

# Revitalizing Africa-Europe Cooperation on Climate Adaptation

*Produced by the Africa-Europe Foundation for the new institutional and programming cycle of the European and African Union Commissions (AU-EU), starting in February 2025.*

## Executive summary

Africa and Europe are at a critical moment in their collective efforts to adapt to climate change. Continued rapid warming has brought catastrophic impacts to both continents, from extreme flooding in Valencia, Spain and Nairobi, Kenya to droughts in the Horn of Africa and Mediterranean. The two regions are historically interdependent, united by trade ties, financial flows, and exchanges of people. Now they are increasingly united by a complex web of climate risks which demand new modes of diplomatic cooperation.

The Africa–EU Partnership is a multi-actor partnership established in 2000 and guided by the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) and non-governmental bodies. The partnership enables political and policy dialogues between the continents on, among other things, the shared effort to build resilience to climate change and adapt to its impacts.

This report assesses the current state of cooperation between Africa and Europe on climate adaptation, and over the past five years (2019–2024), focusing on four aspects of cooperation: policy and diplomacy, finance and resources, programming and implementation, and knowledge and data exchange.

In 2025 there will be significant changes in leadership within both the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) and their respective commissions. It will also mark a new AU-EU policy and programming cycle, and a series of steppingstones for adaptation diplomacy and policymaking.

Waypoints include Spain's hosting of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, South Africa's Presidency of the G20, the Baku to Belem Roadmap on the US\$1.3 trillion climate finance goal and the much-anticipated COP30, and preparations for the 7th EU-AU Summit. Therefore 2025 is a critical window of opportunity to revitalize cooperation on adaptation, and this report provides a comprehensive set of recommendations for doing so. Taking these steps would represent a maturing of the partnership and the evolution of ties between the two continents.

Climate change has risen on the political agenda in both Africa and Europe over the past five years, and policymakers increasingly recognize the need to work collectively to adapt and build resilience. But cooperation between the continents faces significant headwinds.

The EU is struggling to balance internal economic stability and international competitiveness with global climate responsibilities. Tensions are growing between Africa and Europe over protectionist policies, migration and security. Africa is pivoting toward other economic and diplomatic relationships. Geopolitical shifts and conflicts elsewhere increasingly demand attention. Given this backdrop, it will not be easy to reach a balanced and mutually beneficial approach to adaptation, but it can be accomplished.

This report assesses Africa-Europe cooperation on adaptation along four dimensions: programmes and policies, procedures, legitimacy, and durability.

- **Programmes and policies:** Africa-Europe cooperation on climate action is valued by stakeholders on both continents, and there are encouraging developments on adaptation to point to, with the release of continent-wide strategies and ambitious announcements regarding European support for African adaptation efforts. This can be improved, however, by articulating a clear proposition and theory of change: Africa-Europe cooperation on adaptation needs a “pole star” to work towards.
- **Procedures:** institutional arrangements and capacities to enable collaboration in adaptation are lacking. Policymakers from both continents do not always understand each other's plans, perspectives and priorities for adaptation. Regular structures for dialogue are needed to align objectives and address misconceptions.
- **Legitimacy:** although the Africa-Europe partnership is supported and valued by a broad coalition, and garners high-level political buy-in, it is also under significant strain. Persistent unbalanced power dynamics between African and European stakeholders, distrust tied to unfulfilled promises for finance, and the Eurocentric protectionist agenda undermine the perceived legitimacy of the partnership.
- **Durability:** adaptation is not currently a policy priority for either continent, nor is it high on the agenda for cooperation. Ad hoc initiatives and announcements are proving insufficient for sustained cooperation. In the current geopolitical environment, progress is unlikely without a dedicated operational framework to enable a shared high-level response to adaptation.

## Key findings

In the diplomatic arena, the rhetoric of Africa-Europe collaboration has begun to shift – from outdated frameworks of development cooperation towards reciprocity based on mutual respect – but long-standing power inequalities continue to hamper the fruition of these ideals in practice. The AU and EU must develop a clearer narrative for the strategic value of their collaboration, framing adaptation not only as local resilience-building, but also vital to safeguarding and promoting socioeconomic development and prosperity; worthy, therefore, of becoming a core pillar of the partnership.

The AU and EU are global leaders on climate adaptation. The 2023 Africa Climate Summit showcased the continent's ambition to build international partnerships and provide global climate solutions. The Global Commission on Adaptation calls the EU a “pioneer” in the integration of climate risk into decision-making. Both commissions have developed continent-wide adaptation strategies that recognize the transboundary and cascading nature of climate risks, with resilience dependent on international cooperation and action. They share a commitment to multilateralism, with converging positions on adaptation. Strong bilateral relationships are supported through a wide range of partnership agreements, policy dialogues, and high-level forums. Stakeholders from each region commend the other for their global leadership on adaptation, and both are keen to recognize the global public goods this generates.

Despite these strengths, climate adaptation is a blind spot in the partnership. Both commissions are failing to harness its substantial potential to strengthen diplomatic relations between them, and the wider benefits such closer ties would accrue in the current geopolitical context. The EU continues to focus more heavily on mitigation, as did the Africa Climate Summit with its attention primarily on the “climate positive growth” agenda. Europe's growing emphasis on “strategic autonomy” and the Green Deal transition risk undermining the coherence of its own policies, with spillover effects from its Deforestation Regulation and Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism potentially weakening Africa's capacity to adapt. Such policies are also raising questions about Europe's commitment to its proclaimed values on the world stage, creating confusion at best and claims of hypocrisy at worst.

The differing political priorities and institutional architectures of the EU and AU are another hindrance. Though the Africa-EU partnership aims to drive action at a continental scale, most adaptation decisions are delegated to member states. Coordination between actors and levels is challenging, exacerbated by frequent staff turnover in both institutions and a lack of clear counterparts. There are few forums for bilateral dialogues on adaptation involving the commissions and their member states, beyond the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. While it would be naive to expect complete

convergence on adaptation objectives, a more clearly defined framework arrangement would help adaptation emerge from its bureaucratic quagmire, as well as support collective action on identified priorities.

The EU is seen as a leader in delivering financial support for African adaptation, but a persistent lack of trust undermines the potential for deeper cooperation, including on developing innovative instruments. The recent decision on a new, ten-year climate finance goal at COP29 did little to move the needle on mobilizing finance to close the “adaptation gap.” It also failed to address the concerns of African countries over a lack of transparency and accountability in international climate finance.

The EU is the largest climate finance contributor to Africa, driving a dramatic increase in international support from US\$29.5 billion in 2019/2020 to US\$43.7 billion in 2021/2022. Its flagship initiative, the Global Gateway Africa – Europe Investment Package, is expected to provide €150 billion from 2021–2027. Responding to calls from African stakeholders, it seeks to enhance coordination across funding channels and improve local ownership of initiatives. African and European countries are also leaders in the Bridgetown Initiative, the diplomatic effort to reform international financial institutions to make them more just and aligned with climate objectives.

African policymakers, however, perceive the EU as failing to follow through on high-profile funding commitments, including the US\$100 billion goal affirmed in the 2015 Paris Agreement. Given these shortcomings, they express concern about future commitments, such as the Global Gateway. African policymakers draw attention to the continued shortfall in adaptation finance, the need for support that does not add to existing debt burdens, and their persistent difficulties in accessing multilateral funding. European policymakers, in turn, express frustration about how the focus on finance inhibits progress on other aspects of adaptation cooperation.

Adaptation programming and implementation is advancing within and between the two continents but much more needs to be done to translate lofty policy goals into ground-level action. Current implementation falls far short of the speed and scale required.

Every EU member state has a national adaptation strategy, with a requirement to report progress to the European Commission every two years. 22 African countries have completed National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), with many more reporting on their adaptation needs and actions in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). The EU and its member states are the largest international contributors to climate adaptation programming and implementation in Africa, and there are notable examples of promising adaptation initiatives, including the 2024



launch of the EU-funded Adaptation Project Incubator for Africa (APIA) programme.

European and African countries, however, also face common challenges. Slow development of national plans and poorly articulated actions and mandates delay implementation. Though adaptation is increasingly integrated into development planning at the national and sectoral scale, not enough is being done to mainstream adaptation into local plans and practices. In Europe, emerging evidence suggests that less than two thirds of relevant domestic projects are effectively building adaptive capacity. Insufficient human and financial resources, and difficulties in accurately tracking adaptation progress, are shared challenges in both regions. In Africa, there is an urgent need to scale adaptation projects that address climate change impacts through climate-resilient development, complementing existing projects that provide technical assistance and support policy development and advocacy.

While progress has been made on data and knowledge sharing between Africa and Europe, important gaps remain. There are, for example, opportunities to better align adaptation data collection with African research and innovation priorities, building on the long-standing cooperation between the two continents in space science and earth observation.

The AU-EU Innovation Agenda is the policy mainstay of both continents' cooperation on research and innovation for the next decade, and climate adaptation is a key focus in sectors such as food and water systems. In its adaptation strategy, the EU emphasizes the importance of learning from others and achieving "smarter adaptation," informed by more sophisticated data and risk assessment tools. The AU echoes these calls, while also emphasizing the need to build on local and indigenous knowledge. Centres of excellence and academic research programmes on both continents are contributing to an improved understanding of adaptation. Climate services, especially early warning systems, are getting better at translating this knowledge into climate-smart decisions. Joint initiatives, such as the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security in Africa Support Programme, enable cooperation and are beginning to fill the gap in African countries' access to earth observation data.

Independent assessments of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda, however, point to challenges, including funding gaps and a fragmented EU landscape for research in Africa. Significant gaps remain in climate and meteorological observations over Africa and ongoing definitional challenges continue to thwart efforts to better understand "what works" in adaptation, including locally led adaptation, despite the popularity of the principle.

## Recommendations

- 1. Place adaptation at the heart of the 7th European Union–African Union Summit.** Convene a sequence of "warm-up" meetings for ministerial discussion on points of contention, and establish a cross-continent framework arrangement to translate high-level decisions and policies on adaptation into practice. Such decisions should advance shared priorities for adaptation, as articulated in each continent's new adaptation strategy, aligned to the targets agreed in the new UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience.
- 2. Prioritize adaptation finance and deliver on political commitments.** The EU should deliver on existing commitments to double adaptation finance in the lead up to COP30, including by channelling funding to African countries, while simplifying access. Both regions should take steps to improve transparency in the delivery and use of international adaptation finance and work together to identify opportunities for blended finance, innovative financial instruments, and alternative revenue streams, while collaborating on driving reforms to the multilateral financial architecture.
- 3. Invest in strengthening the delivery of adaptation programmes in both continents.** Programmes under the Africa-EU Partnership and related initiatives should prioritize NAP readiness in Least Developed Countries and climate-resilient socioeconomic development in shared priority areas, such as agriculture, food security, trade, infrastructure, energy, and public health. Investment is needed in the clear communication of these initiatives, and comprehensive impact assessments carried out on their effects. Mechanisms for reporting, monitoring, evaluation and learning on adaptation more broadly need to be strengthened.

