

Women and young people should be at the centre of creating green jobs in Africa

Developing skills and fostering youth employment and opportunities for a green and just transition is critical for Africa and Europe. To ensure a more equal distribution of the benefits of economic development along global value chains, local and regional value creation will need a massive expansion, including local skills development and job creation.

In this context, the Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) jointly hosted a special dialogue on ‘Skills for Green Job Creation’ in the Africa-Europe partnership to address multifaceted challenges and opportunities for close and mutually beneficial cooperation following the 6th AU-EU summit commitments. It centered on the potential of European-African partnerships in creating green jobs and skills and the opportunities for close, mutually beneficial cooperation in this area.

On **Thursday 7th September from 18:00-19:30 CEST** leaders from government, civil society and business and thematic experts from Africa and Europe gathered at GIZ Repräsentanz in Berlin to hear the conversation moderated by international affairs journalist Ute Lange. On the panel was:

- **Hon. Susan Auma Mang'eni**, Principal Secretary, State Department of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Development, Kenya
- **Dirk Meyer**, Director-General for Multilateral Development Policy Transformation and Climate, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ, Germany
- **Sharan Burrow**, former General Secretary, International Trade Union Confederation 2010-2022 and Member of AEF's Women Leaders Network, Australia
- **Nelson Ajala**, Program Manager and Business Environment Component Lead for IYBA-SEED, Team Europe Initiative “Investing in Young Businesses in Africa”, SNV, Netherlands
- **Desmond Situma**, Sustainable Development Advocate and former One Youth Ambassador, Kenya

The gender dimensions of climate justice

Speakers reiterated the urgency of the transition to renewable energy and asserted the need to ensure that workers are not left behind. A just transition is an opportunity for development and job creation in Africa but the dilemma is *how*. SMEs are where the majority of jobs can be created, which calls for a coordinated effort to grow them specifically. Access to funding and markets needs to be improved and education systems reoriented to deliver the required skills to build sustainable enterprises.

In her initial remarks, Sharan Burrow, Founding Member of AEF's Women Leaders Network (WLN), elaborated on key factors for a just transition. She emphasised “a seat at the table for workers and for affected communities”, and the need to foster their sense of security, and investment in skilling, reskilling and life-long learning. As she applauded young people's and women's role at the forefront of solutions, she stressed the Women Leaders Network's efforts for gender and climate justice: “We must recognise that women are often on the front line of extreme climate devastation - and solutions,” said Burrow.

Access to financing for start-ups and MSMEs

GIZ Talks on International Cooperation meets AEF Special Dialogue:

AU-EU partnership on skills for green job creation



“There is an opportunity to create more green jobs, working with young people and women,” agreed the Hon. Susan Auma Mang’eni, Principal Secretary, State Department of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Development, Kenya. She acknowledged the importance for Africa to follow an alternative route to industrialisation that would avoid the environmentally detrimental path of Europe, the US and Asia. Meanwhile, she reflected on the challenge of creating employment opportunities for the continent’s young population: “How do we go green and at the same time create competitive jobs?” According to her, the answer lies in investing in the MSME sector – accounting for about 90% of jobs in Kenya –, and easing mutual market access. On supply chain laws, she pointed out to the audience that overly stringent policies are detrimental to job creation efforts. Drawing attention to trade imbalances, she proposed to Germany and the EU to “pull us to a level where we can become competitive in terms of the global value chains.” In this context, she emphasized the potential of mutual learning, for which, however, not only an effective European development policy in the sense of Team Europe is necessary, but also a coherent interdepartmental policy. However, she acknowledged that the Team Europe approach could be a good way to create access to sustainable financing for start-ups and SMEs, which she considers the most important success factor for creating green and competitive jobs.

Multi-stakeholder cooperation on future economies

Dirk Meyer, Director-General Multilateral Development Policy Transformation, Climate at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ), emphasised that it was “great that we all have, globally, the view that any kind of future growth, any kind of future economy should be built on sustainable foundations.” Meyer reacted to Mang’eni’s demand for a concrete alternative route for transformation and job creation and concluded “that we don’t have the real answer,” stating “that we are missing an international debate between CEOs, businesspeople, politicians and scientists.” He echoed Mang’eni’s points that job creation is the basis for social cohesion and the stability of democracies. Against the backdrop of demands for better access to financing, Meyer highlighted the support by BMZ for “national, local ways of building stable, financial agencies to deliver young business people with money.” He also attributed a part of the responsibility to the partner countries themselves in terms of delivering stable legal frameworks to convince investors, as well as in terms of improving skills development through their educational system. As for the question of access to markets, Meyer championed the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which BMZ is actively supporting. However, he equally stressed that “any kind of new business model means that we also have to share our markets and have to come to fair conditions,” which partners could rightfully insist on.

Enabling sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems

Nelson Ajala, Program Manager for the Dutch implementing agency SNV, presented the “TYBASEED” program, which is part of the Team Europe Initiative “Investing in Young Businesses in Africa” (IYBA) commissioned by the European Commission in 2021. Ajala emphasised the aim to facilitate the conditions in which young businesses in Africa can thrive and grow, underlining that resilient, cross-linked entrepreneurial ecosystems are key for successful entrepreneurship. TEI IYBA SEED (Support Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Development) brings together eleven EU member states with relevant actors from the private sector, as well as the European and the African Development Banks to invest into five African Ecosystems in Benin, Kenya, Senegal, South Africa, and Togo. He elaborated four core components for successful entrepreneurial ecosystems: capacity building for business development organisations, enabling a favourable business environment, enhancing an entrepreneurial culture, and strengthening networking. By doing this, TEI IYBA has a specific focus on female entrepreneurs. TEI IYBA intends to support young male entrepreneurs up to the age of 25, and female entrepreneurs, regardless of their age. This, as Mr Ajala highlighted, may prove influential to change the gender dynamic in entrepreneurship.

A decent living as a matter of life and death

Speaking as Sustainable Development Advocate and former One Youth Ambassador, Desmond Situma warned that having the skills to make a decent living in Africa is “a matter of life and death” for young people. “Boats sink in the Mediterranean because people don’t have the skills to support themselves at home.” He wondered: “What is the colour of the other jobs that are not green?” As a graduate of Kenya’s school system, he highlighted that despite the efforts during the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) between 2005 and 2015 were taken, the education systems were not yet able to tackle significant issues regarding the lack of literacy among some of the youth or the lack of practical skills. He highlighted the role of the diaspora – which has already strongly contributed to African countries’ development – in providing resources for entrepreneurs. He further emphasized the need to look beyond a mismatch of jobs and to create more decent jobs and went on to recommend a greater focus on accountability and youth participation both, to African governments and to their development partners.

Key Takeaways and Observations

- Duplication of efforts impedes progress on Africa-EU initiatives.
- A coordinated effort by development partners will garner more consistent results.
- Efforts to upskill youth must be matched with funding and support for youth-led initiatives.
- Under a just transition; youth and women must be central to all skilling and job creation efforts.
- Education institutions need to prepare youth to employ and be employable in emerging green sectors.
- Green job initiatives should tap into existing knowledge and skills bases and harness the value of traditional industries.