



Joint Statement of the Association of African Universities (AAU) and the European University Association (EUA) on the role of higher education in the Africa-Europe Strategic Partnership - for submission to the Africa EU Summit

Preamble

The Association of African Universities (AAU), representing over 200 university members throughout Africa, and the European University Association (EUA), representing over 800 universities and university organisations in 46 European countries, have embarked upon structured dialogue and cooperation on pressing issues regarding higher education and development in both regions. Over the last two years the Erasmus Mundus project 'Access to Success: Fostering trust and exchange between Europe and Africa' has provided a platform for both organisations to engage the academic community, but also donors and regional governments in discussions on the role of universities and university partnership in development cooperation.

The present statement draws upon the project outcomes, and in particular upon the White Paper: Africa-Europe Higher Education Cooperation for Development: Meeting Regional And Global Challenges.¹

The White Paper refers to a wealth of university driven approaches and initiatives to enhance research and innovation, education and training, and economic and social development. It highlights the importance of interuniversity collaboration to ensure further progress, and outlines a number of recommendations to governments, donor organisations, universities and university organisations. It also makes specific reference to the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, which will be the subject of the next Africa-EU Heads of State Summit (29-30 November 2010).

Both AAU and EUA, on behalf of their members, would like to reiterate the concern expressed in the White Paper that the role of universities in Africa, and in particular the potential for Africa-Europe university partnership, has hitherto not been fully recognised or addressed as an important element of the bi-regional political agenda.

Therefore, this joint statement confirms the commitment of the two signatory organisations and outlines specific recommendations for Heads of state, the African Union and European Union Commissions and the European Parliament. It was adopted by the Councils of both Associations on 21 October 2010.

Recalling

- The EUA Prague Declaration (2009), which stressed the role of higher education in solving the financial crisis, and committed to 'enhancing global collaboration, partnership and presence beyond Europe as a priority for an ever greater number of universities with diverse missions, to ensure strategic presence and promote a more international outlook among students and staff alike, and, in particular in times of global financial crisis, to demonstrate active solidarity and cooperation.'

¹ http://www.accesstosuccess-africa.eu/web/images/finalconference/eua_whitepaper_eng_web.pdf

- The AAU Declaration on the African University in the Third Millennium (2001), which calls for 'the revitalisation of the African University and for a renewed sense of urgency in acknowledging the crucial role it should play in solving the many problems facing [the] continent', and which urges African universities to 'give priority to effective and positive participation in the global creation, exchange and application of knowledge' and urges African governments to 'continue to assume the prime responsibility for sustaining their universities, in partnership with other stakeholders' because of the 'critical role of universities in national development.'
- The Declaration of the 2009 UNESCO World Higher Education Conference, that calls for 'partnerships and concerted action at national, regional and international levels to assure the quality and sustainability of higher education systems worldwide – particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, Small Island Developing States (SIDs) and other Least Developed Countries (LDCs).'
- The 2nd Decade of Higher Education for Africa (2006-15) of the African Union, which confirms the urgent need to revitalise African higher education institutions and promote regional cooperation.

Noting

- That in an increasingly interdependent and interconnected world, Africa and Europe need to work together to address global challenges such as sustainable development, energy, climate change, security and migration.
- That one strategic way to address these challenges is through higher education partnerships. If they are structured efficiently and sustainably, partnerships can generate research and teaching capacity, empowering universities as economic drivers and agents of knowledge transfer. Furthermore university partnerships are a strategic means to contribute to the overall capacity development of African universities.
- The important role of higher education in development, a fact that is increasingly supported by multilateral donors and incorporated into national poverty reduction strategies.
- The objectives of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership which seeks to enhance political cooperation and effective multilateralism in a variety of critical fields, to ensure that all the Millennium Development Goals are met and to promote regional and continental integration.

Recommend

To the Heads of State from Africa and Europe meeting at the 3rd Africa-EU Summit on 29-30 November 2010 in Tripoli, Libya to:

- Accord higher education a clear position within the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership and its eight sub-partnerships. While universities and higher education are considered in the Science, Information and Society Partnership and in the Migration, Mobility and Employment Partnership, they are not explicitly mentioned in the objectives of either of these important sub-partnerships.
- Acknowledge that universities link education and research through their activities, and contribute to teaching and learning as well as to the science and innovation agendas in the two regions. This should be reflected in the structure of the Partnership and its activities.

To the African Union and European Union Commissions working in the framework of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership:

- Given the emphasis on the role of civil society in the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, to involve, in a systematic and strategic way, higher education representative organisations in the development of policies and programmes. This would ensure that the higher education community in both regions embraces the Partnership and its activities (such as the Nyerere Programme or the Pan African University), has reliable information on these activities and contributes to the implementation of commitments taken. A formal mechanism for consultation and information dissemination should be developed.
- Establish a sustainable information exchange and dialogue platform that could provide an umbrella for enhanced cooperation among the many ongoing initiatives driven by member states, donor agencies and individual higher education institutions. It could also contribute to exchange and mutual learning with regards to the regional integration projects of Africa and Europe. It should include different actors in the higher education community, donors and governments.
- Strengthen intra- and inter-regional student and staff mobility schemes, by assessing the impact of current initiatives, consulting alumni of existing programmes and considering the resource requirements needed for structuring such mobility.
- Fund mutual learning projects on strategic higher education priorities for both continents. This could include themes like modernisation of higher education, a regional dimension to institutional quality assurance, development of doctoral education and internationalisation of research.

To the European Union Commission and the European Parliament:

- Support the role of higher education and higher education partnerships in European development policy. This would mirror the emphasis placed on higher education in the EU 2020 Strategy and anticipate the soon to be launched EU higher education internationalisation strategy.
- Revise the current restriction in the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) that only stakeholders in developing countries should benefit from funding. A solution needs to be found to ensure the participation of the European University Community in development activities. Higher education cooperation can only be meaningful if exchange is reciprocal. Restrictions regarding eligibility of costs incurred by European universities in EU funding programmes are clearly one of the factors that impact negatively. European universities have expressed concern about incentivising staff to take up development cooperation activities, e.g. for collaborative research and student and staff exchange. Whereas the current regulations of the DCI allow for-profit companies in developing countries to be financed, it is difficult to understand and counterproductive that non-profit organisations in Europe, such as universities, which work for the benefit of society, cannot be funded. We strongly recommend that the DCI grant exceptions to, or otherwise find ways of providing funding opportunities for universities, university networks and associations in Europe.

The Association of African Universities and the European University Association are committed to strengthening Africa-Europe university collaboration and to ensuring the success of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership. Both associations are ready for further discussion with the African Union and the European Union Commissions and to take up dialogue and cooperation with other partners, subject to their capacity.