



Memorandum

Joint Nexus²⁵-ETT^G Policy Conference: EU-Africa Relations in Transition October 29, 2024

On October 29, 2024, the Nexus²⁵ project, led by Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the Center for Climate and Security (CCS) and funded by Stiftung Mercator, hosted its inaugural policy conference in Rome. Organized with the support of the European Think Tanks Group (ETT^G), the high-level discussion brought together leaders and representatives from African and European institutions, think tanks, civil society and international organizations to address European Union (EU)-African relations through the lens of climate change policies, including mitigation, adaptation, and the energy transition.

The full-day event kicked off with the public panel discussion "EU-Africa Relations in Transition" moderated by **Nathalie Tocci**, Director of IAI. The panel allowed for an insightful conversation between **Anthony Agotha**, Climate and Environment Ambassador at the European External Action Service (EEAS), **Diana Acconcia**, Director for International Affairs and Climate Finance in the European Commission, **Afeikhena Jerome**, Special Adviser to the Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Development of the African Union Commission, and **Mithika Mwenda**, Executive Director at the Panafrican Climate Justice Alliance.

Attendants were welcomed by **Pier Carlo Padoan**, Chairman of Unicredit and Vice-President of IAI, and Nathalie Tocci, who emphasized that cultivating inclusive, collaborative relations between the two continents is crucial for the success of the green transition. **Michael Werz**, Nexus²⁵ co-coordinator, set the scene for the panel by situating the project within the context of multilateralism's renewed significance against the background of intertwined global challenges such as Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine and the conflict in Gaza.

Key themes from the public discussion included:

Synergies and opportunities for better EU-Africa cooperation. Panelists discussed how to foster mutually beneficial partnerships between the EU and African countries by leveraging the alignment between the European Green Deal's external dimension and the 2023 African Leaders' Nairobi Declaration on Climate Change and Call to Action. On the one hand, Africa's renewable energy sources and critical raw materials offer the continent a unique opportunity for green industrialization. At the same time, the EU's ambitious climate targets require a strong engagement with African countries to strengthen energy security and develop resilient, sustainable value chains, especially in light of a rapidly changing geopolitical scenario. In light of these shared interests, a renewed EU-Africa relationship has the potential to accelerate Africa's continued development and make inroads in addressing broader challenges arising from the food-climate-migration-security nexus.

The need for improved international climate finance mechanisms. The central role of climate finance in enabling a green, just transition was at the core of the panel discussion, as well as the subsequent private roundtables. African participants stressed that a stronger focus on adaptation finance is needed to establish a new ambitious Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) and to operationalize the Loss and Damage Fund. Enhancing transparency and accountability mechanisms within the global financial system should also be prioritized to ensure that funds are allocated to countries and people that need them the most. Participants agreed that public finance is essential in mobilizing private capital to achieve new finance goals beyond the \$100 billion goal set in 2009 and met in 2022. The EU can play a significant role in catalysing investments through the Global Gateway Initiative, while supporting multilateral debt relief initiatives and innovative instruments such as the global Solidarity Levies. At the same time, African countries must play an active role in de-risking investments and attracting public finance, potentially by tapping into EU technical assistance or guarantees from international financial institutions (IFIs).

Areas of EU-Africa cooperation. EU representatives reaffirmed the Commission's commitment to collaborate with African countries by offering technical assistance, sharing best practices and supporting their integration with climate instruments such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). The potential of Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships, the external pillar of the Clean Industrial Deal recently announced by the Commission, was also emphasized. This new form of partnership, combining trade, regulations, and finance, can significantly step up EU-Africa strategic coordination for the development of value chains for clean technologies. Participants also touched on the importance of long-term energy cooperation on natural gas and green hydrogen, underlining that constructive engagement is crucial to avoid stranded assets.

Overall, the discussion emphasized the potential for stronger EU-Africa cooperation on climate action and green industrialization, calling for a shift toward more horizontal partnerships to tackle shared challenges in the areas of mitigation, adaptation and development.

Private Roundtables: Factors of the Green Transition

The closed-door panels at the Nexus²⁵ event provided an opportunity for in-depth and candid discussions on the evolving relationship between the EU and African stakeholders, with a focus on mitigation and adaptation policies, food security, and the resilience of supply chains. These discussions aimed to address the challenges and opportunities in improving cooperation between the two continents, while also exploring how these issues fit into the broader geopolitical context.

The panels delved into the implications of climate change on Africa, particularly how it exacerbates existing vulnerabilities. While participants acknowledged that the EU continues to play an important role in providing support and facilitating dialogues, several systemic barriers were identified that hinder future-fit EU-Africa cooperation. These included financial constraints, mismatched priorities, and an insufficient level of integration across different policy areas.

In parallel, African stakeholders noted ongoing governance challenges and the growing issue of food security on the continent, highlighting the need for policies more tailored to local realities. The panels ultimately underscored that the EU-Africa relationship needs a more inclusive and adaptive approach that places the priorities and perspectives of African countries

at the center of development strategies, ensuring that they are not merely recipients of aid, but active participants in shaping solutions. For the EU to be more effective in its support of Africa, it must move beyond traditional models of aid and work in partnership with African governments, institutions, and civil society. A more flexible and context-specific approach to funding, as well as a commitment to long-term, locally driven development, will be key in overcoming the challenges discussed during the panels.

Panel 1: Supporting Mitigation and Green Technologies

The first panel focused on aligning African development needs with European interests in the context of green growth and renewable energy. A core message was the necessity for European initiatives to have a transformative effect on African economies, particularly by promoting the growth of renewable energy. The Nairobi Declaration's ambitious goal to increase renewable energy generation capacity from 56 gigawatts to 300 gigawatts by 2030 was highlighted, emphasizing the critical need for substantial financing to achieve this goal. The EU, with its Global Gateway initiative, is seen as a potentially influential player in supporting this transition, particularly by focusing on projects that not only boost energy capacity but also generate positive social impacts.

The EU's involvement in climate adaptation projects and its commitment to green energy transitions were highlighted as positive examples of international cooperation. However, the limitations of EU support were also discussed in depth. One major challenge identified was the mismatch between the EU's policy frameworks and the needs of African countries. In many cases, EU support is perceived as top-down, with insufficient regard for the specific political and social contexts within African nations. Reflecting on the EU's self-perception as a climate leader, some expressed concern that the EU's pursuit of climate justice, while well-intentioned, may not fully align with Africa's development aspirations. A relationship based on mutual respect and accountability was suggested as a more practical framework, where both parties acknowledge their shared objectives. Achieving climate justice for African nations requires policies that not only focus on decarbonization but also address issues of energy access, unemployment, and poverty alleviation. This holistic approach was seen as essential to ensure that the shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy does not disproportionately affect vulnerable communities. Rural electrification emerged as a priority for African development. Investment in small-scale infrastructure, often overlooked in favor of large projects, offers valuable opportunities to boost energy access, create jobs, and attract private sector participation. The climate and energy challenges faced by the EU and Africa—such as the EU's need for affordable clean energy and Africa's need for industrialization and job creation—create a foundation for cooperative action.

Other key themes emphasized during the discussion included:

The lack of coherence in EU policy. Climate change, migration, and security are often addressed in silos, with little integration across different policy domains. This fragmentation undermines the potential for comprehensive solutions that could address the interconnected nature of these issues. Several recommendations were put forward to address these challenges. First, the EU was urged to deepen its engagement with African nations by ensuring that African leaders have a more central role in decision-making processes. Second, there was a call for greater flexibility in EU funding mechanisms, allowing for more context-specific interventions that can adapt to the diverse needs of different regions within Africa. Finally, enhancing collaboration between the EU and African institutions, such as the African Union (AU), was

seen as essential for creating a unified approach to these complex issues.

Africa's potential in the critical raw materials (CRM) value chain. The demand for CRMs worldwide presents Africa with a unique opportunity to industrialize in much the same way that Europe leveraged coal reserves over a century ago. For Africa, this would involve not only exporting raw materials but also developing domestic industries around processing and manufacturing. The approach should prioritize sustainable industrialization, emphasizing establishing local processing capabilities. Investments in expanding and upgrading Africa's energy infrastructure, as well as channeling unused Special Drawing Rights (SDR) toward climate finance, were suggested as critical pathways to achieving this goal. Panelists recognized the potential role of EU institutions in mitigating investment risks, as certain African countries still perceive investments in CRM value chains as high-risk ventures.

Partnerships must prioritize African development. The EU's varied application of policies across different regions of Africa had led to a perception of unevenness in policy execution. A new model of interdependence was recommended, whereby EU-African relations would evolve into more balanced partnerships rooted in mutual respect and the prioritization of Africa's unique challenges and aspirations. Localization of the climate agenda would enhance the legitimacy of EU-supported initiatives and strengthen their impact on the ground. The role of public funding was identified as crucial, particularly in catalyzing private investment by offering interest rate reductions, de-risking mechanisms, technical assistance, and support for policy and project design. In addition, the establishment of a Mediterranean Clean Partnership is anticipated to enhance climate and energy cooperation in the region, reinforcing the EU's commitment to fostering sustainable value chains.

The EU is not Africa's sole partner. Other global actors, including China, Russia, and Gulf countries, offer attractive financing options with minimal conditionalities. The shifting balance of power has provided African nations with greater agency to engage selectively with different partners. In this multipolar environment, the EU's emphasis on accountability and standards can be advantageous, provided the EU delivers tangible results that demonstrate the benefits of these standards. Partnerships that include not only governments but also civil society, the private sector, and local actors are seen as essential to bridging perception gaps and fostering a positive, forward-looking narrative in EU-Africa relations.

Overall, reflecting on these insights, this session underscored that EU-Africa cooperation must move away from a patronizing discourse of top-down "support" and instead foster horizontal, interest-based interactions. Building trust and realigning narratives to reflect both regions' complex realities will enable a more productive and equitable relationship, positioning the EU as a reliable partner in Africa's green transition while respecting Africa's diverse needs and aspirations.

Panel 2: Supporting Adaptation and Resilient Agri-Food Systems

This second panel focused on adaptation interventions and building more future-fit food systems. Food security in Africa is increasingly threatened by climate change, but also by governance challenges, such as weak infrastructure, corruption, and inadequate agricultural policies. Along those lines, opening speakers highlighted that food security should not be seen in isolation, but a key part in broader efforts to strengthen governance structures and sustainable development. Throughout this discussion, attendees noted the challenges posed by substantial gaps in adaptation finance and its critical role in creating resilient agri-food systems, particularly in Africa. Panelists highlighted that despite the growing need, adaptation

finance remains significantly underfunded, with most EU contributions still focused on mitigation. To address this gap, participants suggested that adaptation finance be increased, especially in preparation for COP30, with transparent communication on funding allocation and origins. Proposals such as a global solidarity levy and debt-for-climate swaps were discussed as innovative mechanisms to support adaptation efforts, along with a more frequent and open dialogue between the EU and African partners.

Other key themes from this session included:

The need for improved governance and capacity-building. While international aid and support are important, the long-term success of development initiatives relies on the capacity of African governments and institutions to manage resources effectively and create policies that respond to the needs of their populations. Africa's food system urgently needs transformation to tackle food insecurity, malnutrition, and hunger, problems exacerbated by climate change. In particular, the agri-food adaptation nexus was stressed, with recommendations that the EU support Africa in scaling up agroecological practices, fostering innovation, and investing in the infrastructure needed for sustainable agriculture. A holistic approach involving local and institutional markets was advised to better integrate Africa's private sector and align with both domestic and European demand. EU support could also help local private sectors overcome trade and non-trade barriers to enhance market access between Africa and Europe.

Focusing on local stakeholders. In terms of adaptation policies, smaller, community-sized adaptation projects were recommended over large-scale initiatives, emphasizing a model that could be replicated across similar regions. Such an approach would align adaptation interventions with communities' unique needs, fostering resilience through practical, region-specific solutions. The panel addressed the scarcity of adaptation funding reaching small-scale producers, arguing that traditional grant-based adaptation finance is insufficient and must evolve. Leveraging grants to attract private sector funding, such as through green bonds and climate-debt swaps, was proposed to expand financial flows for local producers. Furthermore, a participatory approach that directly involves farmers in the decision-making process was emphasized, ensuring that financial resources meet real, on-the-ground needs.

Furthermore, attendees stressed the need to localize food systems and production, encouraging policies that support ownership of value chains by local stakeholders and promote agroecological practices. This could entail supporting byproducts of biogas as soil fertilizers and enhancing food waste management through better refrigeration systems and energy access. Employment of locals in production systems was also highlighted as a strategy to foster ownership and adapt food production to local markets.

Leveraging co-benefits and aligning programming at the local, national, and multilateral levels. Panelists recommended focusing on resilience-building interventions that include technical and financial support from the EU and private sectors. Aligning climate finance with local adaptation strategies was presented as a way to bridge the gap between policy-level decisions and the practical needs of small farmers. African financial institutions were seen as key to ensuring that adaptation funds are effectively channeled to those in need. Along those lines, participants stressed the need to integrate adaptation more firmly into global climate discussions, especially at COP events, as adaptation and mitigation are interdependent. A regional approach to resource pooling could enhance cooperation, minimize overlap, and create a more cohesive strategy that aligns EU regional efforts with individual country approaches.

Participants:

1. Diana Acconcia, Directorate-General for Climate Action of the European Commission
2. Theophilus Acheampong, Aberdeen University
3. Anthony Agotha, European External Action Service (EEAS)
4. Houda Allal, Organisation Méditerranéenne de l'Énergie et du Climat (OMEC)
5. Margherita Bianchi, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)
6. Siena Cicarelli, Center for Climate and Security
7. Luca Cinciripini, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)
8. Susannah Dennison, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)
9. Ndoye Fatou, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
10. Daniele Fattibene, European Think Tanks Group (ETTg)
11. Ibrahima Hathie, Research Director for the Initiative Prospective Agricole et Rurale (IPAR)
12. Afeikhen Jerome, African Union Commission
13. Seif Kandeel, Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding
14. Hanne Knaepen, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM)
15. Paques Sidonie Kouam-Gwet, Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI)
16. Lié Maminaina, Shamba Centre for Food & Climate
17. Michela Morese, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
18. Mithika Mwenda, Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA)
19. Antonio Navarra, Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Climate Change (CMCC)
20. Sam Ogallah, African Union Commission
21. Chukwueloka U. Okeke, Anchor University
22. Sophie Rau, Stiftung Mercator
23. Jack Rossiter, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
24. Chiara Scissa, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)
25. Erin Sikorsky, Center for Climate and Security (CCS)
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Nexus²⁵ is a joint project of the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) in Rome and the Center for Climate and Security (CCS) in Washington, DC. The project, led by Dr. Nathalie Tocci at IAI, Erin Sikorsky at CCS and Dr. Michael Werz at the Center for American Progress (CAP), is funded by Stiftung Mercator in Germany.

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