

What must be the priorities to achieve a renewed partnership between Africa and Europe?

My perspective: Addressing Youth Unemployment

It is estimated that by 2025, close to a quarter of the global population aged 24 and younger will be living in Africa and particularly Sub-Saharan Africa. By 2030, its labor force is projected to expand by more than the rest of the world combined and by even more after 2030. With Africa and Europe currently facing a huge challenge regarding migrants who are desperate to look for economic survival in Europe many of them perishing across the seas and the big number of them being youth, there's a need for a greater partnership between the two continents regarding this pertinent issue.

There's a need for increased public and private investment which will be necessary to create quality jobs for this growing population, including investments in infrastructure, human capital, energy, agriculture, and industry. Both the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) aim to create economies of scale, which offer greater potential returns for private investment but require significant public investments to be achieved. As 70% of Sub-Saharan Africa's population depends on agriculture for their livelihoods, and 20% still suffer from hunger (FAO 2019), the sustainable transformation of Africa's agri-food sector and rural economy are a priority. All of this will have to happen, while addressing climate change, developing clean energy, and protecting biodiversity at the same time.

Both the EU and African countries have a common interest in increasing investment in infrastructure, energy, and sustainable agriculture and industry in Africa. The AU and EU also have a shared interest in the successful implementation of the AfCFTA to increase intra-African trade with a view to the economic growth and job opportunities it is expected to create, and for the EU with a view to a future continent-to-continent free trade agreement. This will lead to the absorption of many young people in several development sectors hence reduction of unemployment

Improving the education sector in Africa should also be a priority for EU-Africa partnerships. When African youth get appropriate education especially putting emphasis on science, technology, and technical schools. These sectors can create job opportunities for youth beyond Africa. Digitalization is essential not just to the functioning of a modern economy, but increasingly to governance, to education, and to full participation in modern societies. In Africa, the Smart Africa Manifesto, endorsed by the Assembly of the AU in 2014, aims to accelerate socio-economic development through the championing of information and communications

technology (ICT). There are still many challenges to roll out broadband across the continent, to develop the skills necessary to make the most of the digital economy, and to develop rules and regulations to improve the business environment. EU and Africa can therefore be strong partners in this critical area. The EU and Africa should develop common interests in many aspects of digitalization, including working together on improving broadband access across Africa, supporting the development of Africa's digital single market, supporting digital skills development, and developing e-governance which all these can lead to the employment of many youths in Africa.

As on the wider partnership for investments, there is a lot of room for European investments in Africa to facilitate the rolling out of the digital economy and to work with African governments on digital education, e-government, and much more. These directly or indirectly employ young people. The EU should continue to provide insight into its experience of rolling out the digital single market, the benefits, and challenges, and eventually share its experiences of the single market for data and regulating artificial intelligence.

Ultimately, the digital economy is driven by research and innovation (R&I), and despite limited funding African entrepreneurs who many are young people have shown a remarkable ability to innovate, allowing them to address local problems (e.g., fintech, incubators, etc.) and to leapfrog outdated and more expensive technology. For Africa to reach its full potential in the digital economy, the continent will require much greater investment in R&I and better access to start-up funding. The EU and AU both have an interest in supporting fundamental research, and in connecting digital economy research initiatives between Europe and Africa. The EU's external investment plan can also be used to ensure that sufficient funds are available to fund innovative ideas of young people in Africa.

Lastly, there's a need for partnership between AU and the EU regarding peace and security. Where there's peace, there's also room for development, and youth can exploit that into starting businesses and prosper. Both the AU and EU benefit from promoting stability and peace on the African continent as this contains perceived threats with possible domestic repercussions such as violent extremism and irregular migration.