

# Revitalizing Africa-Europe Cooperation on Climate Adaptation

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# 1. Introduction

For the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU), 2025 will usher in changes of leadership at both Commissions, as well as a new policy and programming cycle. There are less than five years to make significant progress towards Agenda 2030, and 2025 will mark critical waypoints on this journey – 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. This report is aimed at decision-makers engaged in all of these critical processes. Ambitious action and stronger cooperation on climate adaptation is imperative in the years leading up to 2030 and beyond, with the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) arguing that “we cannot afford rest stops, detours or stumbles at this halfway point in humanity's climate journey”<sup>1</sup>.

This report assesses the current state of cooperation between Africa and Europe on adaptation and makes recommendations to revitalize the relationship between the two continents during this year's critical window of opportunity. The assessment focuses on several aspects of cooperation, including policy and diplomacy, finance and resourcing, programming and implementation, and knowledge and data exchange. Taking major steps in each aspect of cooperation would represent a maturing of the partnership – as both interviewees and experts have called for (Abimbola and Aggad, 2021) – and build closer ties between the two continents.

Globally, 2024 was the warmest year on record and Africa suffered a wide range of catastrophic climate impacts. The State of the Climate in Africa 2023 report (WMO, 2024) documents extreme heatwaves in northern Africa, with Tunisia and Morocco recording new maximum temperatures, reduced rainfall in the Horn of Africa and north-western Africa, parts of Southern Africa, and Madagascar, and severe drought in ten countries spanning all five of Africa's subregions. Many countries – such as Angola and coastal areas north of the Gulf of Guinea – experienced heavy rains and tropical cyclones. Extreme flooding from Storm Daniel killed more than 4700 people in Libya, with a further 8000 people missing, while 2.4 million people were displaced as a result of flooding in Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia. African countries are currently losing between 2% and 5% of their GDP annually to climate extremes, with many diverting up to 9% of their budgets to respond (WMO, 2024). These effects interact with other socioeconomic and political challenges across the continent to compound impacts locally on households and communities. At the same time, Africa's economies, societies and ecosystems are vulnerable to the transboundary impacts of climate change happening all around the world (AU, 2022).

Europe is the world's fastest-warming continent (European Environment Agency, 2024c). Extreme heat is now commonplace in Southern Europe, and catastrophic flooding in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe in 2024 was reported as the worst for two decades (European Environment Agency, 2024c; RCRC Climate Centre, 2024). Economic losses from weather and climate extremes cost Europe €162 billion between 2021 and 2023 (EEA, 2024a). In a world of 1.5°C of warming, it has been estimated that investments in adaptation will need to total €40 billion per year for the EU27 and the UK, rising to €80–120 billion per year if warming reaches 2°C (EEA, 2023). The 2024 European Climate Risk Assessment identified and assessed 36 risks and found that several had already reached critical levels: “If decisive action is not taken now, most climate risks identified could reach critical or catastrophic levels by the end of this century.

Hundreds of thousands of people would die from heat waves, and economic losses from coastal floods alone could exceed EUR 1 trillion per year” (European Environment Agency, 2024c: 11).

While some reports assess Europe's adaptive capacity as relatively high compared to other world regions, the IPCC warns of the limits to adaptation the region will face (Bednar-Friedl et al., 2022). The assessment particularly emphasizes Europe's exposure to cascading climate risks, concluding that societies and economies are poorly prepared, with the implementation of adaptation policy “lagging substantially behind” the fast-rising risks (European Environment Agency, 2024d: 4).

It is clear that adaptation to climate change is a social, economic and ecological imperative. The Africa-EU Partnership, which was formally established in 2000 at the first AU-EU Summit in Cairo, should be at the forefront of diplomatic initiatives to strengthen international cooperation on adaptation – with great potential to drive and deliver climate-resilient development for the more than 2.2 billion people that call the continents home. The Partnership recognizes that the two continents are strongly connected, through history, geography, culture, values, trade and economic cooperation. And the two regions face a common future: “the growing urgency of the climate crisis shows how interdependent our two continents are, and why it is so important that both seize shared opportunities and tackle common challenges”, argues the EU (INTPA, n.d.). At the last Summit convened under the partnership in 2022, African and European heads of state made commitments to strengthen solidarity, promote international cooperation and fight climate change (AEF, 2023d).

But what is the state-of-play on adaptation cooperation within the Africa-EU Partnership and the broader 2019–2024 AU-EU

<sup>1</sup> <https://unfccc.int/news/simon-stiell-opening-speech-we-can-t-afford-rest-stops-detours-or-stumbles-at-this-halfway-point-in>





policy cycle? What have been the key achievements, and what challenges, barriers and bottlenecks have curbed adaptation, in areas such as policy and diplomacy, finance and resourcing, programming and implementation, and knowledge and data exchange? What lessons should be drawn by the two new commissions, and which best practices should be built upon? What emerging trends and scenarios will shape cooperation in the years ahead, and what strategic recommendations should now guide Africa-Europe cooperation on climate adaptation?

This study explores these questions. It first describes the current state-of-play on Africa-Europe cooperation on adaptation from multiple angles. It goes on to provide a synthesis assessment, and captures lessons learned and trends shaping adaptation in the years ahead. The study concludes with a set of recommendations to strengthen adaptation diplomacy, rebuild trust in adaptation finance, and drive more effective adaptation action within and between the two continents.

## Methods

This report is based on a review of the literature on adaptation cooperation in the context of Africa-Europe relations over the last five years (2019–2024), as well as insights from six targeted interviews with African and European stakeholders and a group consultation with the AEF Africa-Europe Working Group on Adaptation. The desk review of academic and grey literature included AU and EU strategy and policy documents and communications submitted to the UNFCCC; decisions and resolutions of the African Ministerial Conferences on Environment (AMCEN); European Investment Bank (EIB) reports; joint AU-EU strategies and vision statements; previous Africa-Europe Foundation policy analysis and summaries from convenings of African and European stakeholders; and civil society analysis and assessments.

Interviews canvassed views on the current state-of-play on AU-EU adaptation cooperation, identified relevant trends and distilled priorities to strengthen cooperation in future. We conducted the interviews in September and October 2024. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with African and European policymakers, civil society representatives and adaptation experts. We asked interviewees whether they would like to be anonymous, pseudonymous, or for their responses to be attributed, and we have referenced accordingly throughout the report. Most interviewees preferred to remain anonymous and are therefore referred to simply as interviewees.

The perceptions of stakeholders on international cooperation on adaptation were also captured at key policy moments in the second half of 2024, including: the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN); the Climate Change and Development in Africa conference (CCDA); the pre-COP session of the African Group of Negotiators Experts Support (AGNES); and COP29 in Baku. Data from each of these sources – including speaking notes, transcripts, and press releases – were reviewed by the core author team.

The grading system we have used in the synthesis assessment is based on our overall analysis of the information presented in this report. The results were tested and refined during the group consultation with the AEF Africa-Europe Working Group on Adaptation in October 2024.

## 2. State of play: Africa-Europe Adaptation Cooperation

### 2.1 POLICY AND DIPLOMACY

#### Achievements

Climate change has risen rapidly up the political agenda in Africa and Europe in the last five years. As one interviewee noted: “climate change is on the agenda now in European and African countries and is here to stay”. Consideration of adaptation is often now routine in investment and infrastructure decisions in ways it was not, only a few years ago; a shift in practice interviewees from both regions viewed as remarkable. Adaptation has long been a priority for African policymakers and negotiators within climate action, but as the EU’s Adaptation Communication (ADCOM) makes clear, adaptation has climbed the EU policy agenda too, both domestically and in its international action (EU, 2021b).

Both Commissions have recently set out how they plan to adapt to climate change and strengthen climate resilience in the coming years, providing a continental-level framework to guide collective action and strengthen cooperation between their member states. These ambitions are set out in the African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (AU, 2022a) and the European Union Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change (EU, 2021a).

The current implementation plan for Africa’s AU Agenda 2063 aims to enhance climate resilience (as strategic objective 1.6). The African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan – developed with financial support from the EU – operationalizes this aim, setting out principles, priorities and action areas for climate cooperation, adaptation and climate-resilient development (AU, 2024; AU, 2022a). The strategy identifies agriculture and food systems, water resources, energy, infrastructure and transport, and health as critical sectors for enhancing climate resilience.

Achieving the aims of the action plan will require stronger governance of adaptation programmes, improved climate literacy and access to climate services, a greater number of and more effective early-warning systems, and integrated approaches (leveraging the climate-health nexus, for example) (Pichon, 2022). The action plan notes the importance of locally led adaptation, and the transboundary nature of climate risks, aiming to “enhance coordination between the Regional Economic Communities and Member States in addressing and managing transboundary and cascading climate risks” (AU, 2022a:32).

To date, 22 countries across Africa have a National Adaptation Plan (NAP). Many more articulate adaptation needs and actions in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and 32 countries have assigned institutional responsibilities for planning, resourcing and/or implementing adaptation, with seven at an advanced stage (AEF, 2023d).

The Africa Climate Summit 2023 showcased the continent’s ambition and potential to be an architect of global adaptation solutions. Its Nairobi Declaration calls for the mobilization of adaptation finance, increased continental collaboration, and the urgent resolution of a measurable Global Goal on Adaptation (AU, 2023a and 2023b). The declaration commits to building “effective partnerships between Africa and other regions, to meet the needs for financial, technical and technological support, and knowledge sharing for climate change adaptation” (AU, 2023a).

The 10th Special Session of the African Ministerial Conference (AMCEN) in 2024 also underscored the need to fully operationalize the Global Goal on Adaptation, including through the UAE–Belem work programme on indicators. The international effort to operationalize the Global Goal on Adaptation is an opportunity to increase both investment and ambition in adaptation and finally achieve parity with mitigation efforts (AEF, 2022). The African Group of Negotiators has kept adaptation high on the agenda of the UNFCCC negotiations at successive COPs and is working for a strong adaptation focus in negotiations to 2030.

The Global Commission on Adaptation calls the EU a “pioneer” on integrating climate risk into decision-making (Bapna et al., 2019). It has institutionalized adaptation planning and reporting across its member states and mainstreamed adaptation considerations across its policies, plans, programmes and budgets (EU, 2021a). The EU are giving progressively more weight to adaptation (politically and financially, both domestically and through their international action), seeking parity with mitigation. Every member state now has a national adaptation strategy or plan, and a requirement to report their progress to the Commission every two years (AEF, 2022). Nine of these have been approved and adopted by countries since 2021 alone (EEA, 2024b). The EU’s Adaptation Strategy aims to step up international action on adaptation as one of its four principal objectives, alongside efforts to make adaptation smarter, faster and more systemic (EU, 2021a).

Interviewees noted that the EU's approach to international action on adaptation is shifting from development cooperation to partnership. The European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change plans to publish a progress report on meeting Europe's adaptation needs, and on policy consistency with its future adaptation objectives (date, TBD). The report may also assess Europe's international action on adaptation (ESABCC, 2024). It will be essential to evaluate in some way the potential negative impacts of European policies on third countries (see below).

The EU's Adaptation Strategy recognizes the transboundary and cascading nature of climate risks and frames adaptation as "a cross-cutting element in the EU's and Member States' external action, spanning international cooperation, migration, trade, agriculture and security" (EU, 2021a: 17). It commits to promoting sub-national, national and regional approaches to adaptation, with a specific focus on adaptation in Africa and a nod to strengthening engagement with African initiatives and institutions (EU, 2021a).

Interviewees noted that the EU has strong bilateral relationships with AU member states on climate change, including Egypt, Morocco and South Africa, with Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal next in line. These manifest in policy dialogues, partnership agreements and high-level forums. Interviewees expect that the policy dialogues will have a stronger focus on adaptation in their next phase, and include a wider range of stakeholders, such as the private sector, civil society, and local authorities. Locally led adaptation is consistently emphasized as the EU's favoured approach (AEF, 2023d).

Wopke Hoekstra, the new European Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth, has been tasked with leading a new European Climate Adaptation Plan, with a focus on infrastructure, energy, water, food and land in cities and rural areas, and incentives for nature-based solutions. His Mission Letter stresses the importance of making Europe climate resilient, and that this will remain an overarching objective for the next 30 years, both for internal and external EU action. The plan includes a focus on working with EU partners around the world and strengthening Europe's climate diplomacy (European Commission, 2024c).

Europe also maintains a progressive and cooperative position on adaptation in climate negotiations (AEF, 2024). It has identified opportunities for a closer Europe-Africa alliance to strengthen rules-based multilateralism more generally, and in the UNFCCC negotiations specifically, emphasising its willingness to collaborate with other Parties to drive adaptation efforts (DG ICD, 2020; EU, 2021b). This shared commitment to multilateralism was highlighted at the 6th EU-AU Summit (African Union and European Union, 2022).

It seems clear that the negotiating positions of the two blocs converge more than they diverge on adaptation, at least in relation to other areas of climate action (see Box 2, AEF, 2023d). The

### Converging interests and priorities linked to the targets of the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience

#### Converging interests in dimensional targets

- Strengthening climate risk assessments (both nationally and for major investment decisions)
- Mainstreaming adaptation across policy portfolios
- Establishing clear targets for, and the provision of support to, the development of national adaptation plans (to clearly and robustly assess needs and levels of support required)

**Example:** The African Union Commission's intentions to create a pan-African climate risk assessment, and climate monitoring, reporting and learning (MEL) dashboard, could be an opportunity for collaboration, with the EU having just completed theirs. It will continue to be a challenge for Africa to respond to calls from Europe and others to articulate its full adaptation needs, including credible financing requirements, without such a risk assessment.

#### Converging interests in thematic targets

- Climate-resilient food and agricultural systems, water resources management and infrastructure (including adaptation of urban areas and human settlements) appear priority interests of both regions.

#### Converging interests in cross-cutting issues

- Gender transformative adaptation, inclusivity and participation (e.g. the engagement of civil society, Indigenous Peoples and the private sector), nature restoration and management, and adaptation in fragile and conflict affected states.

**Example:** The development of climate risk assessments and products by European businesses was cited as one example of a practice that could bring added value in an African context through an exchange under the EU-Africa Business Forum.

two regions align on principles for planning and implementing adaptation: that it should be mainstreamed, gender-equal and locally led, though supported by regional and global cooperation. There is also overlap in their priority themes or sectors for adaptation, which include those driving the green transition and priorities articulated in post-COVID recovery plans (AEF, 2023d; Simon et al., 2022; AEF, 2022). There is an immediate opportunity to convene African and European stakeholders to exchange views on workable indicators for the targets of the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience and its broader implementation.

However, the “successful alliance” that Europe thought could become a “new driving force in global climate diplomacy” has not fully materialized (Pichon, 2022). And while the EU – through its 2020 Africa Strategy – has sought to rebalance and reenergize the relationship, and deliberately “adopted the language of partnership in relation to Africa in recent years” (AEF, 2022: 9), a number of challenges thwart the good intentions of diplomats and policymakers on both continents.

## Challenges, barriers and bottlenecks

While the recent achievements of Africa and Europe in adaptation policymaking and diplomacy are notable, to a large extent these developments have been driven separately along two complementary tracks. A more collaborative approach could lead to stronger policy convergence and diplomatic relations between the two regions.

The challenges, barriers and bottlenecks in adaptation policymaking and diplomacy – both within and between Africa and Europe – are grouped under three headings: adaptation as a blind spot, strained diplomatic relations, and disparate institutional identities and priorities.

**Adaptation as a blind spot.** Adaptation remains a blind spot in high-level diplomacy and cooperation between Africa and Europe. While climate action has been a pillar of EU-AU relations, efforts to mitigate climate change have been most prominent, with adaptation largely absent from partnership strategies and policies. The outcome of the 6th EU-AU Summit – *A Joint Vision for 2030* – acknowledges the partnership’s support for implementing African National Adaptation Plans, but investments in the energy transition represent its cornerstone<sup>3</sup> (European Council, 2022). The communique is focused on prosperity and sustainability but does not establish resilience as the critical third pillar upon which the strength of the other two depends (Simon et al., 2022). This may be due to the perceived lack of financial return on adaptation investments, or an unintended consequence of the drive to frame

adaptation as a locally led agenda (Benzie and Persson, 2019). Interviewees spoke of a lack of clarity on the purpose, objective or “value add” of cooperation on adaptation between the two regions, with one referring to a “collaboration that is not well pronounced, not well defined”.

While adaptation is often cited as the number one concern of the African Group of Negotiators, it did not gain high-level political attention in the recent Africa Climate Summit. Several articles of the Nairobi Declaration refer to adaptation – with a significant commitment to identify, prioritize, and mainstream adaptation into development policymaking and planning – but the overarching narrative centred on the economic opportunities that the continent’s green growth could afford. The lower priority awarded to adaptation in high-level summits may reflect a perception that there is often “less on the menu for adaptation”, leaving countries of the global south to peg their priorities to topics on which more tangible outcomes are on the table. Interviewees said that all countries and regions of the global north “lean more towards mitigation than adaptation” and the EU is seen as no exception. Nevertheless, African governments could do more to communicate how they are prioritizing adaptation beyond the negotiating rooms – for example through their investments in interventions that harness synergies in development and adaptation outcomes – despite the challenging macroeconomic environment they face (World Bank, 2022)

While the EU and its member states remain the largest financial supporters of adaptation globally, the EU’s recent strategic initiatives have been interpreted, at best, as a distraction from adaptation and adaptation finance or, at worst, an effort to distance itself from them (AEF, 2022). The EU policy, *Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa*, has been framed as one such example, prioritizing the green transition, energy access and technology at the expense of more shared objectives around agriculture, development and adaptation (AEF, 2022; DG ICD, 2020). And there is reduced emphasis on adaptation and resilience in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES): the JAES Action Plan 2011–13 assigned Climate Change and Environment to a specific Partnership (No 6), but the Roadmap 2014–2017 did not have a dedicated section on climate change; instead, it relegated climate change to one among many issues within the broader Global Challenges Priority (EU-AU Summit, 2014). The emphasis on Africa is notably less pronounced in the upcoming EU policy and programming cycle than in previous cycles. The European Council’s Strategic Agenda and the European Commission’s political guidelines make only limited references to Africa, indicating a broader and less Africa-specific approach to external relations (EP, 2024; Clarys, 2024). Interviewees acknowledged this with concern.

<sup>3</sup> The EU is supporting an ambitious goal to generate 300 GW of renewable energy in Africa by 2030, set through the Nairobi Declaration on Climate Change and Call for Action (AU, 2023b). This support comes through several initiatives, including the Africa-EU Green Energy Initiative (AEGEI), which, as part of the Global Gateway Investment Package, aims to deploy at least 50 GW of additional renewable energy capacity by 2030 (EU, 2023). The AEGEI seems to respond both to the expressed needs and priorities of African countries as well as Europe’s interests, which is an encouraging alignment. However, these efforts do not explicitly consider how to co-produce adaptation benefits. Furthermore, without information on whether AEGEI projects have undergone comprehensive climate risk assessments, the long-term resilience of such large-scale mitigation investments that are themselves subject to climate change effects, remains in question.



**Strained diplomatic relations.** Diplomatic relations have been strained and compromised by the Eurocentrism of the EU's foreign policy and Green Deal transition and their spillover effects on Africa. The latter are of particular concern in Africa given that Europe is its largest trading partner (Pichon, 2022w<; AEF, 2022). At issue are EU strategic initiatives such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, approaches to managing migration<sup>4</sup>, conflict and security that are advanced in the name of climate action, and protectionist language adopted in public discourse and negotiations (Byers and Medinilla, 2024; Fakir, 2021). Following the 2024 European elections, the EU established its priorities for 2024–2029, focusing on democracy, security and competitiveness. Europe's mirroring of the broader worldwide trend toward protectionism and securitization was seen as a step back from multilateral cooperation. Africa was also perceived as having dropped down the list of foreign policy priorities, with Europe's attention on Ukraine and the Middle East. As one interviewee remarked:

***“The kind of vision documents and mandates that are coming out of the European Commission at the moment are probably even more domestically oriented than previous ones. Obviously, the primary role of the EU is to govern the EU. But the way in which we're framing our priorities and interests is much more inward-looking than previous commissions – in particular the focus on competitiveness and various ways we describe our sovereignty, autonomy or our security-related interests. In this context, you have to be cautious, particularly with regard to our relationships with Africa, who have a history of being victims of European self-interest and exploitation. We have to make sure that we are always thinking about our interests in the context of others' interests, and in particular Africa's.”***

The EU's emphasis on strategic autonomy is seen by some as counter to its self-proclaimed values, while the adverse effects of some of its policies in Africa (and the EU's reluctance to acknowledge or discuss them) undermine the efficacy of its other policies and the goodwill they might otherwise generate (Fakir, 2021). The EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) is another case in point. Without sufficient EU support, many smallholders in African countries may be unable to meet the new requirements around traceability and compliance, which could push them out of EU markets. Not only would this disrupt livelihoods, it would also mean smallholders have less money to invest in vital adaptive action, such as improving soil health or adopting sustainable farming techniques (Byiers et al. 2023). If the EU's policies disrupt the economic stability of African countries, it could

further undermine their ability to adapt to the impacts of climate change and protect their populations from climate shocks (AEF, 2022). Given the deep links between Africa and Europe, climate vulnerability in Africa cascades back to Europe via various climate risk pathways (Anisimov and Magnan, 2023), meaning this incoherence in Europe's policies towards African partners ends up costing both continents.

These tensions are exacerbated by different approaches to diplomacy. Some interviewees expressed discontent that progress through bilateral channels becomes hampered by disputes in the multilateral arena, or advancements in adaptation become stalled while tensions underlying different approaches to mitigation remain unresolved. Others saw these distinctions as false, emphasising the importance of advancing progress through a holistic and aligned approach: advance collectively or not at all.

Developments in Africa also present challenges to strengthening cooperation on adaptation with the EU. Interviewees noted a rise in “EU scepticism” in some quarters, while public commentators point to a “shaking off of old allegiances to the west” (Mahbubani, 2024). The growing political and economic presence of China and other emerging economies throughout the continent presents strategic rivalry to long-standing trade and security partnerships with Europe. In 2021, China and 53 African countries agreed to a joint Declaration on China-Africa Cooperation on Combatting Climate Change, establishing a strategic partnership and special action plan (China International Development Cooperation Agency, 2021). Individual EU member states, such as Germany, France and Denmark, have established bilateral MoUs and agreements with African nations to advance climate action (the results of these MoUs - in the form of various initiatives - are outlined in Box 3). But China has increasingly followed suit: since 2021, it has signed 19 MoUs with 17 African countries on cooperation to address climate change (State Council Information Office, 2024).

In the 2024 China-Africa Cooperation summit, China was able to convene fifty-three high-level African delegations, pledged \$50.7 billion in financial investments over the next three years, and signalled a dramatic elevation of relations to what Xi called an “all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future for the new era” (Christian-Géraud Neema, 2024). In a press conference related to the summit, it was noted that “China is willing to further strengthen communication, coordination, and practical cooperation with African countries in climate change” (MFA, 2024).

**Disparate institutional identities and priorities.** Diplomatic relationships and policy cohesion are hampered by the different institutional identities and architectures of the EU and AU and their different political priorities. The Africa-EU Partnership aims to drive action at continental and regional scales – aligning with the spheres of authority of the two commissions – but complex

<sup>4</sup> The EU announced a new initiative at COP29 on Regional Responses to Climate Displacements in sub-Saharan Africa.



and asymmetric governance structures, unclear lines of communication, and confusion over mandates and roles thwart cooperation at these scales. “The practical difficulties of ‘landing’ partnership work at the right organizational level” (AEF, 2022) emerged as a repeated concern in interviews, hampered by the lack of obvious regional counterparts and continuous rotation of staff and teams within both institutions.

Such distinct organizational landscapes produce policies and governance structures that make it difficult to coordinate. Decisions on adaptation implementation are largely delegated to member states, raising the question of how to strengthen cooperation across so many actors and levels, each with their own priorities and sometimes competing needs (AEF, 2022). Multiple interviewees pointed to the lack of frameworks or forums, beyond UNFCCC negotiations, for dialogues on adaptation involving the two Commissions and their member states. The lack of technical capacity to implement the decisions of the EU-AU Summits is another barrier: “I think there’s a very big gap between Africa and Europe when it comes to adaptation issues; we don’t even have a structured way of engaging on specific adaptation issues, and that’s a very, very big gap”, noted one interviewee.

Different political priorities on adaptation also result in frustration between the two regions. European stakeholders have (publicly and privately) expressed their frustration that every conversation on adaptation with their African counterparts comes back to finance: that a partnership between the two regions should focus on political priorities that include but go beyond adaptation finance – “the need for better data gathering, better planning

processes, better ability to monitor and evaluate the success of adaptation policy”, as one interviewee summarised. African stakeholders express frustration that the EU, along with others, has failed to deliver on its adaptation financing commitments and implementation of adaptation action has suffered accordingly, and that until Africa has sufficient finance to meet its considerable adaptation needs, it must continue to be a topic around every table.

Such tensions are compounded by low levels of formal and information communication, leading to an uncomfortable lack of clarity about the perceived state of the relationship. A well-versed narrative on the lack of trust in the partnership is a case in point, with stakeholders unsure whether this reflected a genuine account of prevailing attitudes (held by the other), or a narrative invoked in negotiations when Africa and Europe disagree, or simply a rumour erroneously taken to be true.

There are opportunities to strengthen alignment of the Africa-EU Partnership with the priorities and needs of both regions and their frontline communities (Simon et al., 2022), but it seems necessary to generate a clearer narrative explaining why cooperation is valuable and mutually beneficial – or even critical – for resilience, given the deep interdependence between both continents.

## 2.2 FINANCE AND RESOURCING

### Achievements

Achievements in adaptation financing and resourcing in the last five years are summarized under three headings: European leadership in adaptation finance delivery, ambition for increased and coordinated support for African adaptation, and a joint commitment to reform the multilateral financial architecture, led by Kenya.

#### ***European leadership in adaptation finance delivery:***

European countries have been seen as leaders in delivering on the Paris Agreement goal of mobilizing US\$100 billion in total annual international climate finance (ESABCC, 2024). According to OECD analysis, developed countries met the goal in 2022 (OECD, 2024), though it is important to note that African

countries have challenged the legitimacy of these statistics (see challenges, below). From 2014 to 2021, EU climate finance increased by 50%, reaching €23 billion annually. In 2022, the EU delivered €28.5 billion in public climate finance and mobilized an additional €11.9 billion of private finance (European Council, 2024b). Of the seven developed countries that have provided and mobilized their “fair share” of international climate finance, six are European: Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden (ODI, 2022).

Interviewees emphasized Europe’s stature as a global leader on adaptation finance specifically, with EU member states committed to balancing support for mitigation and adaptation. In 2021, over 50% of EU funding was directed toward climate adaptation or cross-cutting efforts (a mix of mitigation and adaptation). By some

estimates, the EU provides nearly two-thirds of the global funding available for adaptation and cross-cutting finance (AEF, 2023c). Collectively, the bloc is the largest climate finance contributor to the African continent (Simon et al., 2022). Partly due to these flows, climate finance in Africa increased dramatically from US\$29.5 billion in 2019/2020 to US\$43.7 billion in 2021/2022 (CPI, 2024).

**Ambition for increased and coordinated support for African adaptation:** The EU has articulated ambitious goals for delivering adaptation funding to African countries. The EU's seven-year budget, set out under the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2021–2027, allocates €79.5 billion for external action, including €29.2 billion for sub-Saharan Africa. It has a 30% spending target for climate action, including adaptation.

The EU Adaptation Strategy (2021) outlines how the EU plans to provide continued adaptation support to Africa, with a focus on small island developing states (SIDS), least developed countries (LDCs) and fragile contexts. Interviewees emphasized the EU's aim to improve coordination across funding channels and enhance local ownership of initiatives. The strategy aims to pursue greater integration between adaptation, development and humanitarian aid, seeking to mobilize funding through a range of bilateral and multilateral channels, including the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) as the main financing instrument under the broader Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-GE).

The foremost example of this ambition is the Global Gateway Africa – Europe Investment Package, which aims to mobilize €150 billion (out of the total €300 billion 2021–2027 investment package) in a mix of grants, loans, and guarantees. “Climate change and energy” is one of five priority areas. One European-based interviewee referred to this as a “flagship” initiative – an outcome of the 6th EU-AU Summit. Part of the “Team Europe” approach, the Initiative brings together the resources of the EU, select member states and European financial institutions in a complementary effort to support projects in priority areas. The initiative is underpinned by the EU's Global Europe Instrument, with a budget of €79.5 billion over 2021–27, as noted above. The Instrument includes specific targets on gender mainstreaming and responsiveness, human development and social inclusion.

The EIB also aims to triple adaptation finance by 2025, with a strong focus on vulnerable regions, which it defines as SIDS and LDCs, including those in Africa (Losenno, 2022). The EIB intends to take on more risk, financing up to 75% of the investment costs for adaptation projects (up from 50% previously) (EIB, 2021), though it is important to note that most funding will continue to be delivered via loans. In SIDS and LDCs, the EIB will extend financing up to 100%. It also aims to leverage the private sector, through the Climate Finance Lab for example, the first private-

sector fund dedicated to adaptation and resilience. Additionally, the EIB has committed to harmonizing its accounting methodologies to improve transparency of the adaptation funding it delivers (EIB, 2022). Other promising developments include the ACF's Adaptation and Resilience Investment Platform (ARIP), UNEP's Adaptation and Resilience Investors Collaborative (ARIC), and African Climate Funds Designated Authorities Network (AFDAN).

One notable bright spot is efforts to improve local ownership of internationally financed adaptation initiatives: a point reflected in our interviews. Direct Access modalities enable national and regional entities from African countries to directly manage funding, promoting national priority-setting and decision-making and building institutional capacity. These modalities also help a greater proportion of adaptation funding to reach local levels, supporting locally led initiatives in vulnerable communities (AU, 2022a). This “decentralized” approach to finance could be particularly important for agriculture in Africa, where the economy is largely informal and composed mainly of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Knaepen, 2022). Though still small and experimental, these models have the potential to increase access to finance for these critical actors.

**Joint commitment to reform of the multilateral financial architecture:** African and European countries are active in the Bridgetown Initiative, which is the diplomatic effort to reform the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and other international financial institutions to make them more just and better aligned with climate and sustainable development agendas. The 2023 Paris Summit for a New Global Financing Pact, co-organized by France and India, featured strong representation from African and European heads of state, and produced a “Roadmap for Delivery” on priority reforms.

In the Nairobi Declaration (AU, 2023a and AU, 2023b), African states echoed the call to restructure the multilateral architecture, recognizing the risk for many countries of entering a debt spiral as climate impacts accelerate (AEF, 2023c). They called for concrete and time-bound actions to mobilize capital for development and climate action, and to reduce debt burdens for climate-vulnerable countries. African and European countries have previously collaborated on bilateral debt-for-climate swaps (e.g., in Gabon), where a portion of foreign debt is forgiven in exchange for investment in sustainable development. These are gaining recognition as an innovative adaptation solution. The approach has been fragmented to date, with the EU largely ceding leadership to the US, but the EU has an opportunity to leverage its institutions, assets and instruments to play a leading role in this field (Karaki and Bilal, 2024). The Nairobi Declaration further proposed a global carbon taxation regime on fossil fuel trade, as well as maritime and air transport. European countries are in a strong position to advance reforms within the World Bank and IMF, given their over-representation on these institutions' governing boards.

African and European countries have collaborated to drive some of Bridgetown Initiative's proposed reforms forward. Kenya and France established the Global Solidarities Levies Task Force, to examine potential new revenue streams for climate and development, including innovative taxation mechanisms on cryptocurrency, ultra-high-net-worth individuals, and plastics production (Présidence de la République, 2023; Global Solidarity Levies Task Force, 2024). The Task Force currently has 12 members, including both the European Commission and African Union as observers, and Senegal, Spain and Denmark as full members.

France has also contributed to efforts to provide emergency liquidity to climate-vulnerable countries through the International Monetary Fund, pledging to reallocate 30% of its Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) to developing-country action. It is unclear, however, how effectively the IMF can disburse rechanneled SDRs (Setser & Paduano, 2023). Few low- and middle-income countries are eligible to receive such funds from the newly established Resilience and Sustainability Trust, and some fear they will only add to existing debt burdens (Vasic-Lalovic, 2022). The African Development Bank has led proposals for SDR rechanneling, but the European Central Bank has thus far been unwilling to relax rules forbidding European Union countries from rechanneling SDRs through regional development banks (Lagarde, 2022).

## Challenges, barriers and bottlenecks

Challenges, barriers and bottlenecks in African and European adaptation financing and resourcing over the last five years are more numerous, relating to: deepening distrust; a continued shortfall in adaptation funding, particularly for the most vulnerable; a lack of transparency in accounting and effectiveness; challenges in the quality of and access to adaptation finance; and a growing emphasis, and divide, over private finance.

**Deepening distrust:** Climate finance discussions and negotiations are characterized by a continuing erosion of trust between African and European countries (AEF, 2024). The \$100 billion goal affirmed in the 2015 Paris Agreement was met two years behind schedule and many recipient countries remain sceptical of the accounting procedures underlying the OECD analysis (2024).

Interviewees and representatives in recent convenings (AEF, 2024) also raised a perception (among African countries) that high-profile funding commitments have not been followed through. For example, at COP26 in Glasgow, the EU pledged commitments intended to cover a single year, which were later spread over a number of years, while other pledges have yet to be disbursed. The pattern of repeatedly unfulfilled promises has raised concern among African countries about the EU's

ambitious commitments going forward, including in relation to the high-profile Global Gateway Initiative. Though the Initiative has a climate and energy pillar, the primary aim is to leverage investment in sustainable infrastructure, and some experts and interviewees alike foresee only limited investment in adaptation (Pichon, 2022). The associated Team Europe Initiative (TEI) has not yet established a unified funding framework with new activities but rather brought together already planned projects under a TEI heading (according to interviews).

Interviewees pointed out that distrust also exacerbated divisions in the climate finance negotiations, particularly over the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) recently decided at COP29 in Azerbaijan. Despite close rhetorical alignment on the need to position adaptation finance for Africa high on the agenda, African and European countries strongly disagreed on key aspects of the goal, including the overall quantum and the expansion of the contributor base (AEF, 2024). The NCQG decision – which includes a tripling of the original goal to \$300 billion, along with commitment to scale up overall climate finance (international and domestic) to \$1.3 trillion by 2035 – provides only vague language on accountability. The \$300 billion will come from both public and private sources and, while developed countries will “take the lead” in mobilizing finance, south-south financial flows will now be counted toward the goal's achievement. The \$1.3 trillion commitment will involve “all actors” working together and will be kick-started with a set of activities under the “Baku to Belem Roadmap” throughout 2025.

The NCQG is also weak on commitments related to adaptation finance. It retains language from the Paris Agreement, only aiming for a “balance” between funding for mitigation and adaptation, indicating that support for adaptation is likely to continue to lag in the coming decade. Though it acknowledges the need for public, grant-based, and concessional resources for adaptation, it makes no concrete commitments. Likewise, the call to prioritize funding for LDCs and SIDS, both in bilateral and multilateral finance, is not accompanied by the specific allocation floors these groups demanded. The goal does, however, encourage enhanced access for particularly vulnerable countries and communities.

Overall, the NCQG outcome failed not only to improve transparency and accountability, but also meaningfully move the needle on mobilizing the vast sums required to address the climate crisis, in Europe and Africa and elsewhere. The most significant outcome will likely prove to be the further undermining of trust between provider and recipient countries. Many recipient country representatives, including from African countries, expressed outrage about a closed and mismanaged consultation process they felt favoured rich economies. Both the LDC and SIDS groups walked out of negotiations in the final hours. Nigeria joined India in formally rejecting the decision after its adoption. The outcome ultimately reinforced a sense among African officials that Africa is the recipient of policy that is being developed elsewhere: “a



standard taker rather than a standard maker” as one interviewee expressed.

**A continued shortfall in adaptation funding, particularly for the most vulnerable:** International adaptation finance is falling well short of what is needed worldwide, with the 2023 Adaptation Gap Report (UNEP, 2023) estimating the needs of recipient countries as 10 to 18 times greater than current financial flows. International support for mitigation continues to exceed that for adaptation (UNFCCC, 2022), with the OECD (2024) finding that mitigation activities accounted for 60% of the climate finance provided and mobilised by developed countries for developing countries between 2013 and 2022. This discrepancy further undermines trust, as poor and vulnerable countries perceive contributors as unwilling to support adaptation from which they do not directly benefit. At COP26, contributor countries recognized the urgent need to increase support and committed to double adaptation finance by 2025 (from 2019 levels). The 2023 Global Stocktake further underlined that adaptation funding must be significantly scaled up beyond the doubling agreed in Glasgow (Decision 1/ CMA.5, para 86). Although reports indicate that progress is being made to scale up adaptation finance, it remains unclear whether the goal will be met in 2025 (Standing Committee on Finance, 2023).

In sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that climate adaptation will cost US\$30-50 billion annually over the next decade (WMO, 2024). Growing debt and limited access to capital make investment for resilience building tremendously challenging. Yet significantly more climate finance to Africa targets mitigation (61%) than adaptation (33%, with 6% cross-cutting). African officials continue to view adaptation as “structurally underfunded” (AEF, 2022) and observe that funding is skewed towards high- and middle-income economies, such as South Africa, Morocco and Kenya. The ten African countries most vulnerable to adverse climate impacts receive only 11% of climate finance (CPI, 2024). Though the EU has made efforts to balance its financial support, some member states are very far from achieving parity and the EU’s investment and development financing arms remain skewed toward mitigation (AEF, 2022). European and African officials share the sense that finance is not “hitting the ground” and delivering for the most vulnerable (AEF, 2024).

Lack of transparency in accounting and effectiveness: Reporting on climate finance delivery is also a major issue contributing to the deepening distrust (AEF, 2023e). Contributor countries track their own climate finance, using a wide range of accounting methodologies (AEF, 2023c). The 2023 UNFCCC Standing Committee on Finance report on the doubling of adaptation finance recognized particular challenges in tracking adaptation finance, including inconsistencies in official reporting under the UNFCCC (UNFCCC, 2023). The adaptation share within cross-cutting activities remains vague.

The differing methodologies, combined with the lack of an agreed definition of “climate finance”, makes it difficult to objectively assess progress on commitments and concrete investments on the ground. African countries have repeatedly raised concerns, for example, over the double counting of development assistance, in which some EU countries rebrand humanitarian and development aid as climate finance rather than increasing their overall contributions. European countries have raised concerns about how the limited public information on use of funds at national and local levels hampers assessment of policy effectiveness within Africa (ESABCC, 2024).

**Challenges in quality of and access to adaptation finance:** Despite EU and other contributor country efforts to improve coordination, delivery of adaptation finance continues to be fragmented – a point raised in several interviews. European countries channel their finance through a range of multilateral organizations and bilateral channels. African countries perceive a tendency for contributor countries to avoid multilateral funds, such as the Green Climate Fund and Adaptation Fund, in favour of bilateral engagement, through which they can exercise more direct control, for example on how funds are deployed (AEF, 2024).

The wide range of channels makes it difficult for African countries, particularly those with limited administrative capacity, to access funding (AEF, 2022). Funding also continues to be overwhelmingly project based, contributing to disjointed approaches at national levels (AEF, 2023c). African countries have called for more programmatic funding, aligned with national plans and strategies, as well as harmonization of application procedures (AEF, 2023c). Yet European stakeholders (as emphasized in interviews) cite the lack of a project pipeline in many countries as a barrier to unlocking funds. The current deficit of trust and transparency has thus far inhibited a paradigm shift toward more programmatic approaches.

**Growing emphasis and divide over private finance:** Both African and European countries take the position that it is not enough to focus on existing sources of public finance (i.e. grants and concessional loans): additional finance must be brought to the table (AEF, 2024). As much as half of the EU’s climate finance comes via non-grant instruments, mostly in the form of loans (Climate Action Network Europe, 2024). Blended and private finance instruments – such as public-private partnerships and guarantees, insurance, debt-for-nature and debt-for-climate swaps, green bonds, and equity investments – are increasingly seen as important tools to help fill the overall climate finance shortfall. The EU repeatedly emphasizes the need to leverage the private sector in adaptation finance.

However, as interviewees reflected, it remains unclear whether and how private finance can fill the adaptation gap. There is

a perception that adaptation finance solutions are “high-risk” from an investor’s perspective (Were, 2021). It is also inherently difficult to calculate and articulate the return-on-investment for adaptation, making it hard to attract private finance. The ability of blended finance to deliver on adaptation objectives also remains in doubt (Simon et al., 2022). Some worry that the increased focus on blended finance in the Global Gateway and Team Europe

approach could compromise African objectives and adaptation (Simon et al., 2022). Others question the effectiveness of insurance as a climate risk management tool in Africa, pointing to limitations in coverage for certain vulnerable groups and types of extreme weather events, as well as technical challenges with pricing, disbursement and affordability (AEF, 2023c).

## 2.3 PROGRAMMING AND IMPLEMENTATION

### Achievements

Different forms and scales of climate adaptation are happening across both continents – both planned and autonomous. The Africa Adaptation Initiative, now in its third phase, aims to spearhead transformative adaptation results for African countries and implement flagship programmes in each of the continent’s five sub-regions. This includes hosting the EU-funded Adaptation Project Incubator for Africa (APIA). A feasibility assessment of climate adaptation options across Africa found 827 records of adaptation actions in Africa from the peer-reviewed literature between 2013–2020, and effectiveness was assessed as medium or high for 95% of them (Williams et al., 2021).

Implementation of the EU’s Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change, which supports EU regions, cities and local authorities in their efforts to build resilience, is well underway. A total of 311 regions and local authorities have signed up to the Mission Charter. Over half of the adaptation projects in Europe assessed by the European Court of Auditors (2024) were found to address climate risks effectively, and the auditors identified several good practices to build upon.

The EU and its member states are the largest international contributors to climate adaptation programming and implementation in Africa. The Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs) for 2021–2027 shed light on how the EU plans to disburse its climate finance commitments in partner countries and regions,

and how the EU is implementing the NDICI-GE. An analysis of 14 country-level MIPs for sub-Saharan Africa, the regional MIP for sub-Saharan African, and two thematic MIPs, found that “green growth and climate” feature in all MIPs and will receive the bulk of funding. “Adaptation and resilience-building in agriculture” was also high on the MIPs’ agenda (Knaepen, 2022). Annex 1 provides a non-exhaustive list of adaptation projects in Africa, supported by EU institutions.

Sectors that appear to have attracted significant investments in adaptation in Africa and Europe include connectivity and infrastructure, agriculture and food systems (technologies to conserve water, research in drought-resistant crops, engagement with smallholder producers), urban adaptation, and gender and women’s economic empowerment (AEF, 2022; Losenno, 2022; Simon et al., 2022). In addition to these, water and energy systems are also listed as future EIB priorities (EIB, 2022).

Effective cooperation between Europe and Africa on adaptation is increasing with the rise of new actors pushing for a resilience-building agenda. For example, the global networks C40 Cities and ICLEI are mobilizing spaces for knowledge exchange and collaboration on urban adaptation between European and African city-level stakeholders (AEF, 2022). Particular constituencies – such as civil society and youth – are increasingly taking the initiative to work together across regions to advocate for stronger action on adaptation based on climate justice and human rights (AEF, 2022).

## Promising adaptation projects, innovative approaches and successful outcomes

The EU and its member states are engaged in a wide range of adaptation projects in Africa. Notable examples include the **Reversing the Flow** project, which supports locally led adaptation through grassroots grants in various countries (including Ethiopia, Niger and Sudan), the **Dutch-backed One Acre Fund** (in Kenya, Rwanda, Malawi and Nigeria, among others), the **AFD's AdaptAction** programme (in at least ten countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, from Madagascar to Senegal), as well as the EU's support for **UNCDF's LoCAL programme** (in Benin, Burkina Faso, Tanzania, among others) and **Financing Locally-Led Climate Action (FLLoCA)**, a \$295 million programme aimed at strengthening decentralised adaptation finance in Kenya. Initiatives such as the **Global Resilience Partnership**, which includes **Promising adaptation projects, innovative approaches and successful outcomes**

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The diverse institutional and procedural requirements among adaptation finance providers, including European development banks and development finance institutions, have resulted in a fragmented adaptation finance landscape (Ahairwe and Bilal, 2023). This fragmentation poses challenges for local-level adaptation efforts that have also been hampered by European preferences for top-down governance processes (Adeniyi, 2023).

To address these issues, the EU is working to streamline governance arrangements, exemplified by the TEI on adaptation. The TEI on Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience in Africa aims to “bring together existing and new climate change adaptation programmes of over €1 billion and leverage its impact by improved coordination and a reinforced policy dialogue on adaptation between the EU and AU” (EU, 2022). It seeks to complement other investments in resilient infrastructures, transboundary water management, and combating desertification and land degradation. Its four pillars centre on (1) data collection, risk information and risk assessment; (2) mainstreaming adaptation into socioeconomic plans and policies; (3) prioritization and quantification of climate finance, and project generation and preparation; (4) finance, insurance and risk tools and instruments. To date, no comprehensive overview of delivered actions under this TEI exists, but Annex 1 lists some of the projects (in addition to those referenced here) that count towards the €1 billion goal.

It is also important to note that other TEIs, such as Growing the Great Green Wall (a comprehensive multi-country effort supported by the EU to combat desertification, restore degraded land and build climate resilience in the Sahel region), and Sustainable Agri-Value Chains and Food Systems also provide benefits in terms of adaptation outcomes (European Commission, 2024b). The EU has made a strong commitment to Africa's Great Green Wall (launched in 2007) and currently provides more than €700 million annually in funding (European Commission, 2024a). However, as of 2024, there are no comprehensive impact assessments comparing economic, social and environmental outcomes between beneficiary and non-beneficiary countries (Deng et al., 2024). Such analyses are crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of this long-standing initiative and to inform strategic and evidence-based policy decisions. The EU has also been a strong backer of the Climate for Development in Africa (ClimDev-Africa) initiative, launched in 2011, which aims to improve climate information services and embed climate change considerations into development policy across Africa. In 2012, the EU granted €8 million to ClimDev-Africa to help develop policy capacity (IISD, 2012). African stakeholders involved in ClimDev-Africa have highlighted its effectiveness in achieving these goals.

On paper, the EU fully aligns its policies and initiatives with African NAPs and NDCs and supports African-owned institutions. Key examples include its support of the **Africa Adaptation Acceleration Program (AAAP)**, a joint

continent-wide initiative by the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the Dutch Global Center on Adaptation, which aims to mobilize \$25 billion for adaptation by 2025, and the **Africa Adaptation Initiative** (highlighted earlier). Another notable example is the **African Risk Capacity** (an AU agency managing a sovereign risk pool that has provided cumulative insurance coverage of \$720 million to date). All these Africa-owned programmes benefit from European support.

European development banks and development finance institutions are increasingly collaborating with African institutions like the AfDB, the leading investor in adaptation projects, through innovative mechanisms like the **Adaptation Benefit Mechanism (ABM)**. The ABM is a results-based financing approach that offers support for high-risk adaptation projects, incentivizing finance institutions to back initiatives that might not otherwise receive funding and improving their risk-reward profile. The ABM is intended for application across Africa; so far, pilot projects have been identified in Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Ethiopia (Ahairwe and Bilal, 2023). The EIB has also successfully coordinated the **MDBs' joint methodology for tracking climate change adaptation finance** to determine the types of activities that can contribute to adaptation (Ahairwe and Bilal, 2023).

At the multilateral level, several coalitions and declarations unite European and African actors on climate adaptation. The **Coalition of Ambition on Adaptation Finance**, launched by the Climate and Development Ministerial, works to enhance country-owned financing, ease access and scale adaptation finance across 13 countries. The **COP28 Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery, and Peace**, supported by 70 states and 39 organisations, calls for greater collaboration on adaptation and resilience, while the **COP28 UAE Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture** focuses on scaling adaptation in agriculture. The **Joint Statement on Climate, Nature, and People** aligns climate and nature agendas, and the Champions Group on Adaptation Finance advocates for increasing the share and quality of adaptation funds. New commitments to the **LIFE-AR Initiative** (part-funded by an EU member states and endorsed by six more) will accelerate adaptation efforts in least developed countries, and the **Locally Led Adaptation Principles** have garnered support from 126 governments and organizations, expanding their reach in both Europe and Africa.

## Challenges, barriers and bottlenecks

Despite promising developments, effective implementation of adaptation continues to face significant barriers. Translating policies and plans into effective and sustained pathways for adaptation action remains complex and opaque across both contexts.

Slow development of national plans delays implementation of adaptation projects and programmes designed to meet identified needs, particularly in Africa. Countries subsequently face a range of challenges in implementing the NAPs they do have in place – chief among them, the difficulties in accessing adequate financial support for adaptation articulated earlier. The State of Adaptation in Africa Report 2022 (supported by the European Commission) finds that “the policy-implementation gap, which occurs when countries make plans for adaptation but are unable to effectively implement them, is particularly high” (AAI, 2022: 7). While there have been encouraging efforts to integrate adaptation into development planning at the national and sectoral level, downscaling these efforts to the local level has been noted as a significant gap (NAP-GSP, 2017). Several countries highlight the weaknesses of institutional coordination mechanisms for adaptation. There is significant scope to translate good practices

in this regard, such as the high political ownership of climate agendas in Kenya and Gabon. Addressing gaps in institutional capabilities for advancing adaptation action, however, needs further attention at all levels of governance (ADB, 2019).

Strengthening MEL systems is another challenge. Nowak et al. (2024) find that only 53% of African NAPs and 8% of NDCs cover all elements required to provide a sufficient baseline for tracking adaptation progress. There are, however, pioneers in this space to draw lessons from. The Western Cape province of South Africa has been publishing biennial progress reports of its climate change response strategy since 2015 (UNEP, 2024). A recent analysis of 1300 indicators used by African countries in their NAPs and NDCs demonstrate the substantial efforts already underway to measure adaptation actions, with 944 of these from 16 LDCs (LDC Group, 2024).

The Africa Adaptation Initiative (2018) argues that the most significant gap in adaptation action in Africa is that most projects relate to technical assistance, policy development, and advocacy rather than actual action to address specific climate change impacts. This not only points to a concerning lack of resilience building, it also generates a missed opportunity to harness the synergies between mitigation and adaptation action as an entry

<sup>9</sup> The Adaptation Gap Report 2024, however, provides compelling examples of projects, including IMPACT and FRACTAL, that have used knowledge exchange to strengthen climate-resilient development in African cities (UNEP, 2024).



point for Europe and Africa to cooperate on climate change action. Ansah et al. (2024) take a deep dive into urban adaptation in Africa, finding that adaptation responses to climate risks are particularly insufficient in cities<sup>5</sup>. Chingarande et al. (2020) articulate the challenges for ensuring gender is mainstreamed in both national adaptation planning and implementation. ACBF (2023) draws attention to common factors that contribute to the success or failure of adaptation efforts – such as the role of trust and coordination between countries and government agencies.

Recent assessments indicate parallel challenges in the enabling environment for adaptation implementation in Europe. The EEA (2024) find that “governance-related challenges are a persistent barrier to the implementation of adaptation actions in many countries, even where well-developed governance frameworks are in place”. These are attributed to a lack of financial, technical and human resources, and associated challenges.

The European Court of Auditors (2024) finds that Europe is also struggling to measure progress on adaptation, and that while at least €8 billion in 2014–2020 and €26 billion in 2021–2027 were earmarked for climate adaptation, around 40% of projects had little or no impact on adaptive capacity: “adaptation policies experience issues when put into practice”, the court finds. The report revealed outdated scientific data in national adaptation documents, omissions or underestimates of the costs of adaptation measures, a lack of local knowledge about adaptation (respondents in the 400 municipalities in the audited member states were found to be largely unaware of climate adaptation strategies and plans, and were not using the EU's climate adaptation tools), cases of conflicting priorities (where climate adaptation objectives were trumped by competing objectives) and even a limited number of cases of mal-adaptation (European Court of Auditors, 2024).

Tracking of adaptation funding was found to be challenging and reporting on adaptation problematic.

These challenges extend to the EU's international action on adaptation. Implementation of the Global Gateway has reportedly lacked strategic coherence, with limited alignment between development and strategic objectives, such as the EU's domestic competitiveness agenda, while efforts to streamline Team Europe approaches remain inadequate (Bilal and Teevan, 2024). Despite 225 projects falling under the Global Gateway in 2023 and 2024, many have reportedly faced challenges due to insufficient consultation with African stakeholders, resulting in lack of local ownership.

The EU also recognizes the challenges of implementing adaptation measures in Africa's fragile and conflict-affected states, particularly in the Sahel region. These challenges are compounded by growing scepticism among governments, for example in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, toward international organizations such as UN agencies and NGOs, making it increasingly difficult for them to operate. Geopolitical tensions are exacerbating the situation, with increasing Russian involvement in security matters. In Niger, for example, Russia is reportedly set to take over uranium mining permits and assets previously held by French companies after their rights were revoked in November 2024. These developments reflect a range of concerns by the current Niger government regarding its history of cooperation with France, related to environmental damage, insufficient local benefits, and a perceived lack of support in addressing security threats from non-state armed groups. The volatile geopolitics of the region, marked by the expulsion of European military forces from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, make effective adaptation and cooperation even more complex (Salzinger and Desmidt, 2023).

## 2.4 KNOWLEDGE AND DATA EXCHANGE

### Achievements

In both regions, substantial progress has recently been made in understanding the impacts of climate change, and how to adapt to them. Africa has deep experience in climate adaptation, including in leveraging local and traditional knowledge to cope with climate variability, and in generating innovative and locally led nature-based solutions (IIED, 2024). As AEF (2023e) states, “Europe is not simply a funder in this but a strategic partner, and stands to learn from African countries and communities with decades of experience on climate change impacts and adaptation measures”. Both regions have centres of excellence and robust academic research programmes that generate knowledge

on climate change (AEF, 2022). The recent announcement of an African Centre of Excellence for Climate Resilience in Cairo, Egypt, is a case in point. There have also been important developments in climate services over the past five years, not least the Horizon Europe Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change (notwithstanding the challenges noted in the previous section). Interviewees from both regions emphasized knowledge developments on adaptation, including in the water sector (e.g. understanding of hydrological systems and disruptions) and the agriculture sector (e.g. knowledge of how to adapt farming systems and build more resilient food systems). They also cited enhanced knowledge on how to reduce and manage risks from disasters, and how to apply more refined data and evidence to



build better early warning systems. A high-level assessment of the current state of early warning systems, focusing on their operation and outcomes, would be an informative next step.

The EU's new 2021 Adaptation Strategy emphasizes the importance of structured dialogues in learning from others to fill knowledge gaps and exchange solutions (AEF, 2023e). The strategy builds on the 2020 policy communication *Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa*, which emphasized the need for data generation and knowledge exchange on climate change impacts, including innovative technologies for adaptation (DG ICD, 2020). The EU Adaptation Strategy aims to achieve "smarter adaptation" as one of its four principal objectives, proposing actions that are informed by robust data and widely available risk assessment tools, and that "push the frontiers of knowledge on adaptation so that we can gather more and better data on climate-related risks and losses" (EU, 2021a).

The European Commission and EU member states have a number of related projects and programmes. The Climate-ADAPT platform aims to support Europe in adapting to climate change by helping users to access and share data and information. It also provides practical guidance and key indicators for adaptation planning and evaluation. The Horizon2020 COACCH project estimates the costs of inaction on adaptation by 2050. The Copernicus Climate Change Programme aims to make high-resolution climate data more readily available (EU, 2021b; Losenno, 2022). The EIB is using a Physical Climate Risk Assessment System in its direct lending operations, helping its clients understand how climate change may affect their investments. It also supports (among other adaptation initiatives) the Climate Resilience and Adaptation Finance and Technology Transfer Facility (CRAFT), which is the first commercial investment vehicle dedicated to expanding the availability of technologies and solutions for climate change adaptation and climate resilience globally (EIB, 2021).

The African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (AU, 2022a) highlights the need to build on local and indigenous knowledge and calls for increased knowledge exchange and capacity building between African and international institutions (Pichon, 2022). This includes sharing best practice, research and innovation for climate adaptation, as well as developing joint projects and initiatives (AU, 2022a). One such joint initiative is the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security and Africa Support Programme (GMES & Africa). The

programme aims to meet the needs of African countries for earth observation data to help put sustainable development policies into practice. African climate service centres such as the West African Science Service Centre on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use (WASCAL) and AGRHYMET are also built on collaborations between African institutions and the EU and some member states, notably Germany (SEACRIFOG, 2024) (see Annex 1 for other joint initiatives and programmes).

## Challenges, barriers and bottlenecks

Africa-Europe cooperation on research and innovation is vital for strengthening climate adaptation. The AU-EU Innovation Agenda is the policy mainstay of both continents' cooperation on research and innovation for the next decade, and its aim is to translate research findings into tangible, sustainable outcomes that support the green transition through an inclusive approach. It is supported by the Global Gateway and climate adaptation is a key focus in sectors such as food and water systems. However, research on how the agenda could contribute to adaptation in agri-food systems in Africa pointed to challenges that need to be overcome in order to harness its potential. The most notable of these are gaps in funding, the fragmented EU landscape for research and innovation in Africa, and a lack of alignment with African research and innovation priorities (D'Alessandro and Knaepen, 2023).

There remain significant gaps in climate and meteorological observations over Africa (WMO, 2024), and a lack of uptake of climate information services in decision-making (AU, 2022a). Ongoing difficulties in defining adaptation continue to haunt adaptation efforts (including "locally led adaptation", despite the popularity of the concept). One interviewee encapsulated this as follows, "It's a very complicated topic: difficult to make it land in a very concrete or specific zone. For example, what would you consider as a 100% pure adaptation project?"

While some types of adaptation are highly localized, and the "parachuting in" of technical solutions should be avoided, both continents would gain from the exchange of knowledge that would follow from convening stakeholders from diverse contexts and constituencies. The expert dialogues held under the Africa-EU Partnership could be better used for this purpose.

### 3. Synthesis Assessment: State-of-Play of Africa-Europe Adaptation Cooperation

The Africa-EU Partnership has driven a range of outcomes and initiatives that are highly relevant to adaptation, from the EU Global Gateway Investment for Africa to smaller scale pledges of support for adaptation and disaster risk reduction resulting from ad hoc AU-EU Foreign Affairs Ministers' meetings (Simon, et al., 2022). However, some interviewees emphasized that cooperation on adaptation between the two regions largely takes the form of financial support, which implies a transactional relationship rather than a partnership of equals. African stakeholders have more to gain from an alliance with Europe on adaptation than only the economic pledges and calls for financial support seen in recent declarations (AU, 2023b). Likewise, the EU should recognize that building climate resilience in Africa is both essential to its own strategic interests and a matter of moral and historical responsibility. Moreover, both commissions are failing to harness

the substantial potential of adaptation to strengthen diplomatic relations between them, and the wider benefits such closer ties would accrue in the current geopolitical context. A mutually beneficial (and mutually responsible) partnership is a win-win.

To assess the state-of-play, we adopt the Compton et al. (2019) approach for assessing degrees of policy success. This method is considered useful when evaluating the strength of cooperation, in this case between Africa and Europe. Compton et al. propose four dimensions of success, which we translate to programmes and policies, procedures, legitimacy and durability. Based on the analysis above, each dimension was subsequently awarded a score between A and F: A – exemplary; B – good; C – fair; D – inadequate; E – poor; F – retrogressive. The score for each is summarised in the table below:

Question	Grade
Programmes and policies: Does Africa-Europe cooperation on adaptation result in purposeful and valued action?	B-
Procedures: Is Africa-Europe cooperation on adaptation underpinned by thoughtful and fair practices?	D
Legitimacy: Does Africa-Europe cooperation on adaptation have legitimacy, in the eyes of stakeholders?	C+
Durability: Is Africa-Europe cooperation on adaptation likely to endure?	C-

The scores awarded are absolute rather than relational or comparable to other regions. Despite challenges, the EU, together with its member states, remains one of the few global actors actively supporting Africa on climate change adaptation.

**Does Africa-Europe cooperation on adaptation result in purposeful and valued action?** The evidence points to yes, but with room for improvement. We award it a B-. There are demonstrable examples of cooperation between Africa and Europe that are building considerable momentum. These include shared adaptation programmes and initiatives, the recent development of continent-wide adaptation and climate-resilient development strategies and, on balance, their progressive

approach to adaptation adopted in UNFCCC negotiations. In its global leadership on the provision of adaptation finance, Europe is also taking steps towards ensuring that adaptation costs and benefits are distributed more equitably. Interviewees from both regions emphasized the considerable value that their colleagues attribute to the partnership. However, the two Commissions lack a clear proposition and theory of change: cooperation on adaptation between Africa and Europe needs a pole star to work towards.

**Is Africa-Europe cooperation on adaptation underpinned by thoughtful and fair practices?** The evidence suggests this is significantly lagging. We award it a D. Institutional arrangements necessary for effective collaboration are notably absent. Many

interviewees pointed to this gap. There is a lack of a framework agreement or dedicated capacities that could govern and implement adaptation decisions adopted under the partnership. Policymakers on both sides are unclear about the other's priorities and positions on adaptation, and there are few spaces for listening, dialogue and discussion of their respective values and interests. Bold actions required to redress the power imbalance in the relationship have not materialised, despite Europe's rhetoric (McNair, 2024).

While the Africa-EU Partnership has sought to engage a range of public and private-sector stakeholders, these forums haven't related to adaptation. It remains unclear how such forums feed into decision-making processes or leverage a wide range of evidence, expertise and advice. Engagement with Indigenous Peoples and other vulnerable groups has been insufficient (Simon et al., 2022). Africa and Europe will inevitably have a mix of goals and objectives on adaptation – some that align, some that diverge – but without the right institutional architecture and incentive structures, opportunities to identify synergies are failing to be harnessed.

***Does Africa-Europe cooperation on adaptation have legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders?*** The evidence demonstrates a mixed record. We award it a C+. The Africa-EU Partnership is long-held and valued. It is endorsed by a broad and deep political coalition that extends to the highest political levels, for whom it enhances their political capital and legitimacy. But it is also under strain when it comes to climate action, tainted by what many stakeholders see as unfulfilled promises and a Eurocentric protectionist agenda. Heads are being turned elsewhere – Europe's to other geopolitical challenges; Africa's to the opportunities afforded by stronger partnerships with other powers.

There are particular sectors where interests converge and cooperation is strong – namely energy – from which lessons could be drawn for adaptation. And there are organizations that have mandates and capacity for adaptation cooperation that can put it into practice. But to strengthen the perceived legitimacy of the partnership, both regions must communicate more often and more openly, honestly and transparently.

***Is Africa-Europe cooperation on adaptation likely to endure?***

Evidence is thin on whether cooperation between Africa and Europe on adaptation is sustainable, and it is also subject to various push-pull factors. We award it a C-. While some expect adaptation to continue to rise up the agenda of the EU, this may be curbed by rising conflict around the world, growing climate change scepticism in some European circles, and constrained fiscal environments. A stronger narrative on defence and security does not sit comfortably with stronger multilateral cooperation on adaptation.

The need for adaptation will only increase as the impacts of climate change escalate: this means the value of cooperation is only likely to rise. But the relationships needed to forge this cooperation change frequently, not only with personnel, but as new commissions and officials take up their posts. Without a framework or structure to operationalize cooperation on adaptation, and respond to changing circumstances, any gains made from ad hoc initiatives and announcements will likely be short-lived. While the two continents are highly interdependent – and it is hard to imagine a complete breakdown in cooperation – political priorities can be fickle; momentum should be harnessed from the global political developments on adaptation since 2020 to drive cooperation today and in the years ahead.

## 3.1 LESSONS LEARNED

The incoming commissions of the European Union and African Union in 2024 and 2025, and respective policy cycles (2024-2029 and 2025-2029), can draw many lessons from progress to date. We articulate five:

1. ***Adaptation deserves high-level strategic attention:*** International cooperation on adaptation is weak because adaptation continues to be an afterthought or even a blind spot in the upper echelons of political power and climate diplomacy. Adaptation needs to be seen as what it is: a means to safeguard socio-economic development and prosperity in the face of

climate change, not only as locally led resilience building. Both new commissions need to go further than their predecessors by adopting a much more ambitious and cooperative approach to adaptation. The EU in particular should increase participation of high-level political representatives in African-led adaptation events, avoiding a repeat of the “no-show” at the 2022 [Africa Adaptation Summit](#), which (interviews suggest) has not been forgotten<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2022/09/06/african-leaders-blast-european-no-shows-at-climate-adaptation-summit/>





***At COP28, Parties recognized that “climate change impacts are often transboundary in nature and may involve complex, cascading risks that can benefit from collective consideration and knowledge-sharing, climate-informed transboundary management and cooperation on global adaptation solutions”, and emphasizes that “the United Arab Emirates Framework for Global Climate Resilience should catalyse and strengthen regional and international cooperation on the scaling up of adaptation action and support among Parties, international organisations and nongovernmental organisations” (Decision 2/CMA.5 (paras 18–19))***

2. ***It is crucial to deliver on financial commitments.*** Trust between European and African countries on climate finance has been persistently undermined as contributors, including EU member states, have backtracked on and fallen short of high-profile commitments. This includes not only the \$100 billion goal affirmed in the 2015 Paris Agreement, but also more specific multilateral and bilateral pledges. The continued imbalance between mitigation and adaptation finance, including in the NCQG decision, undermines rhetorical claims to solidarity in the face of climate change. The inability to deliver promised financial support for adaptation on time contributes to African officials’ scepticism about new European pledges and initiatives. It also further entrenches divisions between African and European countries, made manifest in negotiations over the NCQG, about the future of international climate finance and the collective effort to build resilience.

3. ***Cooperation on adaptation does not happen spontaneously.*** For meaningful cooperation on adaptation, it is vital to put in place dedicated institutional arrangements, including clear mandates, budgets and capacities. Aims and goals for adaptation cooperation should be clearly drafted, building on the mutual benefits from greater climate resilience in Africa and Europe, so that civil servants have a shared roadmap and civil society can be effectively consulted and engaged. The opacities, asymmetries and imbalances between the two governing structures mean cooperation is unlikely to evolve organically. Clear structures to support regular dialogue are needed to avoid confusion and misconceptions, identify common goals and interests, and strengthen buy-in.

Transparency and honesty are always possible, even if perfect coherence and alignment are not. Both commissions – but particularly the EU’s – need to strengthen the coherence and alignment of their policies (e.g. on climate, development, trade and security) to avoid one undermining the objectives of another. The EU should assess whether they are scoring “own goals” when

they pursue geopolitical interests through the green transition that undermine the economic performance and development aspirations of their partners. A mature partnership should be truthful and upfront about these, be as clear as possible about their motivations and drivers, and proactively engage in good-natured discussions about how such effects may be reduced or managed. Such honesty builds trust, and demonstrates respect for different circumstances, needs and priorities. The two continents have proven this is possible on a diversity of topics: it is long overdue to put these competences into practice on adaptation.

***“We need to make sure that all of our partnerships are genuine partnerships: that they’re not just about EU interests, they’re about the interests of the country [or region] that we’re partnering with – that we recognize that their development strategies and priorities need to be respected” (Interviewee)***

***“It’s about being clear and honest about what our interests are ... and being better able to articulate the principles [driving them]” (Interviewee)***

4. ***The future of climate finance does not look like the past.*** International climate finance is evolving. European and African countries agree that public forms of support, grants and concessional loans are insufficient to fill the growing gap in adaptation funding. The NCQG makes it clear that private finance must step up, but it does not specify how it can be attracted, deployed and scaled in equitable and effective ways. Private companies continue to lack the incentives to invest in resilience-building within and across national borders. At the same time, both European and African countries recognize that the multilateral finance architecture neither reflects current political economic realities, nor is fit to face the challenge of sustaining development while adapting to climate change. Europe and Africa are spearheading reforms and developing novel, innovative financial mechanisms. Other actors, notably China and select Middle Eastern high-income countries, are increasingly involved in finance for Africa. Now is an opportunity for the continents to forge a shared vision for a future financial architecture that underpins a just and resilient world.



## 3.2 WHAT TRENDS ARE SHAPING ADAPTATION?

The EU is struggling to balance internal economic stability with global climate responsibilities. Europe is increasingly dealing with domestic pressures, particularly those linked to the EU Green Deal and the demands of its transition agenda, which are driving a stronger focus on supporting European industries. At the same time, the EU's Adaptation Strategy (2021) underscores that inadequate adaptation efforts in Africa (and other world regions) could produce transboundary climate risks which could be destabilizing for Europe itself (EU, 2021a). This dual imperative could lead to policy shifts aimed at levelling the playing field for European businesses while contributing to global adaptation goals. However, such shifts may create tensions: protectionist policies could undermine the EU's aspirations for global climate leadership and risk isolating the region. With the threat of a global trade war marking the start of 2025, protectionism appears set to rise the world over.

The EU is grappling with budget constraints and fragmented approaches to climate policy, complicating the pursuit of a cohesive and effective adaptation strategy. Internally, the political landscape remains volatile, with gains by far-right parties in some EU countries threatening to derail climate action. Recent shifts in EU leadership, including political deal-making with far-right and centre-right factions, have further highlighted the challenges in maintaining unified climate policies. For example, climate denialism, influenced by coaching from US-based groups, is gaining traction within the EU right, and these sentiments are echoed in public and political resistance, such as farmers' protests against climate policies, and lobbying by the automotive industry to preserve combustion engines (Foucart et al., 2024).

These tensions mean it is increasingly difficult for the EU to present a unified front on adaptation cooperation. Some member states, such as Denmark, are strengthening ties with Africa and prioritizing adaptation support (MOFA, 2024), while others, like the Netherlands, are scaling back international cooperation, with reductions in climate finance budgets (Rijksoverheid, 2024). High energy prices, exacerbated by Europe's previous reliance on Russian energy and debates over the nuclear phase-out, are being reframed as evidence of the economic costs of climate policies. This narrative risks diverting political and public focus away from ambitious climate action.

Budget reallocations toward defence, migration, and aid for crises such as Russia's war on Ukraine are placing further strain on the EU's capacity to support international adaptation efforts (European Council, 2024a). Geopolitical uncertainty, including the return of climate policy backsliding in the US under a Trump presidency, will pose additional challenges for progressive action on climate change.

Africa is increasingly pivoting its economic relationships toward other markets, such as Asia or Latin America, as the EU's openness wanes. China's engagement with Africa has increased, for example, with trade between China and African countries surging from \$11.67 billion in 2000 to \$257.67 billion in 2022. The EU remains a significant partner for Africa, but its trade policies have been criticized for being fragmented and complex, potentially limiting deeper economic integration with African nations (Oyintarelado, 2024; BusinessEurope, 2022). This shift could erode the Africa-EU relationship, diminish Europe's global influence, and weaken its economic and diplomatic standing.

Interviewees already discern a trend towards more bilateral than multilateral cooperation on climate change, with agreements increasingly routed through individual EU member states. With the rising influence of BRICS countries, interviewees expressed the view that climate change adaptation could be a vehicle for the EU to broker additional support in multilateral forums, "if the EU wants Africa as a friend".

Within this broader context, the EU is also making limited concerted efforts to promote the necessary conditions for a negotiated settlement to the conflict in the Middle East. From the perspective of many in the global south, the EU's strong advocacy for a rules-based international order in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine is inconsistent, particularly when viewed alongside its approach to upholding these principles in the Middle East. This inconsistency may have broader implications for the EU's credibility and legitimacy when it seeks to invoke international law in global forums (Karaki et al., 2024).

The intensifying geopolitical and geoeconomic competition for resources is also shaping Africa and Europe's engagement. There is a growing concern that Europe's drive to achieve its green transition might prioritize resource extraction from Africa over meaningful adaptation support. A "mining rush", driven by European demand for critical raw minerals, risks stimulating economic growth in Europe while deepening exploitation and neglect if adaptation efforts and broader socio-economic benefits do not keep pace in Africa (as reflected in the case of Niger outlined in section 2.3). To counter this trend, there is a need for a more balanced and mutually beneficial approach which ensures that Africa's resource wealth contributes to its economic growth and sustainable development, resilience and local stability.

A stronger and more equal partnership on adaptation, built on mutual respect, strategic foresight and an appreciation of what each continent has to offer – from diplomatic support to practical adaptation solutions – would greatly benefit both Europe and Africa in times of geopolitical fragmentation and escalating climate crises.

African states, both individually and collectively, have become more assertive in championing their interests and advocating for equitable representation in global forums and multilateral institutions. A significant milestone was achieved in September 2023, when the AU secured permanent membership in the G20. This strategic shift not only redefines Africa's relationships with its global partners but also reshapes the norms, principles and

decision-making processes of international governance (Tadesse Shiferan, 2023). For climate diplomacy, this means a stronger African voice in shaping global climate policies, advocating for climate justice and driving equitable solutions that reflect the continent's priorities and realities.

## 4. Recommendations to Strengthen Adaptation Diplomacy

### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

We put forward two recommendations to strengthen adaptation diplomacy between Africa and Europe, drawing on proposals from interviewees and the literature (Ashton, 2024; AU, 2022a; AEF, 2022; AEF, 2023c; AEF, 2023d; AEF, 2023e; Harmeling et al., 2007; Simon et al., 2022):

**1. Place adaptation at the heart of the 7th European Union–African Union Summit.** The EU should also prioritize adaptation in its forthcoming update to its Comprehensive Strategy with Africa. These actions would send a strong signal that cooperation on adaptation will form a core pillar of the partnership and is a clear priority for the future relationship. Both regions should assign skilled diplomats and envoys to strengthen relationships between the EU and AU on adaptation and identify high-level champions to enhance ambition and strengthen the engagement of non-state actors.

**2. Commission a rapid assessment of the shared priorities for adaptation.** These are set out in both the AU Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan and the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change. The assessment should cover how these priorities relate to the thematic and dimensional targets and cross-cutting issues agreed in the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience. This would provide focus areas for collaboration and contribute to a shared understanding of prospective areas for joint work, while integrating the Paris Agreement's Global Goal on Adaptation into continental and regional resilience building. Such priorities could then be reflected in relevant initiatives, such as the EU's Global Gateway. They could also provide the basis for ministerial pairings between member states of each Union that face common challenges and needs.

### PROCEDURAL RECOMMENDATIONS

We propose three procedural recommendations – two at the political level, one at the technical – to strengthen adaptation diplomacy between Africa and Europe, drawing on proposals from interviewees and the literature (Abimbola and Aggad, 2021; AU, 2023a; AU, 2023b; AEF, 2022; AEF, 2023d; AEF, 2023e; Pichon, 2022; Pirozzi et al., 2017; Simon et al., 2022):

**3. Strengthen existing lines of communication between AU-EU negotiators between formal sessions under the UNFCCC.** These should consider alignment on UNFCCC negotiating positions in general, and work towards shared messaging on adaptation action and finance, more specifically. While the heads of delegations reportedly feel that current communication levels suffice, the findings of this and other

studies suggest more and better communication would bring many benefits. Interviewees suggested creating informal opportunities to talk and cooperate below the formal level of party and group representation, while ensuring that necessary protocols are upheld.

A renewed energy, focus and approach in existing networks and exchanges would help parties and groups to better prepare for the negotiations, which is particularly important given that agenda items on adaptation are dispersed. These exchanges would also build rapport, which could help advance agenda items on contentious topics beyond adaptation, through greater receptivity to finding common ground. There is a particular window of opportunity to reset relations given the new leadership of key UNFCCC negotiating groups (e.g. the AGN, LDC Group, AOSIS and the G77). Building a shared vision of “transformational adaptation” could raise the bar on adaptation agreements at the COPs and strengthen the efficacy of the multilateral negotiations for the benefit of all parties, bridging persistent divides.

**4. Convene a sequence of warm-up meetings ahead of future EU-AU Summits.** These should aim to strengthen ministerial discussion of the foreign policy and green transition objectives of both continents. The EU needs to demonstrate a willingness to engage in developing solutions to reduce and manage adverse external impacts from its environmental policies, such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism. Although adaptation would not be the central focus of such meetings, they would create a stronger enabling environment for cooperation and action on adaptation. They would also make up for the lack of formal spaces (beyond UNFCCC negotiations) for the two regions to listen to each other and

build mutual understanding of their priorities in multilateral forums beyond the climate regime (e.g. the G20+1 and the UN General Assembly).

Such warm-up meetings should not be restricted to Ministries of Foreign Affairs. Interviewees pointed to the need for more cross-continental dialogue between Ministers of the Environment and others with an adaptation mandate. They also proposed making adaptation a standing agenda item of the other political dialogues that take place under the Africa-EU Partnership, including Commission-to-Commission meetings and Inter-parliamentary meetings, as well as forums with non-state actors to nurture innovation and entrepreneurship.

**5. Establish a cross-continent “framework arrangement” or college-to-college exchange on adaptation.** The creation of an institutional home for cooperation on adaptation is needed to implement actions and decisions agreed at the EU-AU Summit, to advance work between summits, and to identify priorities for cooperation at different governance scales. Mainstreaming joint work on adaptation across jurisdictions, and strengthening institutional capacities on adaptation, should be long-term aims. But dedicated capacity is needed to kickstart implementation of priority actions. As one interviewee put it, “essentially a structure that enables Africa and Europe to have a discourse out of which you can develop a kind of a roadmap to guide adaptation investments”. Such a framework could draw on lessons from the Africa-EU Energy Partnership (AEEP) on cooperation in energy transitions and investments, or from trade more broadly. It could also support monitoring, evaluating and learning from progress and challenges in adaptation.

## RHETORICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

We propose a final recommendation on rhetoric and discourse, drawing on proposals from interviewees and the literature (Abimbola and Aggad, 2021; AEF, 2022; Fakir, 2021):

### **6. Invest in more transparent and consistent communication, with the intent to:**

- Avoid overpromising and under-delivering, or “attempting to sell old wine in new bottles”, in terms of adaptation finance commitments.
- Build trust through honest and upfront explanations about the interests driving decisions.
- Honour interdependency and the benefits and opportunities each partner brings to the table.
- Assure continuity of message as progressive champions of adaptation<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup>The EU could do this by supporting (rather than opposing) a standing UNFCCC agenda item on adaptation, for example, and voicing the need for every COP to be an “adaptation COP”.

## 5. Recommendations to Rebuild Trust in Adaptation Finance

We propose five overarching recommendations to rebuild trust between Africa and Europe and improve the quantity and quality of adaptation finance, drawing on proposals from interviewees and the literature. Recommendations 2 to 5 represent potential landing zones for climate finance agreements between the EU and the AGN in upcoming negotiations.

1. **Prioritize adaptation finance over mitigation and deliver on political commitments.** The EU and its member states must deliver on their commitment to double adaptation finance in the lead up to COP30, including by channelling funding to African countries. They should meet targets for global adaptation funds and pledge contributions to signature initiatives. They should also continue to strive to balance adaptation and mitigation funding, particularly those member states who are currently furthest from parity. The EIB must deliver on its ambitions to triple adaptation finance by 2025. The EU should also capitalize on its moral and political leadership by pressuring other contributors, such as the United States, Canada and Australia, to fill the significant gap in adaptation support to Africa. Additionally, the EU could engage with emerging donors, including the Gulf States and Singapore, to increase their contributions and commitments to adaptation efforts.
2. **Improve transparency and accountability to underpin trust.** Both European and African countries should take steps to make the delivery and use of international adaptation finance more transparent. European countries should work within the EU to harmonize their procedures and reporting requirements, improving clarity not only on the volume of funding delivered but also the balance between mitigation and adaptation, and the allocation across recipient countries. African countries should develop more detailed reporting of project outcomes, demonstrating effectiveness, building trust and thereby attracting further public and private support for programmatic funding. African and European countries should also engage in dialogue about how to best quantify and track progress in adaptation finance. Opportunities include the Global Gateway Initiative (which has a pillar on quantifying and prioritizing climate finance needs) and the 2028 review of the Modalities, Procedures, and Guidelines of the Enhanced Transparency Framework under the UNFCCC.
3. **Harmonize and simplify funding access, especially for LDCs.** The EU and its member states should seek to deliver more funding through multilateral channels to counter the

trend toward bilateral deals and engagement. The EU should also consider how the Global Gateway Initiative can be used to mainstream climate resilience into other areas, such as infrastructure and energy. European and African countries should work together to develop project pipelines and invest in project design at national level, especially in LDCs and countries with limited administrative capacity. African countries should bring forward national plans that clearly identify priority sectors and projects for investment, as well as mechanisms to channel international funding. European and African countries should work with climate-finance providers to streamline application processes and increase Direct Access accreditation for regional and national institutions in Africa, building long-term institutional capabilities to manage funding and implement programmes. To address the shared concern that funding is not “hitting the ground,” they should encourage climate-finance providers to scale up Enhanced Direct Access models that help funding reach vulnerable communities, build from local knowledge and support local ownership of initiatives.

4. **Expand the volume of finance through creative approaches.** Based on the shared recognition that public finance is insufficient to fill the adaptation gap in Africa, African and European countries should work together to identify opportunities for blended finance, innovative financial instruments and alternative revenue streams. This effort could be realized as a joint task force (such as that exploring options for the Global Solidarity Levies) to look into risks options, with a particular focus on limitations for adaptation. These options could also be explored under the Global Gateway Initiative, which includes a pillar on establishing and supporting incubators, project preparation facilities and multi-country coordination workshops.
5. **Collaborate on reforms to the multilateral financial architecture.** To make progress toward the shared goal of increasing the quantity and quality of climate finance, African and European countries should continue to collaborate on driving concrete and time-bound reforms under the Bridgetown Initiative. One promising avenue is the Global Solidarity Levies Task Force, which aims to formulate proposals for taxation of high-emitting and currently unregulated industries in time for COP30. African and European countries should also engage in dialogue on debt relief and restructuring.



## 6. Recommendations to Advance Adaptation Action

We propose four recommendations to advance adaptation action, the delivery of adaptation programmes, and the implementation of adaptation initiatives in and between the two continents and their member states, drawing on proposals from interviewees and the literature (Bilal and Teevan, 2024).

- 1. Support NAP readiness.** While a number of actors – such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the UNFCCC Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG) – already support NAP readiness, there is a critical need to bolster efforts that strengthen the capabilities of LDCs to assess climate risks, articulate their adaptation needs and concerns, conduct comprehensive financial needs assessments, and integrate adaptation actions into national strategies and development plans. The EU should clarify and enhance its role in this regard. Such efforts would demonstrate clear alignment with the outcomes of the first Global Stocktake. They also provide an opportunity for the EU to assess what non-financial support they could provide, such as technical assistance and technological transfer.
- 2. Harness co-benefits from shared adaptation priorities.** European actors should more meaningfully engage with African approaches to adaptation through climate-resilient socioeconomic development and support these efforts accordingly. Mutual benefits can be realized from adaptation cooperation in a number of areas, such as strengthening the resilience of agriculture, food security and trade, or investing in phytosanitary measures and public health systems. The EU should also adopt a more strategic and focused approach to large-scale flagship initiatives such as the Global Gateway, fostering local ownership through transparent communication and genuine consultation, to ensure relevance and attractiveness. It should also streamline implementation through a whole-of-government approach at both national

and regional levels, leveraging the Team Europe framework to foster a unified, coherent strategy that tightly integrates development and climate goals.

- 3. Conduct comprehensive impact assessments and strengthen MEL mechanisms to track the effectiveness of adaptation initiatives.** The development of a harmonised MEL framework would facilitate transparent and consistent reporting from both African and European countries and enable stronger alignment with international commitments. It should promote the use of standardized metrics to assess progress, identify gaps, and ensure that adaptation programmes are data-driven and outcome-oriented.
- 4. Launch a flagship collaboration on adaptation to transboundary climate risks.** This would support implementation of the Global Goal on Adaptation and Decision 2/CMA.5 (paras 18–19), in which Parties recognized that “climate change impacts are often transboundary in nature and may involve complex, cascading risks that can benefit from collective consideration and knowledge-sharing, climate-informed transboundary management and cooperation on global adaptation solutions”. The African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan recognizes the need to enhance coordination to manage transboundary and cascading climate risks. The recently released European Climate Risk Assessment identifies major transboundary climate risks that are of threat to the region, and the 2021 EU Adaptation Strategy notes that coordinated action on adaptation is needed to manage their effects. Adaptation to transboundary climate risks represents a shared action agenda and an opportunity to scale up adaptation ambition not just for the two continents, but the world over.



## ANNEX 1: OVERVIEW OF ADAPTATION PROJECTS IN AFRICA, SUPPORTED BY EU INSTITUTIONS AND MEMBER STATES (NON-EXHAUSTIVE)

Programme	EU institution/member state	Budget and timeline
Global Climate Change Alliance Plus Initiative ( <b>GCCA+</b> ) to help countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Pacific, adapt to and mitigate climate change	EU flagship programme, involving EU member states	€750 million (2007-current)
<b>Africa Risk Capacity (ARC)</b>	European Commission, DG INTPA	€9 million (part of the 11th European Development Fund Intra-ACP Natural Disaster Risk Reduction Programme), under the TEI on Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience in Africa (2022-ongoing)
Support to <b>Nouakchott Coastline Development Project</b> in Mauritania, managed by Meridiam, aiming to protect Mauritania's capital city from coastal erosion and flooding, while also developing new activities to the benefit of its communities	Led by European Investment Bank (EIB) and Meridiam	Approximately €60 million (2023-2027), as a combination of equity, debt - including contributions from development finance institutions - and grants
<b>Development-Smart Innovation through Research in Agriculture (DeSIRA)</b> , a programme to support agricultural R&I in the context of climate adaptation and mitigation	European Commission and EU member states (including funds from the GCCA+)	€335 million (2019-2025)
<b>African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100)</b> , a country-led effort to restore 100 million hectares of deforested and degraded landscapes across Africa by 2030	Led by FAO, co-funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)	BMZ budget of €40 million (2024-2027), under the TEI on Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience in Africa
<b>AdaptAction Programme</b> to build climate resilience in 12 partner countries in Africa	French Development Agency (AFD)	€45 million (2017-2025) by AFD, leveraging approximately €580 million in resilient investments co-financed by Green Climate Fund and EU, among others
Contribution to <b>Adaptation Fund (AF)</b>	EU and EU member states	Over €350 million to the Adaptation Fund, with the EU's direct contribution amounting to €100 million (€80 million earmarked for sub-Saharan Africa) (2018-current)
<b>Africa Adaptation Initiative (AAI)</b> , an Africa-led effort to enhance the continent's resilience to climate change by increasing knowledge, ownership and strengthening capacity for project proposal processes	EU, in collaboration with UNDP	€1 million grant to address urgent adaptation financing gaps in Africa (2021-2023)

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