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**COOPERATION BETWEEN
AFRICA AND EUROPE**
Best practice, future possibilities, and the role of Science Europe

Tallinn, Estonia | 30 October 2024

EVENT REPORT



Colophon

January 2025

'Event report: Co-operation between Africa and Europe – best practice, future possibilities, and the role of Science Europe'

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.14717766

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Acknowledgements: Science Europe thanks the High Level Policy Network (HLPN) for their input in developing the concept of this regional event.

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Report on ‘Co-operation between Africa and Europe – best practice, future possibilities, and the role of Science Europe’

Introduction

The workshop ‘Africa–Europe co-operation – best practice, future possibilities, and the role of Science Europe’ took place on 30 October 2024, following the European Regional Meeting of the [Global Research Council](#) (GRC) in Tallinn, Estonia. This event was the first in a series of Science Europe workshops that will bring together its members with different world regions, one by one. The goal is to develop opportunities for cross-border collaboration to support excellence in science and common efforts to solve pressing global challenges through Science Europe’s [High Level Policy Network](#) (HLPN).

A group of Science Europe members who participate in the HLPN, namely the [Estonian Research Council](#) (ETAG), the [German Research Foundation](#) (DFG), the [Dutch Research Council](#) (NWO), the [Research Council of Norway](#) (RCN), and [UK Research and Innovation](#) (UKRI) collaborated with Science Europe to put together the programme. It was based on two themes: ‘Looking at Africa–Europe co-operation in the past: what could be improved, going forward?’ and ‘Designing reciprocal future co-operation’.

This discussion builds on the [outcomes](#) of Science Europe’s 2023 High Level Workshop on the European Research Area and the [conclusions](#) of its event on Reciprocity in Multilateral Research Collaboration, part of the Science Summit organised during the UNGA79 in September 2024.

Part I: Looking at Africa–Europe co-operation in the past – What could be improved going forward?

A starting point in the discussion is the need to challenge the existing collaboration practices between international partners, highlighted **Mari Sundli Tveit** in her opening remarks. Trust is among the principles that guide true co-operation, and research partners should allocate time so it can be established. International partnerships should be built around human aspects, acknowledging that meaningful collaborations “only move at the speed of trust,” while at the same

time it is practical barriers (such as visa) that prevent collaboration. To change the modus operandi, a radical rethink is required to place human aspects at the forefront of international collaborations. In this context, Open Science plays a significant role, as it ensures equal access to knowledge.

A further introduction to the topic was presented by **Yaya Sangare**. He drew connections to insights from the [GRC 2024 annual meeting](#) in Interlaken, such as leveraging research on the topic and ensuring its social and economic sustainability. True international co-operation, he echoed, should reflect the spirit of mutual respect, equity, and reciprocity. Those principles would enable research funding organisations to address global challenges. Scientific collaboration between Africa and Europe is essential, he said, to produce knowledge necessary to tackle these challenges. The research community shares the responsibility to build equitable and lasting partnerships and to avoid traps of asymmetries and financial challenges. Finally, the demographic significance of Africa cannot be overlooked.

During the panel discussion, **Lesego M. Thamae** reflected on Botswana's experience with European collaboration, particularly in health research, and the challenges faced due to low public funding. Mutual programme development should consider African interests and the integration of indigenous knowledge systems, also when it comes to partnering in dual-research areas. Botswana is a significant research partner for Europe; collaboration is promoted by its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the country both receives and issues grants. The establishment of a national research fund to ensure the sustainability of collaboration is being set up, she added.

Practical barriers, such as the visa process, often pose challenges to collaboration, highlighted **Habtamu Abera Goshu**. He stressed the importance of joint research initiatives to tackle global challenges like pandemics and deal with emerging technologies. He emphasised that sustainable outcomes require long-term commitments and alignment of funding mechanisms. Exchange programmes and mobility are the most important aspect of collaboration, as they aim to build capacity of local researchers and facilitate access to resources and research infrastructures (such as laboratories and equipment).

For historical reasons, Angola has been primarily involved in collaborative efforts with Portugal, which largely focus on education and technology, highlighted **António Alcochete**. However, it also collaborates with Norway, focusing on fish and sea studies, and with France in food technology and conservation. A significant endeavour has been the [UNI.AO](#) project, a Higher Education Support Programme, financed by the European Union and implemented by [Expertise France](#), to support the diversification of Angola's economy. He underlined how the programme was designed around local needs, creating the conditions to carry out its activities in Angola. The country has also contributed to Open Access repositories in line with UNESCO recommendations and has launched scholarship calls for postgraduate studies, through an integrated system of information that facilitates the advertisement of training opportunities.

The success of bilateral programmes with Southern African partners was emphasised by **Maike Spiekerman**, while recognising the challenges mentioned by the previous speakers. She noted that joint agenda setting and call development from the beginning were crucial factors in setting up multilateral joint programming with the Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI). **Rune Vistad** brought forward a Norwegian perspective, detailing the country's extensive collaboration with

African partners, highlighting the valuable grass-roots nature of these collaborations. Africa's strides are impressive, he noted, reaching half a billion euros through Horizon Europe. He pointed out that while the EU has specific initiatives targeting Africa, a broader competitive landscape on the global stage exists. Moreover, he outlined four strategic tracks to enhance co-operation, such as using existing mechanisms and economic instruments, exploring additional opportunities, and the importance of reciprocity in partnerships, which are lacking in Horizon EU funding calls. It is vital that discussions take place on equal terms when embarking on collaborations with African countries.

Yaya Sangare offered a comprehensive critique of the traditional Europe–Africa co-operation models, which he described as often being Eurocentric and primarily beneficial to Europe. It is necessary to decolonise these relationships and transform them into equitable partnerships that prioritise mutual respect, humility, and reciprocity. He proposed more co-ordinated funding efforts to avoid duplication and promote a fair approach, as African partners often face restrictive and unfair financing conditions, which prevent them from receiving funds from European partners. Furthermore, the complex administrative and time-consuming process of the Framework Programme is a significant barrier to collaboration.

Research funding organisations have a role to play in facilitating mobility of researchers and managing joint calls. He cited successful examples of co-operation between the Global North and South, in which organisations effectively partnered with 17 African countries. These collaborations could be co-ordinated by organisations such as the Global Research Council or Science Europe.

Moderator **Lidia Borrell-Damián** invited the panellists to identify key characteristics of fair partnerships. Among the responses, the value of collaborative design in initiatives by including a common agenda of objectives was mentioned. A jointly developed call led to some of the best practices, according to **Cephas Adjei Mensah**. Participants from South Africa shared the importance of highlighting successful bilateral co-operation between Africa and Europe. Concerns about the Eurocentrism of global funding programmes, such as Horizon Europe, were echoed by participants. **Eudy Mabuza** pointed out that while these initiatives aim to address global challenges, they often neglect equitable participation, leaving African researchers to face systemic disparities.

Part II: Designing reciprocal future co-operation

Based on the lessons from past and present practice, this panel discussed ways to foster reciprocal future co-operation. The importance of reciprocal and humble approaches in global research co-operation was emphasised by **Kristin Danielsen**, as the moderator of the session. The discussion centred on strategies to improve equity, build trust, and create sustainable collaborations, while also learning from African perspectives.

To address issues such as intellectual property, visa challenges, the extraction of data, and Eurocentrism, an honest, open approach is essential for European organisations and institutions. This approach should foster knowledge, enhance capacity building, account for different academic standards, and facilitate access to knowledge and its outcomes for African countries.

The dialogue format of this event was seen as refreshing way of reviewing policies; this usually take place under certain procedures, such as the STI Roadmap Towards Achieving the SDGs, stated **Cephas Adjei Mensah**. He pointed out that the [EU-Africa Union \(AU\) Partnership](#) serves as a crucial framework that guides relationships and fosters collaboration across institutions, academia, and government sectors. Transforming research into policy applications and breaking down barriers to leverage opportunities for partnership and development are key aspects of the discussion.

Efforts around South Africa's development are tied to the broader continental progress, which often requires maintaining the same pace despite varying levels of advancement in different regions. Ensuring capacity building is essential both for PhD and post-doctoral profiles, suggested **Eudy Mabuza**. Political development and higher education objectives should be further combined, creating alignment with the [African Union Agenda 2063](#) and the [Technology Innovation Agency](#) (TISA). Such initiatives could attract and retain excellent researchers in the African ecosystem, contributing to career pathways in Africa. **Eudy Mabuza** outlined the role of the [National Research Foundation](#) (NRF) in managing several initiatives, to attract and retain top talent within Africa and to develop career pathways. She also provided two examples of best-practice initiatives that are being implemented by the NRF: the [O.R Tambo African Research Chairs Initiatives](#) (ORTRChI) combines political development and higher education. The second initiative is the [u'GOOD Research Programme](#) to study young people's well-being in urban and peri-urban environments, and how young people address challenges.

Marcus Wilms addressed the critical challenges to achieve reciprocity in research co-operation, pointing out asymmetries and colonial legacies that create epistemic barriers, thereby compromising the research endeavour. These asymmetries should be reduced, which requires significant time and efforts to raise awareness within and between organisations. He cited an ongoing debate in Germany where scientists actively reach out to ministries and funders to advocate changes that foster more equitable research conditions. Funders can play a pivotal role at various levels: by encouraging or requiring reciprocal collaboration in funded projects and by co-designing programmes with equitable structures. Some changes require long-term processes involving other players (especially legislative bodies) while others, such as adjusting internal funding procedures or external communication to be more equitable, can be implemented more swiftly. DFG's activities directed towards reducing asymmetry entail support for capacity-strengthening initiatives and fostering local networks, such as the [Science Granting Councils Initiative in Sub-Saharan-Africa](#) (SGCI), as well as support for Science Granting Councils to engage in multilateral platforms for exchange, such as the Global Research Council (GRC).

Kristin Danielsen proposed exploring new funding models where African and European contributions are more balanced, such as combining Official Development Assistance (ODA) with research funding, allowing African partners to use ODA funding in bi- and multilateral collaborative research programmes. **Michael Booth** also shared insights into UKRI's extensive experience with ODA research funding, which has facilitated a broad network of connections between UK and African researchers. He discussed the need for strengthening institutional and systems-level capacities, including research management, to enhance equity in the long term. Initiatives like the [Africa Charter](#), as an Africa-centred framework to advance modes of research collaborations,

can also provide helpful insights. Learning from African perspectives is crucial, and a pivotal question may be how to co-ordinate equitable dialogues given the growing interest from many European research funders.

Responses from the audience echoed the importance of increased awareness around collaboration with African countries. Practical solutions to support reciprocity emerged throughout the discussion, including the Science Granting Councils Initiative, development aid agencies, and models used in the Nordic collaboration with the Baltic states (such as [Baltic & Nordic research co-operation programmes](#), [NordForsk](#)). Additionally, a peer learning facility is being set up in Bonn, which could also facilitate staff exchanges.

Speakers from Africa and Europe agreed on the value of co-creation and long-term partnership models that prioritise mutual benefit. **Cephas Adjei Mensah** emphasised the importance of tangible outcomes for African stakeholders, urging Science Europe to facilitate frameworks that centralise African perspectives. The need for strong commitment to fostering equity and respect in research partnerships was agreed by all participants. That would require building trust, aligning agendas, and addressing capacity disparities to ensure that Africa–Europe co-operation evolves as a truly reciprocal endeavour.

Overall, the process of decolonising research partnerships entails open exchange from both sides to clearly communicate needs, expectations, and distribute responsibilities. Setting research agendas should equally respond to Africa's priorities, rather than being set by external funders. Reciprocity requires both intention and a change in attitudes. Moving forward, participants agreed on the need to shift from current co-operation methods between Europe and Africa and build on prioritising their quality and humanity.

Ways forward in the co-operation between Africa and Europe

This workshop marks the beginning of a series of events, each one focusing on collaboration with a different world region. The first one aimed to support R&I stakeholders in Europe and Africa to reform and reinforce ongoing collaboration processes, and to further explore next steps.

Specific actions and commitments will be taken forward from both regions, including by Science Europe and the Global Research Council, starting from key points raised below:

- Participants agreed widely that the approach to research partnerships should be decolonised to allow for truly reciprocal collaboration to flourish. The needs and objectives of all regions should be considered and all actors should co-design the partnerships, dismantling the Eurocentric approach, and building mutually beneficial collaboration.
- The significance of mobility for international collaboration was restated, noting that visa requirements remain a major obstacle. Involved actors should advocate to national authorities and institutions to facilitate the process of brain circulation, which would also contribute to better addressing global challenges.
- European actors should actively advocate the inclusion of reciprocity elements in the policies for international co-operation in the next Framework Programme (FP10).

- Setting up more platforms for multilateral funding is a challenging part of existing collaboration both for African and European organisations. Multilateral funding opportunities should be promoted, making collaboration more effective. The contribution of other actors, such as development aid agencies, ought to be reinforced.
- The GRC, through its [Multilateral Engagement Working Group](#) (MLE-WG), should continue to actively facilitate and promote bi- and multilateral collaboration among participant organisations. Supporting the global science enterprise, fostering the worldwide research community, and effectively addressing global challenges is vital.
- Science Europe should have a role in co-ordinating policies or actions at European level and acting as a liaison for fostering collaboration with the African region.

Building on the strong message of reciprocity, African participants invited feedback from European organisations to review aspects in their approach to collaboration that would improve the overall process. The High Level Policy Network (HLPN) of Science Europe, under whose initiative the event was organised, will continue to focus on building partnerships with countries within and beyond the European continent, focusing on removing structural barriers to knowledge sharing, capacity building and brain circulation.

Annex 1: Workshop Programme

Co-operation between Africa and Europe - Best practices and future possibilities, and the role of Science Europe

Time: **13.30–17.00 EET**

Date: **30 October 2024**

Location: **Tallinn, Estonia**

Format: **In-person participation**

Agenda

13.00–13.30 Registration

13.30–14.00 Introductions

- **Mari Sundli Tveit**, Chief Executive of the Research Council of Norway (RCN), President of Science Europe
- **Yaya Sangare**, Secretary General, FONSTI, Ivory Coast

14.00–14.30 Part I: Looking at Africa–Europe co-operation in the past – What could be improved going forward?

All participants take stock of their previous and current co-operations, reflecting on both positive and challenging aspects. Guests from Africa are encouraged to express how they would like to see the co-operation develop from their point of view.

Guiding questions

- How can we further develop and increase co-operation between Africa and Europe?
- What are the preferred approaches to co-operation from an African perspective?

Panel discussion

Reflection on own experiences and sharing views on ways to improve Africa and Europe co-operation

The panel will be led by **Lidia Borrell-Damián**, Secretary General, Science Europe. First, the African participants will be invited to share their opening statements.

- **Habtamu Abera Goshu**, CEO of National Research Development, Ministry of Innovation and Technology; Research Grant Council (RGC) (*online*)
- **Lesego M. Thamae**, Ministry of Communications, Knowledge and Technology (Botswana) (*online*)
- **Rune Vistad**, Director, Department for International Co-operation, RCN
- **Yaya Sangare**, Secretary General, FONSTI, Ivory Coast
- **Maaïke Spiekerman**, Coordinator for bilateral and multilateral programmes, NWO

Rapporteur: **Theodora Famprikezi**, Policy Officer, Science Europe

14.30–15.00 **Plenary discussion**

15.00–15.30 *Coffee Break*

15.30–16.00 **PART II: Designing reciprocal future Co-operation**

We invite all participants to look ahead and bring ideas on how to design future Africa-Europe co-operation. The roles of organisations like Science Europe, the Global Research Council and others, will also be reflected upon.

Guiding questions

- How can we develop our future co-operation based on reciprocity and equitable partnerships?
- Is there a role for Science Europe, the Global Research Council or other organisations?

Panel discussion

Reflecting on the future of Africa – Europe co-operation and the role of organisations like Science Europe, The Global Research Council and others

- **António Alcochete**, Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation of Angola
- **Michael Booth**, Head of International Partnerships (Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia-Pacific), UKRI International
- **Eudy Mabuza**, Senior Science and Innovation Representative, Brussels, Department of Science and Innovation, South Africa
- **Cephas Adjei Mensah**, Head of Research Council, Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI), Ghana
- **Marcus Wilms**, Programme Director, International Affairs, DFG
- **Anu Noorma**, Director General, Estonian Research Council (ETAG)

The panel will be led by **Kristin Danielsen**, Special Adviser, Research Council of Norway

Rapporteur: **Adrien Braem**, Senior Policy Officer, Science Europe

16.00–16.30 **Plenary discussion**

16.30–16.55 **Final comments or questions**

16.55–17.00 **Ways forward**

- **Lidia Borrell-Damián**, Secretary General of Science Europe