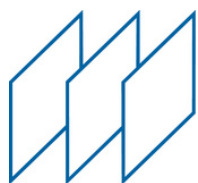


GUIDANCE PAPER FOR COLLABORATIVE ACTION

HOW TO STRENGTHEN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION BETWEEN AFRICA AND EUROPE?

SUGGESTIONS FROM THE
COOPERATION LOUNGE AFRICA-EUROPE:
SCIENCE MEETS POLITICS
10 & 11 DECEMBER 2024, BRUSSELS



Bavarian
Research Alliance



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This Guidance Paper for Collaborative Action aims to strengthen cooperation in research and innovation (R&I) between Africa and Europe. The views presented here do not purely represent the perspectives of its publisher, the Bavarian Research Alliance (BayFOR) and its Scientific Coordination Office (WKS) Bavaria-Africa. The paper is a summary of the public discussions held at the *Cooperation Lounge Africa-Europe: Science Meets Politics*, which took place on 10 and 11 December 2024 at the Representation of the Free State of Bavaria to the European Union in Brussels.

BayFOR provides advisory services on EU research and innovation funding and supports researchers based at Bavarian institutions and their international partners to connect and apply for project funding. The WKS Bavaria-Africa strengthens collaborations between Africa and Bavaria in R&I. It informs about funding programmes for R&I collaborations with African and Bavarian participation, connects actors in this field and supports them in writing grant proposals and project management.

The work of WKS Bavaria-Africa is funded by the Bavarian State Chancellery under its Africa strategy – the Bavarian Africa Package – and by the Bavarian State Ministry of Science and the Arts.

03 KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Funding programmes need to support the **co-creation** of research and innovation (R&I) projects between Africa and Europe from the beginning of writing a proposal to co-leadership and shared responsibilities during the project time. Co-creation helps to establish long-term relationships based on mutual trust between African and European partners.
2. R&I projects should address the needs of societies and global challenges. Thus, the **integration of African, European, inter- and transdisciplinary perspectives** is needed for the design of calls for proposals and in projects.
3. Collaboration projects between Africa and Europe require a **supportive legal and political framework** for their activities, such as prompt visa issuances, an appropriate budget, and the use of several working languages.
4. Accounting and financial regulations of international projects should be **adjusted to local realities**, e.g., by timely compensation of costs, by reimbursement of actual costs and by allowing local ways of payment, such as mobile money.
5. A well-functioning project management with reduced bureaucracy and **smooth administrative work** requires training and exchanges of administrative staff, the establishment of national contact points in Africa, and the integration of the perspectives of administrative staff in the creation of calls for proposals.
6. **Extended timelines** for African-European cooperation projects help the collaboration across continents with various and differing working conditions and infrastructures.
7. Partnerships should become more equitable to be sustainable. Therefore, a **paradigm shift** is needed that changes individual mindsets and global structures, enables mutual learning and listening, and creates resources and investments in R&I in both Africa and Europe

04 BACKGROUND

This Guidance Paper for Collaborative Action is based on the discussions at the Cooperation Lounge Africa-Europe: Science Meets Politics, which took place on 10 and 11 December 2024 in Brussels. The Scientific Coordination Office (WKS) Bavaria-Africa of the Bavarian Research Alliance (BayFOR), together with the Representation of the Free State of Bavaria to the European Union, had invited guests from politics, research and innovation (R&I) from both Africa and Europe to Brussels.

At the high-level networking event on the evening of 10 December 2024, more than 120 participants enhanced the dialogue between science and policy in the context of African-European R&I activities. Opening words were given by Michael Hinterdobler (Former Director of the Representation of the Free State of Bavaria to the EU, now Secretary-General of the Wirtschaftsbeirat Bayern), Eric Beißwenger (State Minister for European and International Affairs, Government of the Free State of Bavaria), Mohamed Igueh Ofleh (Deputy Head of Mission of the African Union Permanent Mission to the European Union), and Nicola Bellomo (Head of the Pan-African Division, European External Action Service). These speakers and the panel discussants affirmed the need for closer cooperation between Bavaria, the European Union (EU), and the African Union (AU) in R&I to tackle global challenges.

More than 80 participants engaged in the subsequent World Café on 11 December 2024 to develop solutions for how cooperation in R&I projects with African and European participation can be improved regarding calls for proposals, project management, and equitable and sustainable cooperation.

Among the participants were representatives from politics, such as from the European Commission, the European Parliament, the African Union, embassies of African countries in Brussels, and representatives of national and federal ministries in Europe. Further, representatives from research institutions attended the event, coming from funding agencies from Germany and Europe, as well as from various disciplines at universities, universities of applied sciences, university alliances, industry, and civil society organisations in Europe, Africa and the diaspora.

The event built upon the Cooperation Lounge Africa-Bavaria: Rethinking Collaboration in Research and Innovation, which more than 100 persons attended in Munich on 11 July 2024 to discuss the theory and practices of equitable cooperation between Africa and Bavaria.

05 BACKGROUND

This guidance paper collects voices from Africa and Europe to provide insights into what is needed for more equitable and sustainable R&I collaborations. The paper presents a set of requirements and practical solutions which were jointly discussed by stakeholders from research, policy, and funding organisations.

These inter- and transdisciplinary collaborations are needed to address complex global issues, which cannot be solved on one continent alone, such as climate change and new geopolitical dynamics. Theory and practice, as well as research and politics, need to interact more closely to provide feasible solutions. Initiatives like the Global Gateway, the AU-EU Innovation Agenda, and the Green Deal target collaborations between the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU). The AU-EU partnership even celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2025. However, collaborations between the continents - even if they aim to be on eye-level - struggle with persistent inequalities and administrative issues on strategic and operational levels, which challenge the success and sustainability of international R&I projects.

This Guidance Paper for Collaborative Action does not focus on the reform of one specific funding programme, but on the requirements of R&I collaborations between Africa and Europe more broadly. For some readers, the presented challenges and their solutions might be familiar, for others, they might contain new aspects. Even if facts are known, they need to be repeated until an improvement is accomplished.

The paper does not address only one institution that might be able to create new policies to support R&I activities between Africa and Europe. It speaks to individuals and institutions from research and politics who will find inspiration in what they can do to make cooperation between Africa and Europe more equitable and sustainable.

Based on an open dialogue across research and politics, across continents and academic and thematic areas, the following section provides insights into what needs to be done. The actions are presented as concrete working steps for researchers, funders, and policymakers at the regional, national, and global levels.

06 WHAT TO DO?

PROMOTING CALLS FOR PROPOSALS FOR R&I PROJECTS WITH AFRICAN AND EUROPEAN PARTNERS

REQUIREMENTS - SOLUTIONS

1. Building and maintaining long-term relationships which are based on mutual respect and trust between African and European partners.

1.1 Dedicate more time to building relationships in collaborations. The dialogue between African and European partners should start earlier in the process and before the proposal writing begins, allowing for **genuine co-creation** of projects on eye level. Early engagement ensures that projects are developed collaboratively and equitably, rather than inviting input only after the project's agenda has already been defined.

1.2 Offer funding possibilities to **continue and expand well-established, successful projects** over long periods, e.g. by adding additional partners, and not demand creating something completely novel for each project application.

1.3 Offer **short- and long-term funding** programmes for specific demands.

1.4 Give leadership roles to African partners, not only to Europeans, and **share tasks and responsibilities**. Two principal investigators, one from Europe and one from Africa, should be an eligibility criterion for projects targeting Africa and Europe.

07 WHAT TO DO?

2. Needs and request-driven approach to solve problems on local, national and global levels, make a positive impact on societies and address the needs of the population.

2.1 Co-create Calls for Proposals

2.2 Enable participation of the African Union in the creation of calls of the European Union that target Africa.

2.3 Fund bottom-up approaches in R&I.

2.4 Build calls based on needs and therefore integrate local authorities and civil society in Africa, as well as administrative staff from both Africa and Europe, in the development of calls. Have not only high-level dialogue on needs, but regional and national dialogues beyond governments and include actors from Africa and Europe.

2.5 Bridge the gap between research and practice for tangible outcomes of R&I projects.

2.6 Support inter- and transdisciplinary projects with funding and administrative structures at research institutes and universities.

2.7 Be more Afro-centric to address societal needs.

08 WHAT TO DO?

SUPPORTING PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT WITH AFRICAN AND EUROPEAN R&I PARTNERS

REQUIREMENTS - SOLUTIONS

3. Supportive international legal and political framework for R&I activities with African and European partners.

3.1 Enable **prompt visa issuance for researchers in Africa to travel to Europe** for R&I activities. **Support junior scholars in Africa** without a travel history to get visas in a short time for their participation and qualification in the field of R&I.

3.2 **Ease visa processes for travels between African countries** for R&I activities.

3.3 Strengthen **collaborations between embassies and R&I projects**.

3.4 Facilitate **research permits**.

3.5 Dedicate **budget lines for African-European cooperation** projects in R&I, such as the Africa Initiative in Horizon Europe and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI).

3.6 Governments in Africa and Europe should **invest more in R&I**.

3.7 Accept international project proposals and management in **more languages than English** (e.g., in French, Portuguese and Arabic), since several languages are not only used within but also beyond the EU.

3.8 **Streamline policies in AU and EU countries**, e.g., regarding salaries and overhead.

09 WHAT TO DO?

4. Well-functioning administration with less bureaucracy.

4.1 **Create national contact points** in more African countries as information hubs for project queries.

4.2 **Strengthen administrative support and project management capacities at universities** in Africa and Europe. Establish more project management offices.

4.3 **Train administrative staff** in Europe and Africa to support R&I projects.

4.4 **Offer non-academic mobility programmes** for exchange and training between AU and EU countries.

4.5 **Create networks of exchange between administrative staff** within and across countries.

4.6 Let **administrative staff participate in the development of calls for proposals and projects**, or include their experiences.

5. More time for collaborative work across continents.

5.1 **Expand timelines for writing and submitting proposals and project reports** so that the collaboration across continents works well with different languages, access to digital and administrative infrastructures and staff resources.

10 WHAT TO DO?

6. Accounting and financial regulations which are adjusted to local realities.

6.1 **Share budget allocation and responsibility equally** between partners from Europe and Africa.

6.2 Cover **costs for pre-award training**.

6.3 Allow the **use of different types of payment/receipts**, e.g., mobile money.

6.4 **Cover costs depending on local realities**, e.g. actual costs for cars and fuel when no public transport system is available and for internet connectivity when no reliable institutional access exists for partners in Africa to secure connection, access to information and participation in project meetings and activities. Enable spending in the informal sector, which is a major market in many African countries.

6.5 Take changing **inflation, exchange rates, and fees of money transfer** into account in the project budget.

6.6 Issue **timely and sufficient pre-financing and disbursement** for project needs and equipment.

6.7 Grant more **budget to the project administration**.

6.8 Allow **flexibility in how the budget is planned and spent**.

6.9 Offer **finance trainings** to streamline what items, services and activities are required in projects and for what and how project funding can be spent.

1 1 WHAT TO DO?

STRENGTHENING EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE COOPERATION BETWEEN AFRICA AND EUROPE IN R&I

REQUIREMENTS - SOLUTIONS

7. Actions for more equitable, sustainable and effective collaborations

7.1 **Shift the paradigm** from aid- and development-oriented research to investment in knowledge and solutions from the African continent.

7.2 **Invest in research at African universities** and in early career researchers at African universities.

7.3 **Reflect critically on personal mindsets, institutional hierarchies, and power imbalances** within partnerships.

7.4 Promote **mutual learning between Europe and Africa** by ensuring that individuals and institutions on both sides actively listen to and learn from one another.

7.5 **Create spaces for formal and informal networking and exchange** between people from Europe, Africa, and the diaspora.

7.6 **Include African voices** in policy making, research and leadership roles.

7.7 **Do not impose European standards and models on Africa**, but follow bottom-up approaches and co-creation of projects that suit the manifold realities on the African continent.

12 WHAT TO DO?

7.8 Take the **differences within and between countries and regions of the African continent** into account.

7.9 Make **economic contributions and budget allocations** more equal.

7.10 **Work as equal partners in all phases** of collaboration, including the formulation of calls for proposals, project execution, and dissemination of results, such as publications.

13 SUMMARY

This Guidance Paper, which summarises the discussion at the *Cooperation Lounge Africa-Europe: Science Meets Politics* in Brussels, demonstrates the requirements and actions which strengthen collaborations between Africa and Europe in the field of R&I.

The demands, which various actors in the field of R&I expressed, regard the transformation of

- legal and political conditions for international research cooperation,
- administrative and financial rules and regulations of projects,
- economic, infrastructural and power dynamics within international research contexts.

Various institutions in the fields of research and politics, as well as individuals, can contribute in their own ways to improving current and future cooperation between Africa and Europe.

The points collected in this paper are not the end of the discussion but a starting point for more intensive engagement. Future work could investigate in more detail how specific funding programmes and legal conditions at regional, national and international levels could be transformed to promote new collaborations and findings in R&I.

FURTHER READING

AU-EU Innovation Agenda.

URL: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/c9c4eb8e-df0f-41e7-a322-891786fef29b_en?filename=ec_rtd_au-eu-innovation-agenda-final-version.pdf

Africa Charter. Perivoli Africa Research Centre, University of Bristol.

URL: <https://parc.bristol.ac.uk/africa-charter/>

TEPSO toolkits to improve equity in global North-South partnerships.

Perivoli Africa Research Centre, University of Bristol.

URL: <https://parc.bristol.ac.uk/2025/03/11/launch-of-toolkits-to-improve-equity-in-global-north-south-partnerships/>

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