt whether Europe would follow through on its pledge.[54]

It is true, of course, that wealthier countries are in a better position to provide funds, but funding is only one aspect of cooperation, and it is obviously false that the countries of Europe cannot benefit from solutions designed in Africa and that African countries cannot contribute to development in Europe, despite more limited financial resources.

Toward Circular Cooperation

The pandemic was better managed in many African countries than in European countries,[55] and some African countries are ahead of the curve at adapting to climate change and managing the associated loss and damage. For example, in 2019, two-thirds of Kenya's energy came from bioenergy. It is pioneering the generation and adoption of geothermal and carbon capture and storage technology.[56]

These advances are commonly acknowledged in the modern world of international cooperation, but there is still no program model or institutional framework to ensure in practice that all countries are able to contribute what they can to solving global challenges.

In contrast to this supposedly vertical, Global-North-to-Global-South way of thinking, the concept of South-South cooperation—which emerged from the Buenos Aires Plan of Action in 1978—has long been presented as offering horizontal cooperation between peers, with both parties benefiting from collaborative projects.[57] But the Global South covers a vast range of countries, and relationships can be just as "vertical" as North-South ones when, for instance, China (which has a per capita gross domestic product, or GDP, around $12,500) engages with Zambia (GDP per capita $1,100).

Continuing the geometric imagery, the concept of "triangular" cooperation has recently come to the fore, encouraging communities of different wealth levels to engage in development projects in a new way, building on complementary strengths.[58] Typically, an organization based in a high-income country provides funding, partners from a middle-income country provide expertise, and a low-income country is the target for development impact. However, even with this apparently modern triangular approach, the colonial narrative persists, and "vertical" cooperation is maintained by situating a poor country supported in its development by richer countries.

These three models need to evolve further. They don't recognize the twenty-first-century patterns of education, mobility, and technology diffusion that make it increasingly possible for financially poorer groups in Africa and Europe to lead change based on profound knowledge and experience. They don't recognize that vulnerability exists in countries of all wealth levels, including in European countries. And they don't recognize that, facing an uncertain future, European publics increasingly want to ensure that they are getting something out of international cooperation. That something should be access to the remarkable human capital, ingenuity, and innovation that comes from the need to solve problems in remarkable resource constraints.

A modern approach to Africa-Europe cooperation should emphasize reciprocity. Circular cooperation would be the final rejection of the colonial thinking that has so undermined relationships between the two continents. It would break down the donor-recipient divide and treat all countries as both co-contributors and co-recipients of ideas, experience, resources, and support. Where one country has more material resources, it would contribute more money, but that would not accord it leadership status. All countries would jointly recognize and implement a program of work from which all would benefit in different ways.

Circular cooperation would place dignity in the hands of Africans, their countries, and their communities, as well as Europeans. Too often the psychological aspects of development are overlooked by bean-counter approaches to impact, but without the self-esteem associated with the power to contribute, communities are less motivated to build change for themselves, let alone others, meaning that even supposedly hard outcomes (measured, for example, in lives saved or children educated) are reduced. In fact, people everywhere routinely choose dignity over economic outcomes; some governments reject help from abroad, even when their populations remain extremely poor.

The impacts of circular cooperation will be broader, as both African and European countries benefit from collaboration and learning. Today, too much value is being left on the table by European stakeholders who are missing the opportunity to provide benefits to their own communities, despite having real problems to solve. It is likely that over time this way of viewing international cooperation will be popular with both Africans and Europeans. There are mixed messages on public support for international cooperation in Europe, but some European leaders seem increasingly inclined toward mutual cooperation to prevent, for example, a pandemic crossing borders or multiplying climate crises.

The principles behind circular cooperation are already evident in a new approach to international public finance called global public investment (GPI), which has been developed through a co-creative process involving organizations and experts across the world. It emphasizes the critical role of concessional international public finance, particularly grants, and envisages a system for meeting global ambitions through long-term, reliable investment in the goods, capital, and infrastructure they require and responding to global challenges such as climate adaptation, pandemics, and social protection. Without undermining the responsibility of the richest countries to pay their fair share, GPI comprises three universal principles reflecting a circular approach to addressing the world's challenges: all contribute, all benefit, all decide.[59]

Breaking Down Conceptual Constraints

GPI's emphasis on reciprocity also breaks down a range of other conceptual constraints. For example, development economists tend to think that ending extreme poverty—a concept defined by World Bank economists based in Washington, DC—is the only real goal of development cooperation; when the worst forms of poverty are ended, the job is done. Instead, reciprocity would involve not just containing the direst situations but also consistently solving problems, improving living standards, identifying opportunities for increased sustainability and prosperity, and creating convergence with the living standards of citizens of wealthier countries.[60]

Increasingly, governments and international analysts and agencies (including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Monetary Fund) are emphasizing the problems of inequality and the crucial redistributive role of taxation, picking up on the work done for decades by civil society and academics. Whether the 2008 financial crisis ushered in a new era of global inequality, as many claim, or simply noticing it more as it increases in Western countries, deep inequality is entrenched in most countries. The heart of political struggle revolves around trying to persuade the "haves" to share wealth and opportunities more generously with the "have-nots." These challenges cannot be resolved in a short space of time, say three, five, or ten years, and they are susceptible to backsliding as much as to progress. Policymakers need to better acknowledge the long-term nature of political change given this stubborn reality.

Through a reciprocal approach to cooperation, another fundamental conceptual constraint is challenged: the idea that the development process has a time horizon. A common slogan in the world of development cooperation is that "our job is to do ourselves out of a job." But the idea that countries move along the same development continuum as their economies grow is false; countries at similar levels of income per capita can have vastly different institutional arrangements and types/standards of public service provision.

Perhaps more importantly, there are constantly new challenges requiring international cooperation; natural disasters, conflict, disease outbreaks, and macroeconomic shocks can set countries back decades on some development indicators, as the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated. There should be no exit strategies for cooperation; rather countries should cooperate through learning, adapting to change, and resolving challenges together as they arise. Circular cooperation would not be a time-bound process (any more than working together on technology and security is) but a permanent and evolving direction of travel.

Reciprocal forms of cooperation also, quite obviously, require an equitable form of governance with a focus on voice, ownership, and accountability. For cooperation to be successful it has to be managed well, grounded in transparency and fairness, and aligned to national priorities and contexts. It has to be sufficient, predictable, and sustainable. These attributes are not delivered well by the present system. Africa-Europe circular cooperation projects and institutions would be built by Africans and Europeans together, in contrast to an aid architecture built in Europe and the United States at a time when colonial attitudes were dominant. African and European countries could propose an equivalent of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action to inspire new approaches for modern, interregional cooperation.[61]

Conclusion: Clues From the EU and the AU

The good news is that clues to how to build this approach can be found close to home. Both the EU and the AU showcase what a reciprocal approach to cooperation within a region can look like: countries clubbing together to solve common problems. The goal of convergence is at the heart of the theory behind the EU's Structural and Investment Funds and Cohesion Funds,[62] whereby the EU's wealthier countries, including some of the world's major donors, transfer billions to poorer European countries, which are nevertheless wealthy by global standards. With the adoption of the SDGs, the door for applying EU-style thinking to a broader global context seems to be wide open.

Neither in Africa nor in Europe do countries metaphorically graduate from concessional assistance upon reaching a certain (arbitrary) level of income per capita. Notably, even the wealthier countries in the EU grouping, net contributors to the overall pot and some of the richest countries in the world, also benefit directly from EU grants. The money they receive is generally used to promote social cohesion, generate jobs, and invest in green growth in poorer parts of the country, as well as to support broader objectives such as culture and environmental sustainability.

Since their inception, the two EU funds have been about more than overcoming an arbitrary poverty line. While the EU's and the AU's funds both focus on poverty and social cohesion, with special funds for humanitarian responses, their thematic focuses go well beyond these concerns, looking at greater connectivity between countries, infrastructure development, job creation, small business development and entrepreneurship, research and innovation, and environmental protection.

The most important aspect of EU fund governance is that, because all countries pay in and all receive, all sit around the table deciding how funds should be spent—much in the way those backing a GPI approach propose. Critical to the theory underpinning the EU funds, and to garnering public support for this redistribution of wealth, is the recognition that reducing disparities in living standards and building shared infrastructure is important for the progress and security of all parts of the union, not just the direct recipients of grants.

This form of reciprocity has deep implications for the Africa-Europe partnership. Moving from one-way development cooperation to mutual circular cooperation will require not only a shift in worldview that sees every participant as an active contributor to finding solutions for all but also a new political narrative that does away with the harmful notion of international charity.

Circular cooperation will demonstrate the value to the citizens of both Africa and Europe and redesign institutional mandates in a way that redistributes power to all contributors. In an era of rapid change and significant disruption, the moment demands a type of partnership that puts dignity and reciprocity at its center.

CHAPTER 2

Harmonizing the Climate and Energy Transition Agendas of Africa and Europe

Saliem Fakir

In her 2023 State of the Union address, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen praised the impact of Europe's green investments in Africa as investments in Europe's prosperity. In her next breath, she turned to how "conflict, climate change and instability are pushing people to seek refuge elsewhere."[63] This is one example of how climate diplomacy largely frames the goals of investment in Africa as mitigating risks around issue-based climate concerns, such as peace, security, and migration.

But it is time to move away from discussions about vulnerabilities and weaknesses and toward the enlightened strategic autonomies of both continents, which can together form an investment partnership for mutual economic interests. The energy transition presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to align the geopolitical interests of both regions.

Africa-Europe climate diplomacy should adopt an integrated approach linking climate and development issues as part of a broader economic development planning and investment process that could transform the economies of both continents.

In this light, both continents should take steps to mobilize low-cost investment in the energy transition, actively champion the future finance and investment trajectory of multilateral institutions, and actively participate in Africa's economic diversification agenda.

Achieving Europe's Climate Goals Depends on Good Neighborliness With Africa

Today's geopolitical shifts in relation to tackling global climate issues are increasingly serving the economic interests of advanced economies. These powers are actively seeking to use national or regional climate goals to shape future energy markets and become frontier developers of green technologies.

The African continent is an increasingly strategic player and should be a priority for the European Union (EU) and for European countries for four primary reasons.[64]

First, the size of Africa's economy is projected to triple by 2040, with $5.6 trillion in business opportunities by 2025.[65] While growth rates have decelerated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank estimates that many of Africa's regions will post growth rates of between 3 and 5 percent from 2020 onward.[66] By 2050, Africa will have the youngest population in the world, the largest workforce, and the fastest rate of urbanization.[67] This opportunity also presents a risk because jobs will have to be found for many young Africans, while the continent will face a range of climate vulnerabilities. But if these challenges are addressed through better policy choices and improved governance, the prosperity that ensues will play a role in addressing instability and social conflicts.[68]

Second, on the diplomatic front, Africa holds the largest share of votes of any region at the United Nations (UN). These votes cannot be taken for granted in a world where votes count on climate-related matters at the UN General Assembly, the World Trade Organization, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change—where economic and new industrial development trajectories intersect.[69] This impact became clear when Europe along with other Western nations struggled to corral African votes behind a succession of UN resolutions condemning Russia's actions in Ukraine. Most African countries took the view that they did not want to be drawn into Europe's conflict.[70]

Third, the war in Ukraine has made Europe more dependent on the supply of coal, natural gas, and oil from Africa—Africa's gas supply to Europe is projected to double by 2050.[71] This is a short-term economic imperative. Reducing gas supply from Russia has increased prices and impacted European industries.[72] Yet, this is also hypocritical: one branch of EU climate diplomacy is calling for the world to decarbonize and for Africa to get off gas, while individual member states are negotiating new gas deals for European consumption.[73]

Fourth, Africa is rich in mineral resources needed for this new industrial revolution, and it has large land availability (especially for green hydrogen production). The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), for instance, has just over 50 percent of the world's cobalt deposits and is responsible for 70 percent of global production.[74] Ghana is poised to become a leading lithium producer, and Zimbabwe has an abundance of the mineral.[75] Limited and unsecure access to critical minerals will likely undermine Europe's competitiveness. The EU's Green Deal Industrial Plan (GDIP) for electric vehicles, batteries, electrolysis for green hydrogen, and renewables is highly reliant on a variety of critical minerals such as lithium, graphite, cobalt, nickel, copper, and others. The EU's Critical Raw Materials Act, adopted as preliminary package by the European Parliament and the European Council in November 2023,[76] is driven by the fact that the continent will need eighteen times more lithium and fifteen times more cobalt to meet its climate goals.[77]

Europe's push for strategic autonomy can easily tie with Africa's own pan-African ambition contained in the Agenda 2063 program, which aims to create an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa.[78] The idea of the African Union (AU) mirrors the European project of a unified political bloc, and the AU now represents fifty-five countries. It is reinforced with the recent creation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which is one of the largest and most diverse free trade areas in the world.[79]

Europe's experience in the creation of a common market gives it an advantage vis-à-vis other major powers. But a new model of economic partnership for mutual security and development between the two continents cannot be understood in isolation from increasing geopolitical competition between China, Russia, and the United States—not to mention other middle powers such as Japan, South Korea, and Türkiye.

Green Industrial Strategy

The trend toward industrial policy is of principal importance. The Joe Biden administration's Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) is landmark legislation to support the United States' energy transition through subsidies and tax breaks. The IRA has not only raised alarm bells within the EU but also with key members of the G7. Canada, for example, has warned against the United States fragmenting the Atlantic alliance with what it called a "carbon subsidy war."[80]

The Norwegian company Yara International, which has operations across the African continent and is exploring new opportunities in East Africa, is also considering the United States as a key destination for fertilizer production. In an interview in the *Financial Times*, Yara's CEO, Svein Tore Holsether, noted that Yara requires massive amounts of renewables to produce large quantities of clean ammonia green hydrogen—quantities that would require a scale-up faster than the current pace at which green hydrogen projects are being rolled out in Europe. These sentiments are coming on the back of the United States' IRA, which is effectively a series of green subsidies for different clean technology pathways Washington is seeking to scale to build new industrial capability.[81]

In response to the IRA subsidies, companies like Yara have pressured von der Leyen, to take action.[82] In response to the IRA, the EU published the GDIP to enhance the EU's competitiveness and key industry and technology innovation within the geography of the EU.[83] The strategies of the U.S. and EU plans all include a focus on the security of critical mineral supply chains, an area where China already has a lead.

China dominates the production of rare earth minerals and has secured key critical minerals supply chains and contracts in Africa. But this advancement is being countered by new competition; for example, the United States recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the DRC and Zambia on battery minerals.[84] But, the EU cannot solely rely on its relationship with the United States to guarantee a security supply of critical minerals. The sudden announcement of the IRA by the Biden administration has demonstrated that Washington will pursue its own interests irrespective of its friendship with the EU.

Both the United States and the EU will have to contend with China's strategy of wrapped state-to-state deals, sometimes also described as the Angola model. In this model, China agrees to extract mineral resources in exchange for Chinese state-owned companies building critical infrastructure or providing competitive, low-cost loans.[85] Europe's climate and development diplomacy will increasingly have to contend with alternative financing and development models from its economic rivals.

The EU will need African sources of supply and will have to develop a constructive partnership model for critical minerals, which are needed in wide-ranging new areas of technology modernization. This need is an opportunity to shape new areas of cooperation as Europe looks to reduce its dependence on China for critical minerals and the production of clean energy technologies.[86] In order to boost the security of its own critical minerals supply, the EU has established the European Raw Materials Fund, which aims to raise €100 billion.[87]

This reactionary approach to industrial policy risks hindering the trust between Africa and Europe. The GDIP, touted in Europe as beneficial to Africa, actually risks undermining Africa's market access. New standards, rules over market access, and carbon border tax adjustments, which have been read by Africans as inward-looking and a new form of protectionism, could harm the African continent rather than boost prosperity.[88]

African Expectations of Europe

Recurrent summits and other diplomatic engagements between the EU and AU often seem like rituals that must be performed, and a widening gap is emerging between the rhetorical ambition expressed by both parties and the delivery of developmental outcomes. The EU concerns itself with pushing normative outcomes such as governance, democracy, peace, and stability, hoping that this will enable development.

On the other hand, China is supporting African states by providing concrete, real-economy investments and locking in a range of deals on key minerals, information technologies, and knowledge transfer. These deals are not without costs, particularly when it comes to debt burdens, but highly visible results are delivered rapidly. These contrasts—alongside China's perceived anticolonial history and recent track record of lifting millions of people out of poverty[89]—are shaping the optics that ought to indicate to the EU that it needs to up its game.[90]

To signal that it is serious about a new kind of relationship, the EU should consider the interests of African countries, principally the following.

First, Europe should stop treating climate change as a spillover risk to Europe or relegating its importance to aid projects that deal with adaptation and resilience. The entire framework of climate diplomacy must be reconceptualized as an investment partnership for mutual economic interests rather than secondary to them.[91]

The EU could use its clout to mobilize the G7 and wealthy countries behind an African climate and development agenda. This should include arguing for better African representation at key decisionmaking tables, building on the approval of a permanent seat for the AU at the G20 and arguing for effective debt relief programs aligned with much cheaper sources of finance that are embedded with climate objectives.[92] Reducing debt distress enhances the fiscal space of governments, supports sustainable growth, and improves new capital-raising efforts from public and private sources with better credit ratings. Interestingly, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which held the 2023 presidency for the UN climate change conference known as COP28, is targeting highly indebted countries in Africa with finance packages to build out their energy transitions. A UAE deal with Zambia involves $2 billion (€1.84 billion) in phased installation for 2,000 megawatts of solar generation capacity and is described not as a loan but an investment with the Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation (ZESCO).[93]

Second, Africa needs significant sources of cheap financing to scale up its infrastructure and deliver Africa's Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), an African Development Bank initiative that aims to advance crucial regional and continental infrastructure sectors. The Africa-Europe Investment Package of €150 billion announced at the 2022 AU-EU Summit, part of the EU's €300 billion Global Gateway infrastructure initiative, should materialize quickly.[94] This could undergird the EU's mantra of a values-driven premise and high standards for infrastructure. The pledge is also aligned with the G7's Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, which also aims to advance public and private investments in sustainable, inclusive, resilient, and quality infrastructure.[95]

Third, Europe should actively champion the future finance and investment trajectory of multilateral institutions within its own domain and within the Bretton Woods framework. Two important initiatives, the Bridgetown Initiative led by Barbadian Prime Minister Mia Mottley and the Summit for a New Global Financial Pact led by French President Emmanuel Macron,[96] have encapsulated not only broader reforms but also have created coalitions of governments and non-state actors to champion proposals to increase the supply of finance for climate and development agendas in developing countries.

Fourth, the EU should participate in Africa's economic diversification agenda. The EU is pushing for a more restricted market through its Green Deal and the introduction of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), but these instruments are too blunt and will certainly be damaging, especially if the current approach to the CBAM is not reconsidered.[97] Some research estimates suggest that the CBAM, if implemented in its current form, would knock as much as $16 billion per year off of Africa's GDP.[98] The elements of the mechanism that penalize African exports with embedded carbon intensity—without room for exemptions and leeway for adjustments—will be harmful to sectors that are key for Africa's export-led growth and foreign exchange. Key sectors that are likely to be impacted by the CBAM are automobiles, steel, cement, petrochemicals, and fertilizers. The EU should consider a formal structure and process to facilitate more meaningful discussions with key African states most likely to be adversely impacted by the CBAM. For example, an approach is already being provided for the German government's climate club, which is aimed at providing a parallel forum for high emitters to engage each other directly on decarbonization solutions that involve trade or nontrade measures that impact their exports.

Fifth, the EU and African countries should partner on a shift to an integrated approach linking climate and development issues as part of a broader economic development planning and investment process. This shift should build on an assessment of the economic context and development trajectory of African countries that highlights the priority climate risks and investment opportunities. Models such as the much-vaunted just energy transition partnerships (JETPs), which were started in South Africa and are now being mimicked elsewhere on the continent, are useful country platform models to align cheap sources of finance with energy transitions and economic diversification.

Via the European Investment Bank, the EU has started a journey toward a comprehensive approach using the South African JETP as a test case to an approach the Global Gateway initiative can adopt more broadly for clean energy infrastructure deals on the continent. JETPs are useful models to collapse several things: achieving high climate ambitions, aligning the financing package to increase fiscal space and reduce debt levels, and supporting rapid policy reform and implementation on the back of a finance package.[99]

These deals also allow EU-based firms to play a leading role in the energy transition space and for private sector finance to be crowded in. But, for these deals to work, the EU has to develop fast-track mechanisms and should consider new mandates and roles for the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. African countries should increase the capacity at the African Development Bank and Africa Export-Import Bank to participate meaningfully.

Finally, the EU should shift to a developmental and investment approach when it comes to critical minerals. The EU should prioritize value addition in the extraction of critical minerals, following the example of the United States in its partnership with Zambia and the DRC to strengthen electric vehicle battery value chains.[100] Working with producer countries of critical minerals, such as Zambia and the DRC, to enhance and improve sourcing quality and standards, embedding more human rights and social justice measures in critical minerals extraction processes, would not only create jobs and build prosperity but also would help ensure that governance in host countries and firms exporting these critical minerals adhere to best practices.[101] This could be part of a broader efforts to address what is perceived to be a fragmented trade policy when it comes to Africa and to integrate EU trade actions with the AfCFTA in a way that promotes common interests and approaches to investment in the new green sectors.[102]

Conclusions: Where to Take Climate Issues and Climate Diplomacy

When it comes to climate diplomacy, Africa's future will determine Europe's fate. The role of climate finance and the alignment between development and private finance require European and African policymakers to focus on long-term mutual strategic interests in the political, economic, and trade spheres rather than on short-term risks. Never before has the climate agenda become more pertinent to these issues given that the world is moving into a new era of geopolitical fragmentation, fractured trade regimes, and competitiveness issues in green industrialization.

Climate diplomacy, therefore, remains an important tool for all parties to revitalize the Africa-Europe relationship and bring joint, climate-related actions to the center of the economic transformation of both regions through just energy transitions, interlinkages in trade of critical minerals, and mutual industrialization and manufacturing.

CHAPTER 3

Connection and Creativity: Rethinking the Movement of People in and Between Africa and Europe

Marta Foresti and David McNair

In 2019, with the space to think about the strategic long-term interests of Europe, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen started her term by prioritizing the EU's partnership with Africa. She said,

> "I have chosen Africa for my very first visit outside of Europe. I hope my presence at the African Union can send a strong political message, because the African continent and the African Union matter to the European Union."

While a series of crises—including COVID-19, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the war between Israel and Hamas—have dramatically changed her calculus and that of other European leaders, the underlying facts that led von der Leyen to prioritize Africa remain. The two continents have a common and collective future even though, politically, they may feel farther apart than ever.

There are two ways to look at this; *plus* ça *change, plus c'est la même chose.* Existing inequalities will persist, Europe will continue to look down on Africa as a continent in need of help, or aid, to support its (slow) development. Yet, increasingly, this old—and in many ways colonial—approach is seen by many, particularly in Africa, as past its sell-by date.

If Africa and Europe are to work closely together toward a collective future, the people of Africa and Europe need to also *be* together: to do business, be connected, meet, trade goods and ideas, learn from each other, and partner as equals. And to do this, people need to be able to *move*- within, and between, the two continents.

Yet, migration and human mobility remains a fundamental unresolved political challenge standing in the way of better Africa-Europe relations.[103] There is simply no hope for a partnership of equals until progress is made to facilitate, rather than deter, the movement of people.

Despite this paramount political necessity, the latest headlines in many European countries, including not only Italy and Sweden but also the UK, suggest that if anything the migration governance agenda is backsliding with little appetite for cooperation among European countries, let alone finding common grounds with African counterparts. Most EU migration deals are in fact a framework to manage asylum and do not really address the broader, and in many ways a much more complex, question, of how the two continents can manage the necessary movement of people to support societal needs.

The EU's approach not only inhibits the creation of new ties but also impacts how Africans feel about Europe. If Africans are not welcomed in a world where they have options, they will take their intellect, creative energy, and considerable future spending power elsewhere. Until some common ground on migration is found, the issue will continue to poison relations between the two continents.

Contrary to this political narrative, overwhelming evidence points to the benefits that migration brings to migrants and their host communities in terms of economic resilience and increasing incomes of domestic populations. More recent studies add to this, increasingly focusing on both the practical implications and the political barriers standing in the way of a more pragmatic approach to migration policies – notably dissociating migration with permanent citizenship of the host country.[104]

For some time now research has shown that public attitudes on immigration among the European population are not as negative as one might expect given how prominent anti-immigration policies continue to be on the political agenda in several countries. In France, for example, positive sentiments toward migrants have surpassed negative sentiments since 2016, the year of the EU's so-called migration crisis.[105] In 2018, 63 percent of Swedes reported that immigrants make the country a better place to live.[106] In Spain less of the population saw immigration as a problem (20 percent) than an opportunity (29 percent) according to survey data in 2021.[107]

Given this apparent conundrum, it has proven hard to develop policy propositions and political narratives to make the most of these positive attitudes that Europeans hold toward refugees and other migrants.

However, new analysis drawing on historical data is beginning to shed some light on this: European citizens' positive views of migration could be a reaction to nationalist and far-right electoral successes, in what is known as a "reverse backlash effect." For example, immigration attitudes improved following the Brexit referendum in the UK and former president Donald Trump's 2016 election in the United States. This emerging body of evidence suggests that pro-immigration reforms do not necessarily lead to increases in populist voting.[108]

There is no easy way to interpret this evidence nor point to a policy solution to this apparent paradox. But a mid- to long-term view of how Europeans think and feel about immigration, and what is likely to influence these views, reveals that populists are not likely to succeed. Those with progressive views of human mobility are actually winning, even though it may not feel that way. Or at least not yet.[109]

Another key area of evidence concerns the economic benefits of migration. There is ample evidence that moving across borders can bring benefits to those who move in terms of increased income and expanded opportunities;[110] those who stay in the sending country via remittance and other nonmonetary benefits, like knowledge transfers; and host communities, as immigrants tend to increase the fiscal balance of the countries where they live, expand opportunities, and increase entrepreneurialism.[111] The economic benefits for individuals who move from a developed to an advanced economy and work for minimum wage are on average 334 percent higher than if the individual did not move and instead participated in an economic development program.[112]

Yet this evidence on the economic benefits of migration is not cutting through to public opinion and has at times contributed to a sense of division between those who benefit from immigration, including the urban elites and potential migrants themselves, and those who feel excluded, such as workers on low income or in deprived areas with poor service provisions and limited employment opportunities.

With such a rational argument for the movement of people, but such a difficult political environment in which to craft and present a new message, the time is ripe for a different way of thinking about the reality of human mobility.

The World Bank's 2023 World Development Report tried to close this gap and find a pragmatic common ground: a "match and motive" matrix that focuses on how closely migrants' skills and attributes match the needs of destination countries and what motives underlie their movements. This approach enables policymakers to distinguish between different types of movements, minimize the causes of distressed movements, and maximize the net gains when people bring skills and labor to a new location.[113]

This kind of pragmatism is needed in the Africa-Europe relations, not least because of the demographic trends. Europe is aging rapidly, which is creating a fiscal time bomb that is increasingly recognized by financial markets. In 2023, Moody's, S&P, and Fitch warned that worsening demographics are already hitting governments' credit ratings because of the impacts of higher pensions and healthcare costs.[114]

As Dietmar Hornung, associate managing director at Moody's Investors Services, told the *Financial Times*, "In the past, demographics were a medium- to long-term consideration. . . . Now, the future is with us and already hitting sovereign credit profiles."

Africa has labor in abundance, as a result of its stage of the demographic cycle. By 2050, it will add 796 million people to the labor force, by which time, Europe's labor force will have declined by 156 million.[115]

What would a pragmatic approach to the movement of people look like? We have a proposal.

Here, language really matters. When the media or academics use phrases like "fortress Europe," they suggest that Europe is trying to protect something dear from attack.

Our proposal involves moving beyond both the defensive language of border protection and the reactive approach that involves responding once the negative narrative has already been set. Instead, we are embracing the idea of spaces and places of connection and creativity and suggesting that policymakers design policies and practices to facilitate these spaces and the movement between places.

The literature on spatial clustering supports the idea that new industries and innovations that create changes in industrial structures are rooted in a specific space and time before being disbursed much more widely.[116] This is far from a new idea. Going back to Irish scientist Robert Boyle's performative lectures at the Royal Society in London in the 17th Century, to the innovation of Silicon Valley, human progress is rooted in spaces and places. Spatial proximity creates ecosystems of learning, innovation and growth. [117]

So, the temporary movement of people between places to enable these spaces of connection and creativity could be supported and its potential economic benefits tested, since there are clearly political, social, and creative benefits to doing so.

To change the old, tired paradigm of Africa-Europe migration, we propose shifts in three key areas:

1. the narrative defining what migration is about,
2. the policies and tools that can turn these changes into reality, and
3. the places people move to and the leaders embracing this movement.

Investing in Creativity

Moving between places and across borders is much more than just crossing them. It is a journey of ideas, talent, and cultures. Yet this is so often missing in Africa-Europe relations: a narrative that considers the movement of talent and ideas, not just bodies (or brains), across and between the two continents.

Culture and creativity are areas where Africa and Europe present a unique added value to each other, with the potential for investment to make a real difference to economic and social development.[118] The so-called old continent is revered and respected around the world for its culture, art, design and history—including in the relatively recent boom in European luxury goods.[119]And Africa has demonstrated the value of its cultural dynamism in the areas of fashion, food, and music.

In 2022, sub-Saharan Africa had the fastest-growing music market in the world, according to the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry.[120] Afrobeats, for example, has become a global cultural export with artists like Burnaboy and Wizkid regularly selling out Madison Square Gardens. Afrobeats manager and CEO of Mavin Records, Don Jazzy, has spoken of the challenges he has faced in gaining visas to Europe for his artists despite the significant cultural and economic capital they bring.[121] They are young, highly creative artists with massive followings and huge potential. But they are also young African men with few financial assets and are therefore considered a risk under current visa rules.

African fashion was identified by the *Economist* as one of the five global trends to watch in 2022.[122] Cultural exchanges (featured in figure 2), highlight the vibrancy of the sector. A major exhibition called Africa Fashion opened in July 2022 at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, "exploring the vitality and global impact of a fashion scene as dynamic and varied as the continent itself," where cultural exchange was a key outcome.[123] African designers are hot tickets at London, Milan, and Paris fashion weeks, and Chanel chose Dakar as the setting for its latest fashion show.[124]

Beyond catwalks, creative sectors are increasingly seen as key to fostering local economic development, especially in cities.[125] African and European cities collaborate to create opportunities for city-based creatives to connect, exchange practices and ideas, co-create, and make the most of the business opportunities that these collaboration may lead to. As with the Afrobeats example, these initiatives are severely hampered by the ability of African creatives to obtain visitor and business visas to travel to Europe.

Figure 2. *Freetown based fashion models and designers on a cultural exchange in London. Photo credit: Sama Kai. London, September 2022*

African designers in more elite cultural spaces face the same challenge. The 2023 Architecture Biennale was curated by Scottish-Ghanaian architect Lesley Lokko.[126] Yet some of Lokko's collaborators were denied visas to travel to Venice.[127] The Italian Embassy in Accra claimed there were reasonable doubts on their "intention to leave the territory, or state, before the expiry of [their] visa." In other words, they cannot be trusted to just want to visit as guests of a high profile international cultural event. Lokko went on to win the Royal Institute of British Architect's Royal Gold Medal in 2024.[128]

With the 2024 Venice Art Biennale titled 'Foreigners Everywhere' aimed at celebrating the immense contribution of diasporas and migrants to the arts, there is an urgent need to match the narrative with concrete policy change to finally unleash the largely untapped potential of African talent.

Reforming Visa Regimes[129]

This leads to the second shift: what would it take to make the most of the potential of African, often young, creative talent in ways that could benefit the arts and culture sectors in both continents? A reform of the temporary visa system to proactively promote spaces and creation and collaboration.[130]

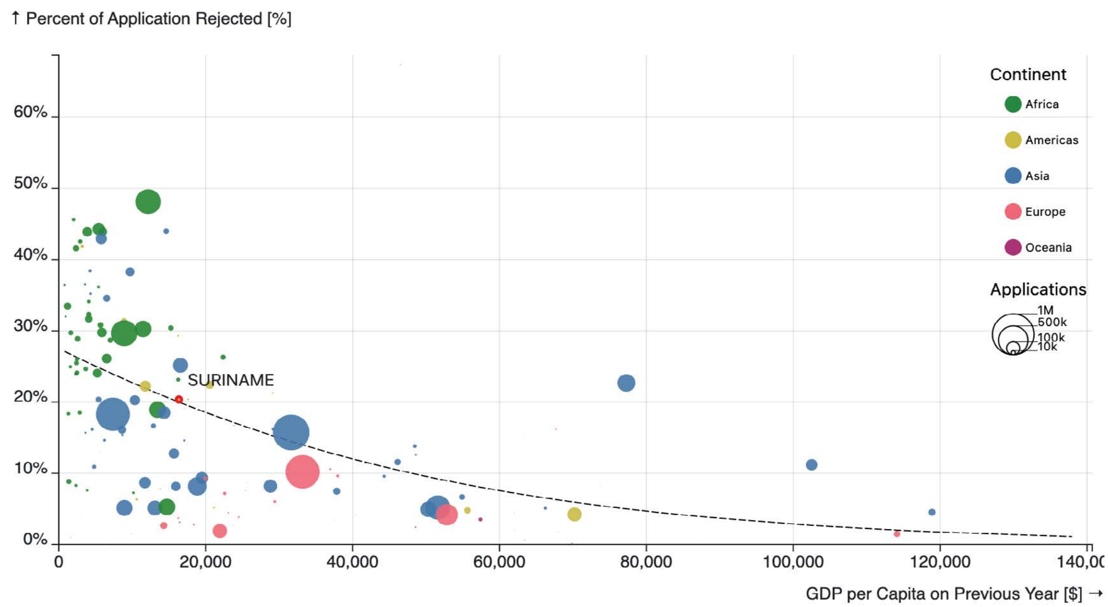
Visas matter because visiting, for work or leisure, is part of day-to-day life: going to places for short visits, temporary work, or education is not only often necessary, but it is also key to the human experience, for pleasure and happiness, to meet colleagues, friends, and family, to learn, and to develop new skills and ideas. Visa regimes are also vital components of trade agreements and are critical in some key sectors of modern economies, from culture, the arts, and tourism to tertiary education and research.[131]

Schengen countries (EU member states that have agreed to a passport-free zone) have agreed on a common, short-stay visa regime that allows third-country nationals to travel to any member of the Schengen Area for up to ninety days for tourism or business purposes. This agreement provides some common standards to the application process as well as precious data to better understand what happens to visa applications.

But the success rate of a Schengen visa application tends to depends on the GDP per capita of the country where the application is lodged. The poorer the country, the higher the rejection rate (see figure 3).[132] Analysis shows the cost borne by applicants whose visas are rejected is around €130 million a year; such costs are nonrefundable.

The rejection rate is especially high for African countries, yet most Schengen country nationals (who are Europeans) would still be able to obtain a visa on arrival in most of the African countries where these rejected applications are lodged. Furthermore, the ease of access to African e-visas has increased dramatically since 2016.[133]

Figure 3. Applicants From Poorer Countries Face a Higher Rejection Rate When Applying for Schengen Visas



Source: "Short Term Visa Accessibility," Lago Collective, accessed on December 5, 2023, https://www.lagocollective.org/material/f/visas/rejected-by-gdp.

If European and African policymakers are committed to better and more equal Africa-Europe relations, they need to fix visa regimes[134] not only because of their deeply unequal nature and the unfair deal for Africa but also because as they stand, they pose major problems for Europe. Crucially, this will create opportunities and growth on both sides of the Mediterranean.

Policy change is however not enough unless those who can turn these changes into practice have the power and resources to act. This leads to a third shift.

Shifting Power to Cities

People move to cities. By 2050, two-thirds of the world population will live in cities. Eight of the twenty fast-growing cities are located on the continent.[135]

In the same way that the battle for climate change will be won or lost in urban areas, the opportunities and challenges that migration brings must be addressed in cities.

Many African and European mayors know this and joined forces to create the Mayors' Dialogue as a political platform to act together, in a partnership of equals. The mayors of Freetown (Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr) and Milan (Giuseppe Sala) led the initiative (see figure 3), and more than twenty cities were represented, from Lisbon to Amsterdam, Accra to Kigali and Abidjan. The aim is to build on the connections rather than the differences between the cities, countries, and continents. The mayors' focus is very much on practical innovations, local solutions, and learning from each other's experiences.[136]

Figure 4. *Mayors Sala (Milan) and Aki-Sawyerr (Freetown) at the Mayor's Dialogue discussing common challenges and solutions. Photo Credit: Mia Isabella Photography*

Figure 5. *Fashion designers from Freetown on the catwalk of Durban Fashion Week, September 2023 Photo: Envizage Concepts.*

Creatives thrive in cities, and cities move, change, and grow with the innovative minds they host. Urban landscapes are shaped by creative practices rooted in local communities, which can lead to transformative urban agendas with increasing attention to sustainability and inclusion. This happens because of people, collaboration, and experimentation, at the individual and institutional levels, often across borders. The movement of people, ideas, and talents between cities is essential to make the most of the opportunities and potential that creative sectors bring to local economic development.

Some examples are already underway: For one, example, Durban, Freetown, London, and Milan (featured in figures 2 and 5) collaborate to support exchanges between city creatives, involving diasporas and using fashion and design weeks/events to anchor the collaboration.[137] The potential to support city mayors in creating concrete opportunities for exchanges and collaboration between designers, access to training and skills development, and connecting manufacturers and investors is immense.

Here's where demographic shifts are again relevant. With Europe's aging population, Africa's increasingly urban youth boom is likely to be a source of youthful creative energy for a generation. Specific economic support to build creative and cultural hubs around fashion, film, music, and food—accompanied by supportive visa policies to promote these spaces of connection—could be the spaces that create new narratives, cultural movements, and economic sectors for Europe and Africa.

Putting power and financial resources in the hands of city mayors, who are less likely to have the political constraints of national leaders and instead have direct incentives to create opportunities for all urban residents, will lead to greater opportunities to make these spaces of creativity, human mobility, and talent grow.

These shifts in thinking about human mobility will tell a different tale on the necessity and beauty of the movement of people and culture within and between the two continents: a story of talent, opportunities, trade and economic development, and local action and innovation.

CHAPTER 4

Bridging the Gap: Sending Money Home, Developing Africa

Ottilia Anna Maunganidze

In early 2023, I participated in a convening of African citizens and diaspora civil society in preparation for the 2024 Global Forum on Migration and Development.[138]

Through discussions on climate-change-linked migration, labor migration, and the role of the diaspora, one recurring theme emerged: most people that migrate out of their country of birth do not lose ties with their homes.

These ties are maintained through cultural links, direct development support, and remittances. Working, earning, and sending money and goods back home is *the* major connector.[139]

For Africa, which still heavily relies on external sources of finance, labor migration and remittances matter.

While most Africans migrate within the continent—choosing to stay as close to home as possible—the second-largest destination for Africans is the neighbor to the north: Europe.[140] In Europe in 2020, 12.7 percent of international migrants were from Africa.[141]

Much of the news on Africa-Europe migration focuses on the pitfalls—the deaths at sea, the people clandestinely entering Europe, the challenges of integration, and the purported strain on services. Yet, this is only a small part of the story.

The balance of Africa-Europe migration is mostly beneficial for both continents. Fostering partnership is thus not only necessary for both continents but a key ingredient to unlocking the potential of a sustainable and mutually beneficial relationship, as explained in the following quote.

Building Bridges Over Troubled Waters

The Africa-Europe relationship on migration ebbs and flows.[142] Over the past nine years, the dominant narrative has been shaped by images of migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe (even as both continents benefit more than they lose from safe, regular, orderly migration).[143] In February 2022, when African and European leaders met in Brussels for the sixth summit between the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU), an enhanced partnership for migration and mobility was high on the agenda for their Joint Vision for 2030.[144]

This relatively new partnership is intended to follow three main streams. The first is enhancing migration dialogues between Africa and Europe. The second is implementing joint actions, such as addressing the root causes for irregular migration and forced displacement and promoting legal migration pathways. The third is revitalizing the AU, EU, and United Nations tripartite task force on stranded migrants and refugees in Libya.

At the core of this partnership is a focus on managing migration flows from Africa to Europe. Within this initiative, there is limited (if any real) focus on intra-African migration that is not linked to onward journeys to Europe, nor is there analysis of the positive developmental role that migrants in Europe can (and do!) play in Africa. Africa and Europe do not quite see eye to eye on implementing this joint partnership on migration and mobility.

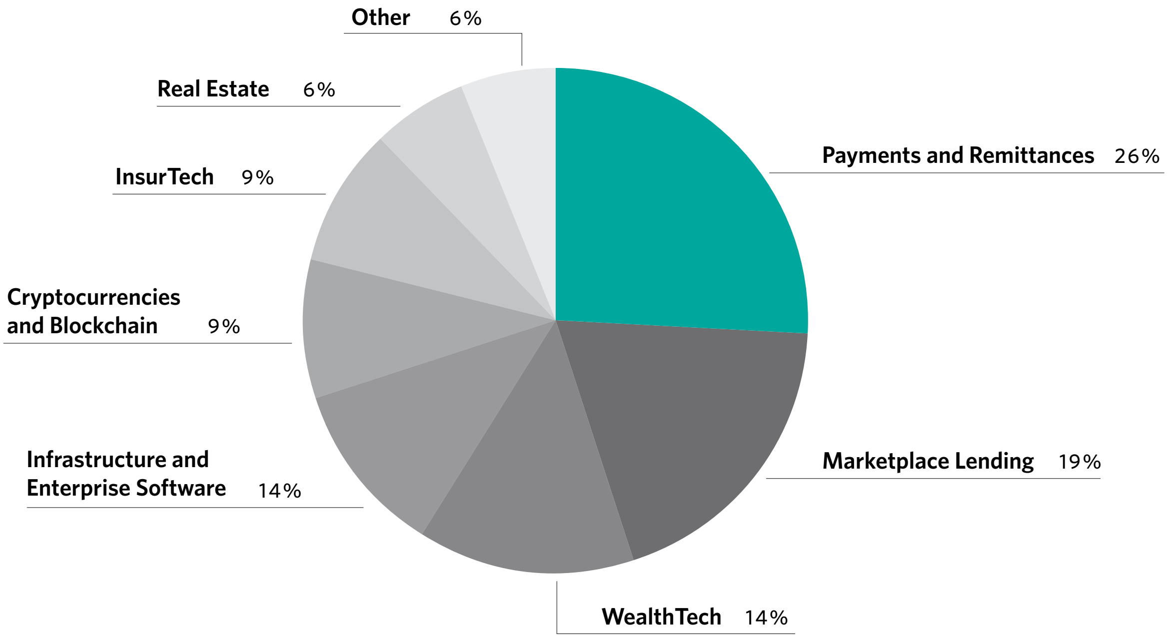
As Europe looks to tighten policing of the EU's external borders,[145] ramping up deportations and seeking to strike deals to return rejected asylum-seekers in exchange for EU funds,[146] Africa is gearing up for more internal open borders (for trade and people).[147] EU members' bilateral free trade agreements with African countries include preferential trade terms with selected countries, including clauses on migration. Efforts to put in place a continent-to-continent free trade agreement could include these provisions.[148]

But these two continents must meet each other halfway and explore positive avenues for engagement. One possible area that can help bridge this widening gap is exploring ways to better leverage remittances.

Changing Lives, One Remittance at a Time

Approximately 160 million people born in Africa now live and work in other parts of the world. The money they send back to Africa through banks, money transfer agencies, and other financial services providers (see figure 6) supports the living costs of over 200 million people in Africa (family and friends of those in the diaspora).[149] Remittance flows to sub-Saharan Africa totaled $55 billion in 2023, greater than the volume of official development assistance (ODA) to the region.[150]

Figure 6. Payments and Remittances Dominate Africa's Fintech Industry



Source: "Economic Development in Africa Report 2022," United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, https://unctad.org/edar2022

Note: Wealthtech refers to the use of technology, such as big data and AI, to offer an alternative to conventional wealth management firms. Insurtech includes the use of technology innovations to bring in savings and efficiency to the insurance industry model.

Still, the majority of Africans move within the continent, and they, too, remit billions of dollars every year: for example, the remittance corridor from South Africa contributes the majority of remittances into Zimbabwe, a country where remittances outstrip investment and aid.[151]

It is no surprise, then, that remittances are a key aspect of Africa's quest for economic development. They are formally factored in the AU's Migration Policy Framework for Africa and the continent's long-term vision for growth in Agenda 2063. Migration and remittances are seen as central to Africa's integration agenda. For Africa, remittances are a major source of foreign income, contributing billions of U.S. dollars in revenue annually. Remittances are an opportunity to better develop Africa against a backdrop of declining foreign direct investment (FDI) and flatlining ODA.[152]

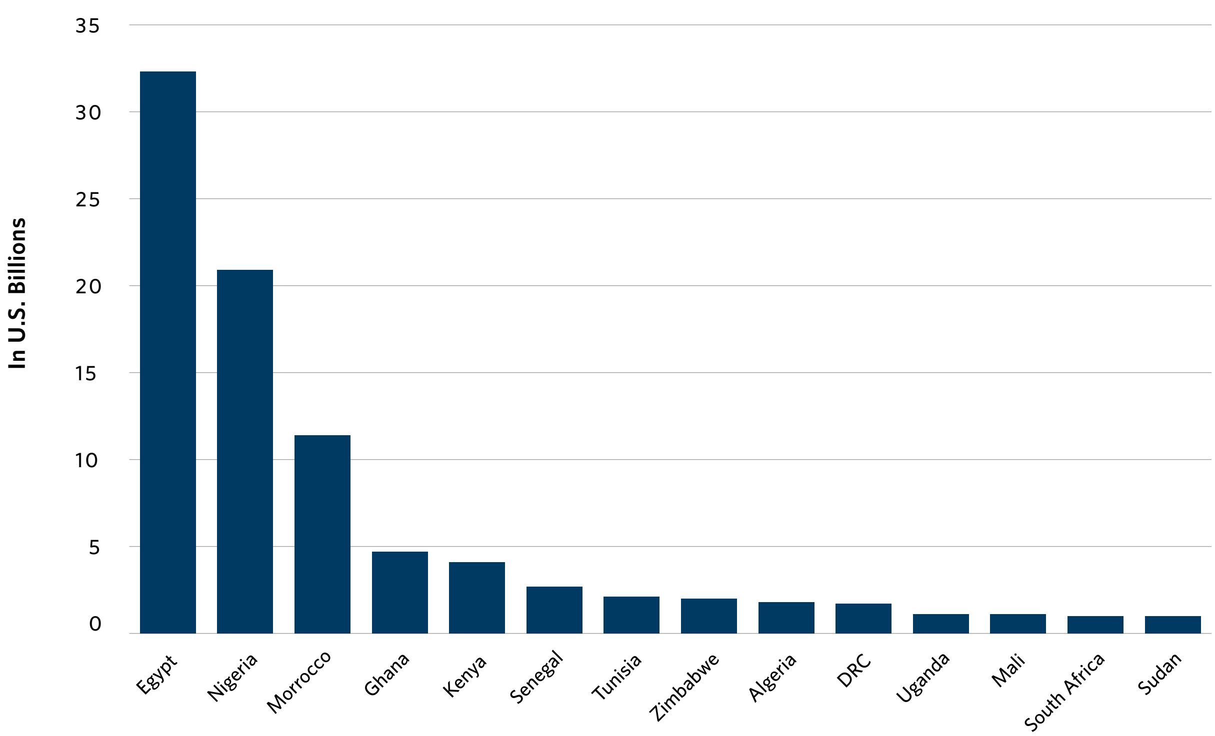
In 2020, despite predictions that the COVID-19 pandemic would adversely impact flows, remittances grew to $540 billion globally, with Africa accounting for 15.37 percent of global remittance inflows.[153] In 2021 and 2022, remittances continued to grow (see figure 7).[154] Remittances to sub-Saharan Africa increased by 5.2 percent in 2022.[155] In the Middle East and North Africa, they grew by 2.5 percent. For several countries, such as Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Senegal, and Zimbabwe, remittances now exceed ODA and FDI combined.[156]

The AU sees remittances as key to reducing poverty and lessening inequality in Africa.[157] The African Institute for Remittances (AIR), established in 2015 by the AU,[158] forms part of the continent's long-term strategy of harnessing the important role of remittances in Africa's development.[159]

However, remittance infrastructures remain complex. When traveling abroad, even for a short trip, figuring out how to transact at a low cost can be a significant challenge. In some places, cash is preferred, in others a bank card. In all contexts, using money is costly. For most, sending money to someone outside the country they currently are in is exasperating and requires jumping through many hoops to transact.

Navigating remittances is often (still) a difficult task for most. Countries have different rules about how and where one can transfer money out of the country, such as whether one needs a fully licensed bank, mobile money, or a border runner. The rules also include how much money one can send and what that will cost them, what forms of identification for both the sender and the receiver are acceptable, and the kind of account required to send, receive, or keep foreign currency. Other countries even have rules on what the money, once received, can be spent on. So, for migrants that have moved and are working abroad, sending money

Figure 7. Top Remittance Recipients in Africa

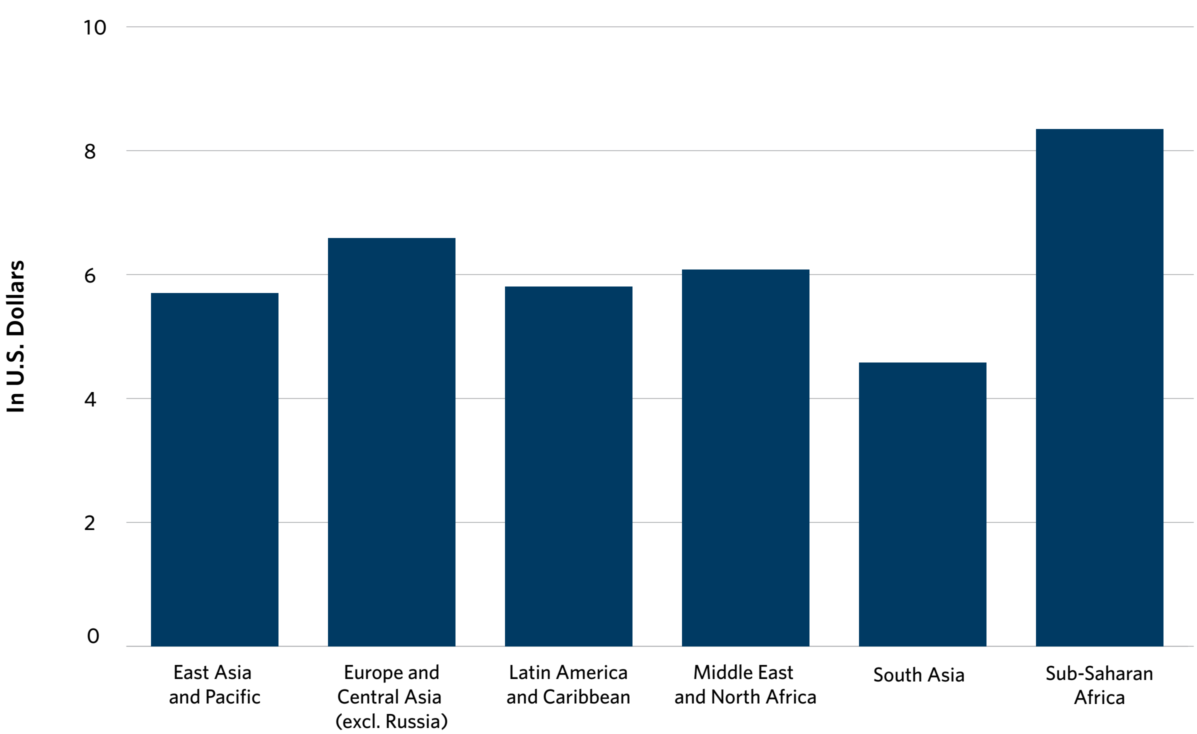


Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank, https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators; Remittances Data, Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD), https://www.knomad.org/data/remittances; and Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Statistics, International Monetary Fund, updated February 28, 2024, https://data.imf.org/?sk=7a51304b-6426-40c0-83dd-ca473ca1fd52.

back home (which should be a simple act) can be quite confusing, stressful, and costly. This can be true for both intra-African transactions and transactions between European and African countries.

According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development, sub-Saharan Africa is still the most expensive region in the world to send money to. According to the World Bank, the average commission was 8.35 percent in 2022. Sending money in eastern and southern Africa is the most expensive of all. For example, according to the World Bank, fees for sending money from Tanzania to Uganda cost 24 percent of the amount transferred; from Angola to Namibia 22 percent; and from South Africa to Botswana 19.6 percent, to Angola 19 percent, to Malawi 16 percent, and to Zimbabwe 14 percent (see figure 8).[160] These costs are far higher than the 3 percent target set in Sustainable Development Goal 10 on reducing inequality within and among countries.

Figure 8. Average Costs of Sending $200 by Region



Source: World Bank, Remittance Prices Worldwide Quarterly, issue 45 (March 2023): https://remittanceprices.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/rpw_main_report_and_annex_q123_final.pdf.

Easing the Process to Maximize Remittances' Role in Development

So, where do opportunities for reform lie? For starters, AIR research shows that the average cost of sending $200 from the EU to AU countries in 2021 was 5.68 percent (down from over 8 percent in 2015). The institute identified a number of Africa-Europe corridors where average remittance costs were under 5 percent in 2021. These include France-Cameroon (3.5 percent), Spain-Nigeria (3.52 percent), France-Senegal (3.83 percent), and Portugal-Mozambique (4.11 percent).[161]

Some communities are already making strides in development. Gandiol, a small community in northern Senegal, is one example. Remittances from Europe not only diversify the source of household incomes, but also, recipients have used funds to build homes, invest in new farming and fishing techniques, and construct and maintain community buildings.[162]

More broadly, the lower cost of remitting from Europe to Africa contributes to the level of output in the migrant's home country. Reducing remittance costs, for a $200 remittance, by 1 percent leads to a 1.6 percent increase in inflows. Drawing lessons from the cheaper Africa-Europe corridors can help lessen costs for high-cost corridors like those in southern Africa.[163]

Beyond reducing costs, there are other opportunities to harness the development potential of remittances. For example, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the UN Capital Development Fund are leading a process to help harmonize the different rules governing remittances.[164] The long-term vision is to create coherent frameworks to support remittance flows. For Africans (both at home and in the diaspora), this will be a huge relief.

Since Europe has already lowered the costs of remittances and improved the infrastructure for transacting, it can work with African partners to stimulate the same for the continent. This goes beyond so-called knowledge transfer and includes capacity building and technical support on harmonizing rules and using technology to reduce costs. The end goal is to ensure that one of the main benefits of international migration is leveraged to its fullest potential. The AIR is already spearheading work to better understand the remittances landscape and connect it with development. Partnerships, here, can also push for the AIR to provide useful guidelines on how this otherwise informal channel of keeping families afloat and prospering can be formalized for greater developmental impact.

This is about more than just bringing recipient households into the formal financial sector; it is about unlocking the investment potential that formalized remittances contain. Already, remittances are used for human capital development, and the long-term benefits of this are obvious. But, with better-skilled Africans migrating for better opportunities more often, joint efforts are necessary to limit the brain drain (that is a brain gain for receiving countries) and make use of these skills to benefit communities in Africa. Because development is more than just money, so-called social remittances are part of the solution. As Peggy Levitt put it, these are "the ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital that flow from receiving to sending-country communities."[165] They include migrants sharing innovative ideas, knowledge, values, and skills.

Conclusion

The relationship between Africa and Europe on migration is complex and fraught. Yet, the benefits outweigh the downsides. Remittances are no longer just African migrants sending their families some money; they are instrumental to the growth of national gross domestic products, poverty reduction, and national development. Through improved infrastructure and lowered costs, Africa and Europe can contribute to an increase in capital available for development, while reducing frustration and administration and placing agency in the hands of migrants and their families. Ultimately, improving the role of remittances is a key avenue for these two neighbors to live better together.

Note

This piece builds on arguments initially laid out in a policy brief by the author published by the Institute for Security Studies: "Africa and Europe: Building Consensus on Migration," available at https://issafrica.org/research/policy-brief/africa-and-europe-building-consensus-on-migration.

CHAPTER 5

How Africa-Europe Trade Arrangements Can Harmonize, Not Collide

David Luke

As geographic neighbors, Africa and Europe have a long trade history. However, current trade policy priorities between the two neighbors appear to be on a collision course, due to the balkanizing effect of the European Union's (EU) patchwork of trade agreements across the African continent. This effect is accelerated at a time when African countries are pursuing an ambitious economic integration agenda.

This paper unpacks the misalignment in trade policy priorities that have emerged between Africa and Europe and proposes a different course that will better serve the interests of both neighbors. It begins by reviewing the Africa-EU trade relationship to understand the context before outlining the main characteristics of each neighbor's trade policy and making recommendations to avoid the looming collision.

Africa-EU Trade

The EU is Africa's most important trading partner.

According to data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), from 2018 to 2022 the EU accounted for 25 percent of all imports in terms of value into African countries, followed by China (16 percent) and other African countries (14 percent). Other partners such as the United States (5 percent) and the UK (2 percent) are important but much less significant sources of imports into African countries.

The EU is also Africa's most important destination for exports. Between 2018 and 2020, it accounted for 27 percent of all African exports in terms of value, followed by other African countries (17 percent) and China (14 percent). India (8 percent), the United States (5 percent), and Türkiye, Brazil, the UK, Japan, and Russia (each under 3 percent) are smaller export destinations.

The EU's imports from Africa are made up of fossil fuels (40.7 percent) and other primary commodities (with ores, metals, precious stones, and gold together accounting for 14.2 percent of the total), as well as food items (15.7 percent). EU imports are highly concentrated in low value-added products, a reflection of Africa's poor industrial base that has not changed for decades. On the other hand, Africa's imports from the EU are strongly dominated by manufactured goods.

The EU is also Africa's most important investor, but EU investments are concentrated in the mining sector, including fossil fuels.

Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, and South Africa are partial exceptions, and, in each case, more diversified trade is the outcome of significant European investment in nonextractive sectors.

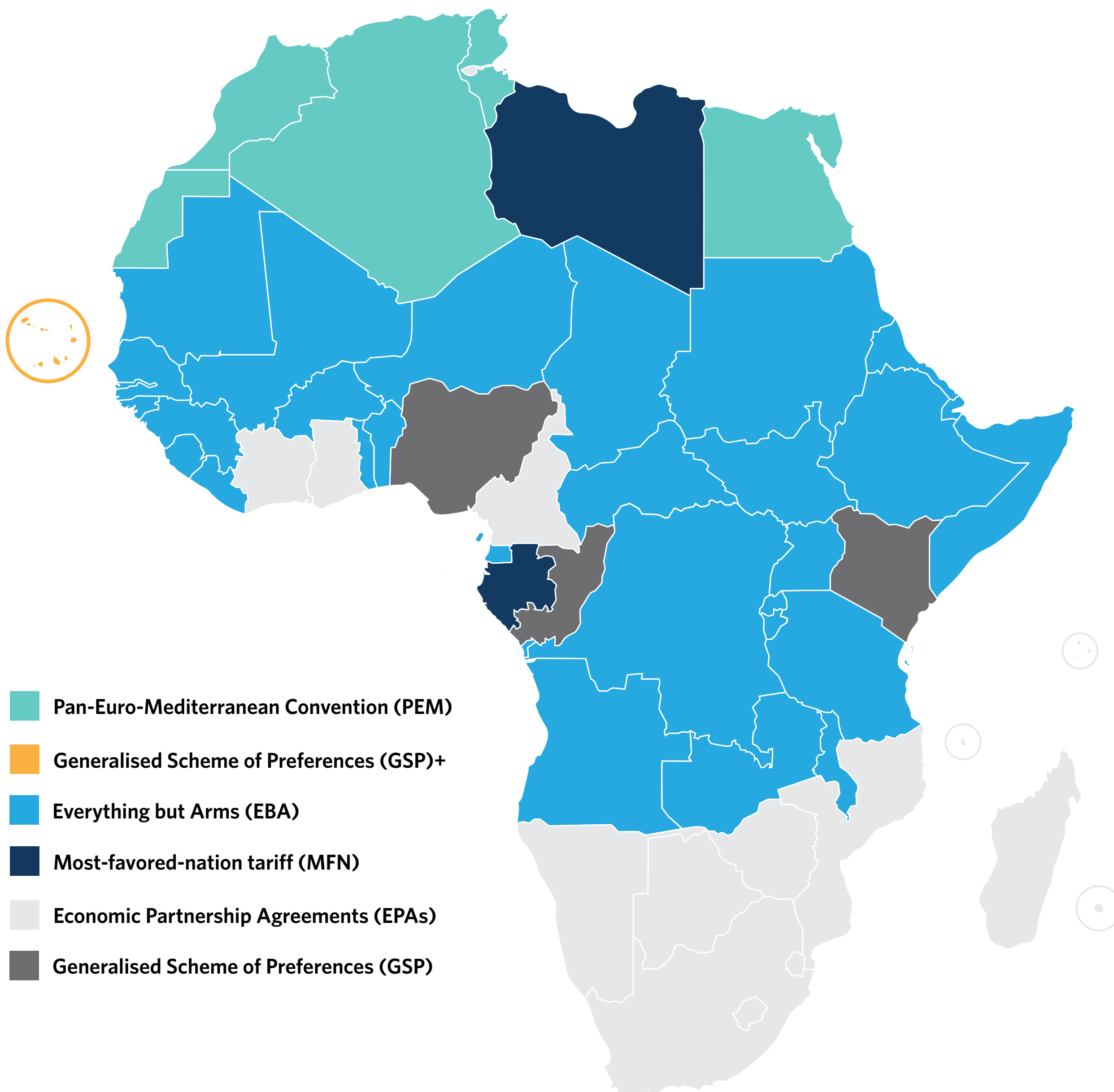
Africa's trade relationship with Europe is highly asymmetrical, a persistent pattern since the independence era in the 1960s. But this pattern is also repeated in Africa's trade with partners such as China, the United States, and emerging economies such as India and Türkiye. Despite accounting for around 17 percent of the total world population, only about 3 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP) occurs in the African continent. Africa is, economically, a small part of the global economy and is not a major export destination or import supplier. Africa accounts for just 2 percent of the EU's trade (in terms of imports and exports), 3.9 percent of China's trade, 2.2 percent of the UK's trade, and 1.1 percent of U.S. trade. Africa's share of world exports is also small, accounting for just 2.3 percent.

Intra-African trade, however, presents a contrasting picture. Intra-African trade tends to be more diversified, with a larger share of value-added content than Africa's exports to trading partners outside the continent has. Within the continent, manufactured goods are the largest type of export, accounting for 45 percent of all formal intra-African trade. Food exports amount to a fifth of trade between African countries.

These formal figures miss a large amount of African trade that flows across contiguous borders informally and is unrecorded. These informal trade flows account for the equivalent of between 7 and 16 percent of formal intra-African trade flows, according to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). Much of that includes food and basic consumer goods.

The trade flows between Africa and the EU are governed by different trade regimes (see figure 9). These vary according to geography (such as whether the African country is in North Africa or below the Sahara Desert), level of development (whether the country is classified by the UN as a "least-developed" or a "developing" economy), and whether the country has an existing economic partnership agreement in place with the EU or a designation from the Generalized System of Preferences regime that applies to its exports, among other factors. As a condition for preferential access to the EU market, extraterritorial enforcement of the differentiated trade regime is a key principle and practice of EU trade policy.

Figure 9. EU Trade Regimes by African Country



Source: David Luke (ed.), *How Africa Trades* (London: LSE Press, 2023), available at https://doi.org/10.31389/lsepress.hat.

Africa's trade with the EU (and other partners) is a tale of two patterns. The first is a pattern of commodity concentration in Africa's exports to the EU and the rest of the world. The second is a pattern of a higher degree of diversification in trade among African countries.

It is this second pattern that provides a viable pathway for Africa's economic integration, industrial development, and transformation aspirations that will also entail more meaningful trade with the EU and the rest of the world. The fragmentation of EU trade policy toward Africa in effect constitutes a negative incentive for achieving trade policy coherence and deepening economic integration on the African side. Because the variations in country characteristics are prevalent within each regional economic community, African countries are often put in the difficult position of having to choose between sticking to their regional commitments, on the one hand, and demands set by the EU on the other.

Africa's Trade Policy Priorities

The main objective of trade policy in Africa is to diversify its trade with the rest of the world and at the same time boost its trade within Africa. The instrument to achieve this is through enhanced levels of continent-wide economic integration starting with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

The AfCFTA is a deep trade agreement, extending beyond merely the tariff reductions that might amount to a traditional free trade agreement. Instead, the AfCFTA includes provisions on trade facilitation, nontariff barriers, trade in services, and behind the border regulatory issues such as competition policy, investment, intellectual property rights, and e-commerce.

While the average tariff encountered on intra-African exports amounts to about 6.1 percent, the proportional equivalent for all nontariff barriers (including sanitary and phytosanitary measures and technical barriers to trade[166]) is much larger, assessed at 14.3 percent by some estimates.[167] It is unsurprising, therefore, that most of the models that estimate the impact of the AfCFTA attribute relatively more importance to trade facilitation and addressing nontariff barriers than tariff reductions.[168]

The policy rationale behind the AfCFTA is threefold.

First, the AfCFTA represents a large and attractive marketplace. Most individual African countries are small. Twenty-two of the fifty-four African countries have populations under 10 million and a further twenty-two have populations under 30 million. The annual GDP of the median African country is just $16 billion, equivalent to the output of a UK city like Bristol. To the extent that it reflects a consolidated market, the AfCFTA by comparison comprises 1.3 billion people and an annual output of $3 trillion.[169] These metrics are similar to India's and equivalent to about the seventh or eighth largest economy in the world. The enormous size of the collective African market is valuable in attracting investors and achieving competitive-scale economies.

Second, ten of the top twenty fastest growing economies were expected to be African in 2024, according to IMF estimates as of October 2023.[170] Over the longer term, the African population is expected to grow to 2.75 billion by 2060 with an increasing middle-class market and a combined annual output of $16 trillion.[171] This year, in comparison, China's population is projected to be 1.21 billion and Europe's 676.25 million.[172]

Third, the AfCFTA has significant potential to contribute to the industrialization and economic diversification of African countries. African policymakers correctly view manufacturing-based industrialization as a critical step in their countries' development, and as a means of reducing their dependencies on primary commodities. As already noted, trade outside the continent—dominated by primary products like fuels and metals—has struggled to drive such industrialization. Conversely, the intra-African trade that would be stimulated by the AfCFTA is a more conducive vehicle for industrialization. Intra-African trade offers a far greater share of manufactured as well as agricultural goods, and it also has a higher technology content.

The AfCFTA provides a platform for ambitious reforms that include the elimination of nearly all tariffs, disciplining nontariff barriers, services liberalization, and a rules-based arrangement for trade governance across the continent. The AfCFTA enjoys broad consensus and strong political backing as a flagship project of the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063. It amounts to the crystallization of decades of policy deliberation into an actionable and legally enforceable trade agreement. Beyond the AfCFTA, African countries have committed themselves to "lay the foundation for the establishment of a Continental Customs Union at a later stage."[173]

In political economy terms, while the record of African countries in implementing trade-related commitments at the regional economic community level might not inspire much confidence, the EU—through its fragmented trade regimes—has not been an innocent bystander to this. The political momentum behind the AfCFTA presents the EU with an opportunity to become fully aligned with the vision and reform effort for enhanced continental integration, but this is not yet the case.

EU Trade Policy Priorities

In 2021, the EU took three important steps that will shape its trade relations for the foreseeable future.

First, it announced an Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy to reaffirm European trade principles and reset its trade ambitions.[174] This policy followed the United States' unilateralism under former president Donald Trump, the systemic trauma of Brexit, and a changing geopolitical landscape.

Second, the EU concluded additional negotiations with African countries and other ex-colonies in the Caribbean and Pacific for a Post-Cotonou Agreement.[175]

Third, it launched the Global Gateway Initiative,[176] a strategic plan for investment in infrastructure with digitalization, climate and energy, transport, health, education, and research as related priority areas.

For Africa, which is specifically referenced in the Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy, two distinct facets of the new policy stand out.

For the first time, the EU has made sustainability an explicit and central pillar of its trade policy. This implies a commitment to leverage the EU's global power and strong trade relationships to support sustainable and fair trade as well as to increase the ambition of its trading partners to address climate change. This is an opportunity for Africa, as a new focus on sustainable and fair trade is consistent with Africa's industrial development ambitions for capturing and retaining more value from commodities along the supply chain. If this is backed by the approach that the EU rolled out in its Global Gateway Initiative, it could help to attract the investment needed to foster economic diversification and inclusive growth.

The challenge, however, is that the EU could pivot toward protectionism by introducing new measures and tariffs such as the already announced Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism. This policy is aimed at avoiding the risk of the EU simply exporting its carbon emissions to trade partners in certain high-carbon-emission-intensity sectors where the EU increases its climate ambition and partners do not. Unfortunately, Africa, which bears little responsibility for the climate crisis, could find its exports from these sectors penalized in the EU market.

The EU's new trade policy recognizes that most future growth will take place outside the EU and that trade plays a key role in connecting Europe to these high-growth regions. Africa is viewed as one of these regions. In acknowledging the problematic effects that are reinforced by its own fragmented trade regimes in Africa, the policy points to a continent-to-continent trade agreement as a solution, not for the immediate future, but as a long-term prospect.

Unfortunately, the Post-Cotonou Agreement and its Africa Protocol together lock in the fragmented trade arrangements for twenty years (from 2021) as the framework for trade relations between the two neighbors. Among other undertakings, the parties to this agreement committed to support efforts to increase trade in manufactured goods through linkages to markets and trade facilitation, including for enhanced quality standards and infrastructure.

While these commitments are in line with Africa's industrial development ambitions and can help to drive diversification and ramp up exports, the agreement contains no specific commitments on investment flows, which are the most critical factor for driving economic transformation.

The Global Gateway initiative provides financing to support the agenda outlined in the Post-Cotonou Agreement and its Africa Protocol. But this initiative, too, is vague on specifics. Indeed, half of the amount pledged for Global Gateway (€150 billion) is earmarked for Africa, according to announcements made at the EU-AU Summit in February 2022.[177] At the January 2024 Italy Africa Summit, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen shared some case examples of how these investments have been used.[178] But a systemic presentation of how the Global Gateway funds will be accessed and disbursed remains unclear, and the impact that the initiative will make on the ground remains to be seen.

In the meantime, the EU plans to "widen and deepen" the Economic Partnership Agreements and Euro-Mediterranean Partnership to tap into the robust growth that is expected. This plan led CONCORD, the European Confederation of NGOs for relief and development, to ask:

> Where does this leave the African Continental Free Trade Area and the continent-to-continent approach and where does it leave the local and regional attempts to strengthen intra-African trade. . . . It is crucial that the EU allows [the] countries to make their own assessments as to when they would be ready to negotiate such issues with the EU and that the EU does not pressure them to prematurely take up far-reaching liberalisation commitments for which they are not ready. Triggering the rendezvous clauses and broadening and deepening the [agreements] would also mean that the . . . countries involved would drift further away from the other countries in their regions. The EU's offensive interests in Africa should not prevail over the development needs of African countries.[179]

At the European Parliament there appears to be strong support for a radical change in EU trade policy toward Africa. A June 2022 resolution may lead to broader momentum within the European institutions, saying,

> Members believe that the EU needs a whole new basis for its economic partnership with Africa, based on a level playing field, equality, mutual respect and understanding. This is a unique opportunity to re-launch trade relations between the two continents, to engage in a renewed, mutually beneficial and sustainable partnership based on solidarity and cooperation, and to reshape economic and trade relations with a view to empowering Africa.[180]

Avoiding a Collision

The EU's encouragement of Africa's steps toward economic integration and AfCFTA implementation is not in question. It is backed by concrete efforts to overcome supply side constraints in Africa and, more broadly, to provide development and financial support across a wide range of policy areas.

But European trade policy toward Africa remains at odds with the publicly expressed intention to champion AfCFTA-led integration of the African continent. In particular, the EU's fragmented trade regimes result in hard borders for EU trade with African countries within the same customs union at the regional level. It is difficult to see how a continental customs union could emerge from the divisions created by the EU. On this basis, African and European trade policy priorities are on a collision course. How might the collision be avoided?

The answer lies first in strategic sequencing of AfCFTA implementation, before reciprocal opening to the EU. If the EU reciprocal agreements were implemented ahead of the AfCFTA, then the African countries would see losses in trade—or trade diversion—between African countries, according to modeling from the UN Economic Commission for Africa. [181] On the other hand, if the AfCFTA was fully implemented before the reciprocal agreements, this negative impact would be mitigated. Trade gains by both African countries and the EU would be preserved while intra-African trade would expand significantly, benefiting trade in industrial goods.

Further evidence from UNECA that accounts for the liberalization of trade in goods and services, along with reduction of nontariff measures, affirms the need for correct sequencing. This study found that the current share of intra-African trade would nearly double following the AfCFTA reforms. Most of the gains will accrue to the industrial and agri-food sectors as well as services, which are critical for Africa's transformation.[182]

To avoid the looming collision between Africa's economic integration agenda and EU trade arrangements, a good development case can be made for the EU to grant unilateral, duty-free, quota-free market access to all African countries, with a unified rules-of-origin regime for a transitional period benchmarked against milestones in AfCFTA implementation.

This would require multilateral legitimization through a World Trade Organization (WTO) waiver, which is not an insignificant barrier. The WTO's one-size-fits-all rules require reimagination to meet the twenty-first century realities and challenges facing late developers, such as African countries, a not-insignificant hurdle but one that the EU and African countries could, together, champion.

Given the precedent established by the United States' 2000 African Growth and Opportunity Act in obtaining a WTO waiver for nonreciprocal trade concessions, this should not be an insurmountable feat. In the act, the United States—in contrast to the EU, China (which has no all-encompassing trade policy framework for Africa), and other advanced countries—applies a uniform preferential trade regime for all sub-Saharan countries that meet the eligibility criteria. However, the United States should consider making the act a continent-wide trade concession rather than limiting it to sub-Saharan Africa only.

Concessions to Africa as the world's least-developed continent, accounting for only 2.3 percent of world exports, pose no threat to the international trading system. Allowing nonreciprocal access to advanced country markets for a transitional period is strongly pro-development. It incentivizes African countries to seek trade opportunities with each other and mitigates the risks of trade diversion. By ensuring the right sequencing for the AfCFTA, Africa can build productive capacities and achieve its potential for strong and diversified growth in intra-African trade with inclusive and transformational consequences. It will turn around the record of the last sixty years in which the structure of Africa's external trade has not changed.

At the continental level, AU member states must consistently apply their own resolutions, including "to engage external partners . . . speaking with one voice."[183] Summits between African leaders in an AU configuration and partners such as the EU now occur with regular frequency. The AU Commission has no mandate to act on behalf of member states in trade negotiations. This leaves African countries vulnerable to being outmaneuvered in trade negotiations and in their engagement with partners. In geoeconomics and geopolitics, individual African countries lack influence on their own to achieve meaningful outcomes that impact their development prospects. They must learn to work together. The AU member states should give the commission a mandate, direction, and resources to secure outcomes that meet African aspirations.

Trade growth and trade integration in Africa is in the interest of the EU and all partners. Reduced nontariff barriers, lower intra-African tariffs, improved trade facilitation, and integrated markets within Africa would create a large, prosperous, peaceful, and more dynamic environment for trade and investment opportunities for Africa's partners as well as for Africa's own enterprises to grow. It should not be difficult to avoid the current collision course on which African and EU trade policy are set.

CHAPTER 6

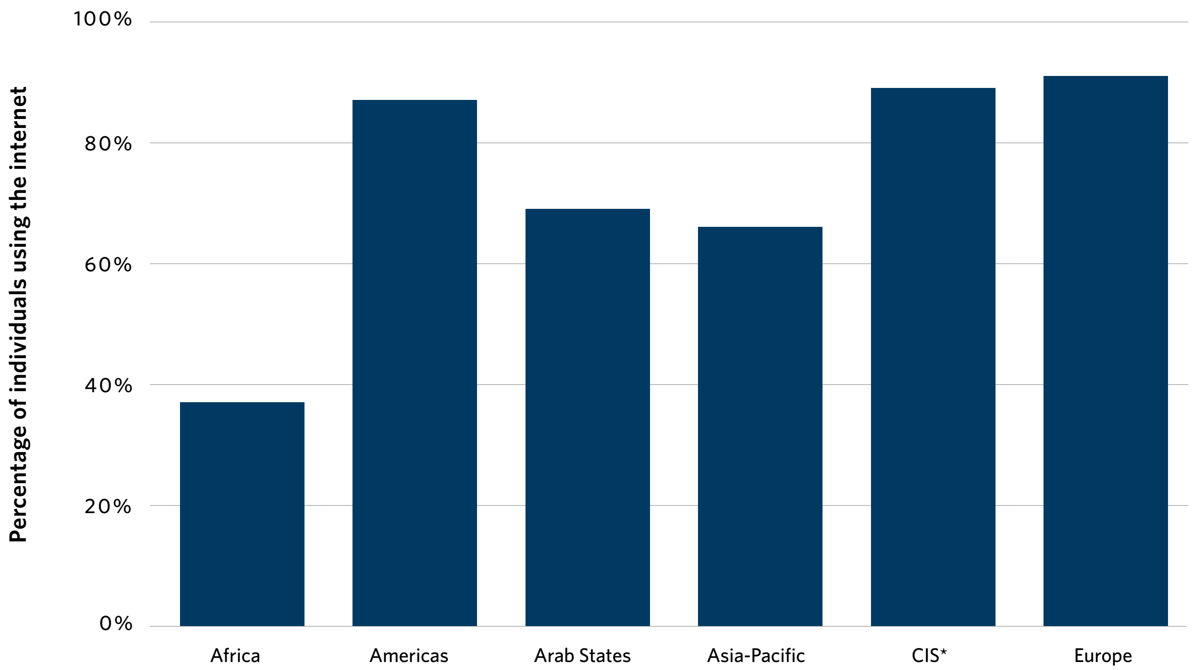
Building a Digital Market Between Europe and Africa

Jane Munga

Europe and African countries have a long-standing history, with established economic and political ties. Both sides have a common interest in developing a more extensive digital collaboration. The current collaboration has been pivotal in "shaping a joint digital future," but to achieve greater success and to realize the untapped potential between the two, there is an imperative for the collaboration to refocus on the opportunity presented by Africa's youth, a mitigated digital divide and increased interconnectedness to build a common digital market.[184]

Africa's economies are in the midst of a structural transformation, as the youth population booms and more and more of these young people move from rural areas to cities. With this youth bulge will come a massive digital market that will generate digital innovations applicable across the globe and create digital trading opportunities globally—and particularly for the European Union (EU), as Africa's largest and closest trading partner. By 2030, 250 million people will enter the middle class on the continent, adding $3 trillion in consumer spending. [185] By 2050 Africa will add 796 million people to the global workforce and will be the youngest and largest population in the world.[186] This massive, young workforce will both generate and adopt new innovations that could be applicable outside of the continent. But today, the full potential for value addition remains untapped: in 2019, Africa's real productivity in the services sector (which includes information and communications technology) was the lowest of any region ($7,200 compared to $17,700 in Latin America and $20,900 in China).[187] Additionally Africa-Europe digital relations remain hindered by a marked digital divide——while 89 percent of Europeans used the internet in 2022, only 40 percent of Africans did (see figure 10).[188]

Figure 10. Internet Usage in Africa and Europe (2023)



Source: International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2023," https://www.itu.int/hub/publication/d-ind-ict_mdd-2023-1.

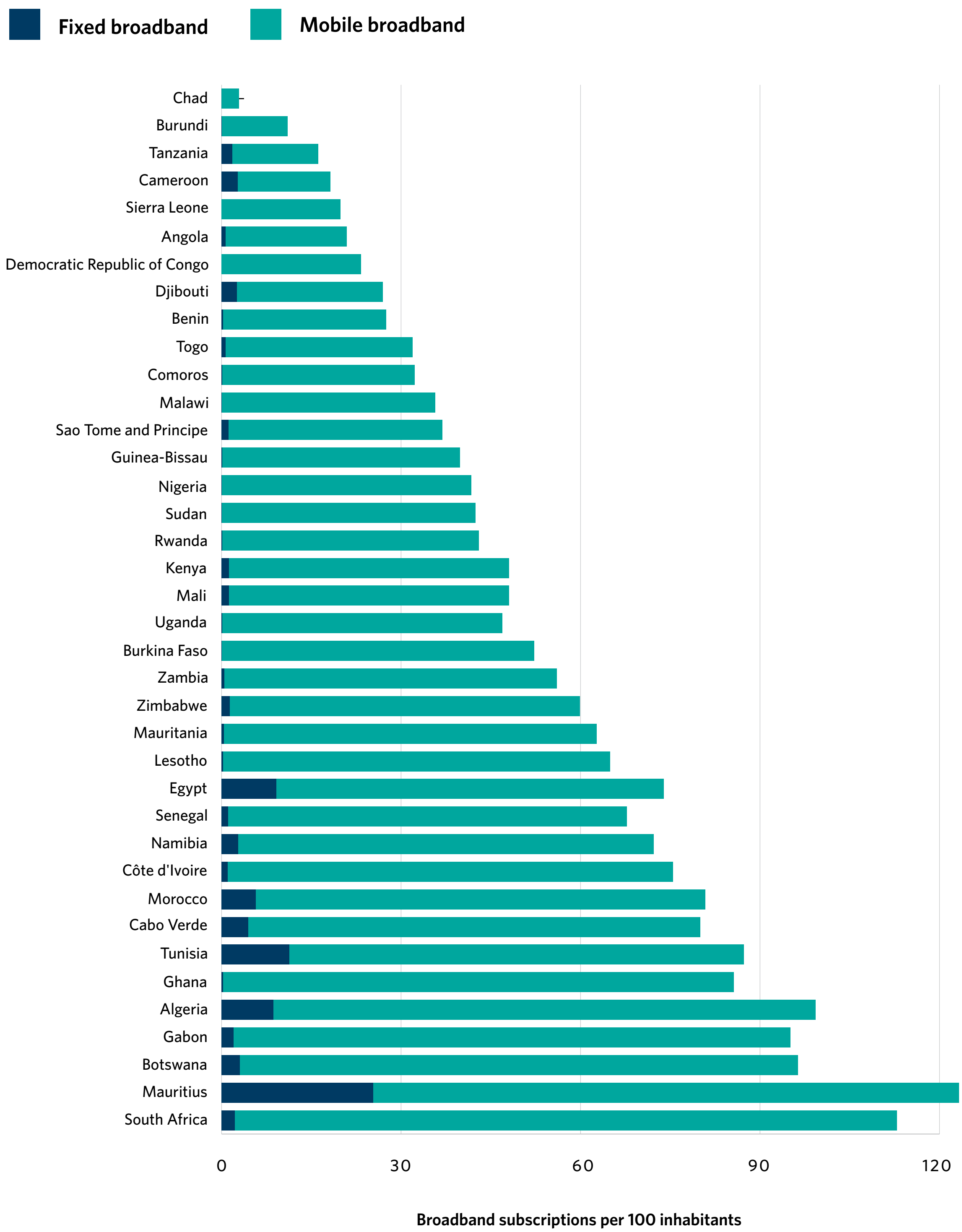
As a greater share of our lives and economies are transformed by digital technologies—from efficiencies in farming to digital marketing—60 percent of Africa's population, some 800 million people, are left out of this transformation. [189]

And while Europe's digital divide is less pronounced, significant gaps exist among EU member states: for example, Malta has achieved full broadband access, while only 20 percent of Greek households are connected (and almost none of its rural population).[190] Similarly significant gaps are also evidenced between African nations (see figure 11).

These gaps present a series of risks and opportunities for both Africa and Europe.

First, the potential of digital access for improving education outcomes and providing market and financial access is well documented.[191] The digital divide could therefore exacerbate inequalities between those with access and those without. This could have both humanitarian and stability implications for both continents with the potential for spillovers.

Figure 11. Fixed and Mobile Broadband Penetration Rates in African Countries, 2020



Source: International Telecommunication Union.

Second, digital transformation could create significant economic opportunities for both continents. It would allow European firms to "near-shore" supply chains and provide a massive market for European digital trade.[192]

Third, the massive infrastructure and skills gap has led African nations to seek partnerships from a range of partners, including those outside of Europe. For the most part, they have remained silent on the geopolitics at play and focused instead on their digital transformation agenda. In the late 2010s, China's Digital Silk Road initiative dominated infrastructure investment in Africa. In 2015 and 2017, Chinese financing for information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure surpassed the combined funds from multilateral agencies, G7 nations, and African governments.[193] By one estimate, 70 percent of the continent's 4G networks were built by Huawei.[194] This trend has potential security implications but could also lead to fragmentation, undermining the integration of the African digital market and Europe's participation in it.

Fourth, as artificial intelligence technologies expand in capability and in scale, the views, behaviors, patterns, and priorities of a significant proportion of Africa's population will be left out of the training datasets for AI algorithms.

Addressing the digital divide requires massive infrastructure investments that address the coverage gap—meaning targeting unconnected populations who live in an area that is not covered by mobile broadband—to provide access. But infrastructure investments must also target the usage gap—which occurs when populations who do live within the footprint of a mobile broadband network are not using mobile internet services.

As of 2018, there were more than 1,389 million kilometers of terrestrial fiber links within African countries, and approximately 936,000 kilometers of those were operational.[195] The 2Africa cable system, the largest subsea project, will ring the entire African continent with a 28,000-mile-long, high-speed subsea cable. However, fiber-optic networks have yet to fully penetrate Africa—particularly in the land-locked interior countries. The World Bank estimates that $100 billion is required by 2030 to provide universal access to broadband on the continent.[196] Current levels of investment are far from what is needed. European businesses have played an important role in Africa's digital transformation to date. Orange S.A. (formerly France Télécom) has a presence in fourteen African countries, while the British firm Vodafone's thirty-year presence in Africa through locally run subsidiaries has helped connect 170 million people and catalyzed innovations such as Kenya's M-PESA payments platform, which was used by 96 percent of Kenya's households in 2017.[197]

The EU should deploy its significant experience in building common digital markets and its considerable access to capital to play an important role in building Africa's digital market. In turn, Africa should consider Europe a partner of choice in building its digital future and share lessons learned in ways that could support digital innovation in Europe. To do so, the digital partnership between the EU and Africa should be reframed away from one focused on programmatic development support to African countries and toward a partnership of mutual interests and market creation in the digital arena.

African and European Collaboration on Digital Cooperation

The African Union's (AU) Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030) lays out an ambitious vision. By 2030, it aims to build a digital single market in Africa in which everyone should be digitally empowered and able to access safely and securely at least 6 megabytes of data per second, all the time, wherever they live in the continent, at an affordable price. To do so, the AU's plan outlines a series of efforts to harmonize national policies, stimulate digital transformation, and address cybersecurity challenges. African governments, eager to capitalize on the youth dividend, have also prioritized inclusivity in their digital agendas, with a focus on youth as an accelerator to their digital transformation.[198]

The European Union's (EU) formal partnership with Africa on digital issues is relatively recent and can trace its foundations to the sixth EU-Africa Business Forum (EABF), which took place on November 27 2017, held in Côte d'Ivoire. The EABF recommended incorporating the digital economy into EU-Africa cooperation.[199] This led to the EU's Digital4Development policy document, the creation of the EU-AU Digital Economy Task Force, and the EU-AU subsequent report the New Africa-Europe Digital Economy Partnership.[200]

The task force laid out lofty ambitions including "accelerating the achievement of universal access to affordable broadband," "guaranteeing essential skills for all," "improving the business environment," and "accelerating the adoption of eServices." Recommendations spanned the regulatory agenda, infrastructure investments and spectrum allocations, the scaling up of digital literacy programs, and the reduction of barriers to cross-border digital trade.

But the lofty recommendations led to modest outcomes: the creation of a Digital for Development Hub (D4D), which has a limited budget of €8.9 million ($9.5 million) allocated between 2020 and 2023, involving ten African and five European countries. Its operational framework is furthermore limited to technical assistance and to facilitating the exchange of knowledge between African nations (see table 1).[201] As the D4D project draws to a close, a strategic partnership could leverage the strengths of both partners.[202]

Table 1. Digital for Development (D4D) Hub

Timeframe and Budget	Approach
Timeframe January 12, 2020–January 12, 2023	1. Technical assistance: increase the capability of regional and national institutions to develop and operationalize digital transformation plans.
Budget €8,974,220	2. Knowledge sharing: facilitates exchanges of experiences, skills, and expertise between African and European stakeholders.
	3. Dialogues: between actors from the digital ecosystem to support participative policymaking and foster new partnerships

Source: European Commission, Project: AU-EU Digital for Development (D4D) Hub: Shaping a joint digital future

Building an EU-Africa Strategic Partnership on Digital Cooperation

Both partners should move beyond collaboration on project-level initiatives, which have value but do not constitute a strategy. Instead, they should elevate the development of digital common markets to a strategic priority that leverages the assets and capabilities of both the EU and AU and their member states. Building on the recommendations of the Digital Economy Taskforce, both partners should work to systematically identify barriers to addressing the digital divide in three areas.

1. Leverage European Space Technology to Reduce Africa's Digital Divide

Space and satellite capabilities are regarded as the new frontier for connectivity and offer new avenues for collaboration to bridge Africa's digital divide. The European Space Agency (ESA) project INSTANT5G,[203] for instance, has the potential to provide mobile connectivity via a software-based solution that will enable satellites to communicate with mobile phone networks. A game-changing technology that would open doors for Europe and Africa, it would provide a means for connecting the more than 60 percent of the African population that is currently offline. Though the project is still in pilot stage, it provides the foundation of a targeted partnership between the ESA and African countries, especially those with the lowest levels of fixed and mobile broadband penetration such as Chad, Burundi, Tanzania, Cameroon, and Sierra Leone (see figure 11). Satellite technology enables mobile connectivity to be provided in areas where traditional terrestrial connectivity, such as fiber or cables, are lacking or hard to install, such as rural areas.[204]

For example, in 2021, Eutelsat, one of the world's leading satellite operators, launched Konnect, a satellite internet service aiming to provide affordable and fast internet while supporting social and economic development by creating new digital highways that terrestrial networks cannot reach. In Tanzania, Eutelsat Konnect partnered with Vodacom to extend internet access to businesses operating in rural areas. Satellite technologies like these offer the promise for reducing Africa's connectivity gap, but a successful rollout will depend not only on getting the technology right and affordable but also on the regulatory regime currently domiciled in over fifty African countries. The Europe-Africa partnership could focus on both the technological and regulatory aspects at national and regional levels with institutions such as the African Union and Smart Africa,[205] a pan-African consortium that aims to ensure the harmonization of policies and standards between Europe and Africa. Bolstered by adequate financial commitments, the partnership could become transformational.

2. Foster a Digital Entrepreneurship Ecosystem

Africa's population will increase by 50 percent by 2040. Fifty-three percent of the increased population will be under the age of twenty-five. This young population will shape and drive Africa's digital economy,[206] which will in turn impact the global economy. But innovations do not happen by accident. They require investment in the ecosystems, training programs, and entrepreneurship incubators that help them flourish. The African-European Digital Innovation Bridge (AEDIB) was launched by the EU in 2022 with the objective of creating a "single market for digital innovation" between Europe and Africa.[207] This initiative is already investing in digital innovation hubs across the African continent and is working with Smart Africa.[208]

On the basis of this initiative, a future digital collaboration should, for example, connect European technology and research centers and investors with African innovators. From 2021 to 2022, investment in Africa's start-up ecosystem increased by 7.6 percent, reaching $4.85 billion in 2022, but finances continue to be a major barrier for African tech startups.[209] By building a common strategy, the EU's Global Gateway initiative could leverage the assets of the European Investment Bank and other multilateral development banks to reduce the cost of capital for African businesses and reduce competition and transaction costs for countries seeking to implement these strategies.[210]

3. Enhance Operational Structures to Build Interoperability Between Europe and Africa

Even the most well-designed bilateral and multilateral agreements are susceptible to failure if operational efficiencies are lacking. Because each member of team Europe must negotiate bilateral agreements with individual African nations, additional bureaucracy slows progress, hinders innovation, and draws on scarce resources. In addition, D4D was solely a technical assistance program, which restricted the scope of engagements with African countries. Future digital cooperation between the AU and EU should provide a unified engagement framework and coordinated delivery mechanisms. It should also incorporate investments and funding mechanisms.

To build Europe's internal digital market, Brussels has invested in building out digital public infrastructure—data exchanges, digital identity (e-ID), and digital payment systems that are scalable and interoperable. Sharing this learning and supporting the AU in its efforts to build a similar model could both accelerate the implementation of the AU's plan and also ensure its consistency with European standards, further increasing the scalability of this market.

Conclusion

Europe and Africa have a mutual interest in building a larger and stronger digital market for both continents. But the current vision for the partnership remains lofty and focused on projects that, while beneficial, will fail to capitalize on the scale of the opportunity presented by Africa's youth, closing the digital divide and building a common digital market. As a result, the status quo will likely lead to untapped potential both within Africa and between Africa and Europe, with economic and geopolitical implications.

Elevating digital cooperation to the scale of a strategic priority for both continents should be an economic, stability, and geopolitical priority. Starting with leveraging key assets already available to both parties could be transformative, including leveraging European space technology to reduce Africa's digital divide, fostering a digital entrepreneurship ecosystem, and enhancing operational structures to build interoperability between Europe and Africa. If implemented effectively, this renewed collaboration will strengthen transcontinental networks in the digital ecosystem, harness digital technologies, address the digital divide, and elevate the connectivity landscape for Africa's youthful population.

CHAPTER 7

How Interpersonal Relationships Can Reshape Africa-Europe Relations

Fred Ngoga

**The views represented herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the African Union.*

Much of the debate on Africa-Europe relations focuses on institutions and treaties. But the relationship between them is much more.

The two continents' shared history, while defined by a rich tapestry of cultural exchange and human connection, is fraught with complexity and tension. And this complexity plays out in the politics of partnerships between the two continents.

On paper, the institutional partnership between the European Union (EU) and African Union (AU), culminating in the 2022 EU-AU Summit,[211] is built on a shared commitment to solidarity, security, peace, sustainable economic development, and prosperity for future generations and citizens.

But while governmental and institutional cooperation is important, political cycles are, ephemeral.

In practice, the relationships play out in the day-to-day experiences of millions of Africans and Europeans as they interact and navigate legal systems, institutional bureaucracies, cultural dynamics, and the narratives that shape how they see the world.

Perceptions matter—for individuals, for national politics, and for geopolitics. African perceptions of Europe's actions in their countries remain positive,[212] but recent experiences—during the COVID-19 pandemic and through divergent perspectives on the climate crisis, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and Israel's actions in Gaza—have strained relationships.

At the same time, Africans' perceptions of China have been consistently high (above 70 percent) over the past decade, bolstered by highly visible infrastructure projects that improve people's lives.[213]

In this article, I draw on my relationships with Africans and Europeans to help us understand how policy plays out in lived experience.

I share my own personal experience as an African who migrated to study in Europe before becoming an AU ambassador, negotiating partnerships between the two continents and between the AU and other regions. And, while I write in a personal rather than an official capacity, I use these experiences to make suggestions for how policy frameworks and institutions can support people-to-people connections and change how Africans and Europeans feel about each other.

The Interplay Between Dignity and Bureaucracy

Consider the story of a young African seeking a life in Europe, longing for the opportunities promised by a continent with world-class educational institutions and the opportunity to create a better life for their immediate and wider family.

Yet, instead of being welcomed with open arms, they find themselves subjected to grueling bureaucracy, navigating a labyrinthine visa and immigration process that may ultimately prove fruitless. While 80 percent of Africans thinking about migration have no interest in leaving the African continent, the aspiration for a better life in Europe *is* held and has been fulfilled by millions of Africans.[214]

Visa regimes present significant barriers to these experiences for both Africans and Europeans, though there is a clear mobility divide between the Global North and South. Citizens of European countries enjoy enhanced mobility rights while African citizens have experienced stagnation or diminishing visa mobility.[215]

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation's mobility score highlights that Europeans are the most mobile of any world region, with an average score of 139. Africans, with a score of 63, are the lowest.[216] The Passport Power Index ranks ten European countries in joint second place (after the United Arab Emirates).[217] The most powerful African passport, Seychelles, ranks twenty-first, with most African countries ranking fifty or worse.

This is felt strongly by African businesspeople working in Europe and by civil society organizations seeking to participate in international summits, only to find themselves relegated to virtual participation because of delays in the processing of visas.[218]

But the visibility of Africans struggling to obtain visas has increased in recent years in the wake of travel bans during the pandemic and a high-profile snafu involving popular Kenyan musician Coco Em.[219]

Africa is making rapid progress on visa openness. The 2019 Visa Openness Index prepared by the World Tourism Organization shows that Africa's average openness score is higher than that of Europe.[220] The 2022 Africa Visa Openness report highlights that between 2016 and 2022, the number of African countries offering e-visas increased from nine to twenty-four.[221] In 2023, Kenyan President William Ruto announced that African travelers would no longer need a visa to enter Kenya.[222] Yet for the majority of the continent, a visa must be obtained before arrival in the country.

In contrast, recent EU steps have further tightened restrictions. The 2019 Schengen Visa Code amendments led to stricter visa review measures that have increased the cost of European visas.[223] Even before the implementation of the amendments, the number of rejections had increased, and African applicants received the highest proportion of those rejections.[224]

Steps to facilitate greater visa openness between Africa and Europe would not only contribute to income through trade and tourism but would also increase people-to-people interactions.

The Cotonou Framework provides a road map for enhanced political and economic cooperation and a means to break down these barriers.[225] The framework served as a foundation for the negotiation and signing of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy, an agreement that was signed in 2007 at the second AU-EU Summit in Lisbon, Portugal. Agreements such as the joint strategy can increase meaningful and frequent interaction and facilitate mutual understanding, a necessary factor for strong political and economic relations.

Less restrictive policies should be enacted for key priority areas such as education and cultural integration with the specific objective of fostering a deeper appreciation of the unique contributions and perspectives each community brings to the table.

But this is not just about economic opportunities and cultural exchanges. Addressing the bureaucratic burden facing those seeking to travel between Africa and Europe could also change the perceptions and grievances held by those individuals.

When an African migrant reaches Europe, they will likely face ethnic and cultural exclusion.[226] A Eurobarometer survey of perceptions of migrants in Europe conducted in November 2021 showed that 68 percent of Europeans overestimated the real share of immigrants in the population, and 47 percent considered national integration of migrants unsuccessful.[227] This is borne out by various studies that have shown that Africans and other migrants in Europe face a great deal of ethnic exclusionism at a policy and a cultural level.[228]

Africans' perceptions of exclusion start upon entry to Europe and are amplified by the media to create a negative cultural narrative. Border policing and immigration law enforcement produce a spectacle that enacts a scene of exclusion, amplifying the perception that migrants are somehow illegitimate or illegal.[229]

While migrants' arrival in Europe is largely driven by economic needs—on the part of both the migrant and the host country—a 2017 study of migration perceptions charts how European public and political debate regarding immigrants' place societies progressed from a perception of a labor market issue to one that is social, cultural, and political.[230]

European anti-immigrant sentiment is not a monolithic phenomenon,[231] but resistance to immigrants, where it does exist, is often correlated around racial and ethnic lines, with preference toward immigrant groups that are more white and seen as more culturally similar to Europeans. This dynamic has been seen through the differential treatment of those fleeing conflict from Africa and the Middle East and those fleeing Ukraine.[232] These anti-immigrant sentiments increase during times of economic crisis, as was notably the case during the global financial crisis of 2007–2008. Because migrants are concentrated in economic sectors that are less secure and subject to fewer employment protections, they therefore face a double whammy during economic downturns.[233]

These perceptions and experiences are then channeled back to African communities via the media and through friendship and family networks, reinforcing the perception that Europe is an unwelcoming place for Africans.

Yet, this is not a uniquely African issue. Europeans face barriers (albeit fewer) when seeking to establish themselves in African nations, through visas and business opportunities.

A European beginning their journey to some African countries might endure an arduous and time-consuming process marked by extensive paperwork and documentation, long waits in embassy waiting rooms, and the surrender of passports, sometimes for a matter of weeks, to secure a visa.

Should they seek to open a business, they will wait an average of 21.5 days and pay 36.3 percent of the business region's annual per capita income to secure a business licence in sub-Saharan Africa (compared to 11.9 days and 4 percent in Europe and Central Asia).[234]

To counter these powerful narratives, specific efforts to increase meaningful, positive interactions between Africans and Europeans could help to create positive stories of cooperation and collaboration.

Personal Experiences of Multilateral Cooperation

As an AU ambassador responsible for external partnerships, I have direct personal experience of how power imbalances play out in multilateral settings. I have been sitting at the negotiating table in preparation for summits and major treaties with the EU, the Chinese government, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, among others.

While systems of international cooperation are guided by treaties, those treaties and the actions within them are negotiated by people.

While Africa and Europe share common interests—as articulated in other pieces in this compilation—my personal experience of these forums has been shaped by discussions rooted in an outdated worldview, an outdated governance architecture, and an imbalance of power that inhibits the urgent action required.

When sitting at the tables of power, the imbalances are palpable: The consultations conducted without meaningful say over the outcomes that have profound implications for citizens. The design of funding instruments that are dominated by the interests and politics of donor countries, with little regard for the interests and politics of the countries where the funding is deployed.

This inequality is most acute is in the Bretton Woods institutions. Designed at a time when most African countries had yet to gain independence, they are no longer fit for purpose. Principal among their shortcomings is the lack of adequate representation for African and other countries in the Global South.

The World Bank and IMF wield significant influence on the African and European continents. The voting shares of these institutions are pegged to the size of shareholder countries' economies. As a result, the United States, which has a population of 330 million people, controls roughly 16 percent of the voting power at the IMF and World Bank, while fifty-four countries in Africa—that account for 1.4 billion people—collectively have a voting share of roughly 7 percent. Per capita, an American's vote at the IMF is worth twenty times as much as a Nigerian's and sixty-four times that of an Ethiopian.[235]

For the size of their populations and the size of their economies, many European countries are overrepresented when it comes to voting quotas in these institutions while African countries are significantly underrepresented. The rationale for maintaining these arrangements—that advanced economies provide the majority of the paid-in capital—neglects the important fact that significant financing for these institutions is provided through the interest payments that countries in the Global South pay on loans from these institutions.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the use of structural adjustment programs by Bretton Woods institutions required many African nations to impose neoliberal fiscal and monetary policies, including export-oriented growth, austerity cuts, and privatization. As a result, many African countries faced fundamental problems: such as low levels of investment, inefficient use of resources, weak institutions and human capacity, and a general decline in income.[236] During the European debt crisis of the late 2000s, European states were forced by the IMF to enact similar economic adjustment programs that sought to implement austerity, structural reforms, and privatization of public assets as a condition for aid, causing economic and social discontent within these states.

While these harmful policy conditionalities have receded, some of the dynamics still play out in how the institutions operate. In 2022, for example, the IMF developed a new funding instrument—the Resilience and Sustainability Trust—to help countries respond to the pandemic and build resilience to climate change. But the countries that would draw down on the trust had limited involvement in the trust's design, also limiting both their buy-in and the trust's suitability to country contexts.[237] In 2022, the World Bank's launch of its Evolution Roadmap to reform its vision and mission, spearheaded by U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, again involved limited participation from African countries, many of whom, behind closed doors, asked what was in it for them.

But that could change. Africa and Europe should work together to forge a twenty-first-century vision for these institutions, starting with fair representation and governance through a review of quota shares in both institutions and new models for involving all parties in the design of new funding instruments and the reform of existing ones.

The same holds true for the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which is clearly out of date. Its inability to prevent and resolve conflicts, in both Africa and Europe, has created a serious crisis of legitimacy for the institution, and consequently, multiple reform agendas have been proffered.[238] Its reform has been a perennial issue since its inception—in fact, various reforms over the years have created the current membership and governance scope. And the current moment presents a rare and compelling opportunity for a catalyst of change, as a growing chorus of voices from around the world call the council to better align with the contemporary geopolitical landscape.

The common African position (Ezulwini Consensus)[239] offers a unique and transformative framework for the revitalization of the UNSC, serving as a cornerstone of the global governance architecture reform efforts aimed at realizing a more just, equitable, and inclusive world order. The convergence of European and African perspectives and interests on this matter presents a rare opportunity to galvanize collective action and drive the much-needed transformation of the UNSC, enabling it to better serve the interests and needs of all nations and peoples in the twenty-first century.

The G20 has been looking to make similar changes. In 2023, the Indian presidency of the G20 approved a permanent seat for the African Union at the G20. This followed a 2022 proposal from then chairperson of the African Union, former Senegalese president Macky Sall, who argued that Africa has long been absent from this important forum.

These proposals are geopolitical. But they are also personal, because they propose a genuine seat at senior decisionmaking tables for African stakeholders.

Conclusion

Ultimately, strong and good relations between Africa and Europe will depend on forging strong people-to-people ties. But these connections must be intentionally promoted and nurtured. Sadly, the current international agreements and treaties, summits, and bureaucracies all too often result in the opposite—a loss of dignity for those who interact with them—either at the negotiating table or with the state apparatus that implements the negotiated terms.

And ultimately this leads to poorer outcomes. The principles of human-centred design tell us to understand the experience of the user. I argue that we bring them to the table and let their voices be heard.

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Notes

Introduction

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