

EU-AFRICA ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STAKEHOLDERS' NETWORK

4-5 March 2014, Brussels

FINAL DECLARATION

Representatives of European Union and African economic and social stakeholders came together in Brussels on 4 and 5 March 2014 to discuss the EU-Africa joint strategy, at a meeting organised by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). Representatives of employers, workers, farmers, consumers and players in the social economy and cooperatives from the two continents wished to align stances on the partnership between Africa and Europe, with a view to contributing ideas to the next summit of heads of state and government being held in early April. Recommendations have been drawn up on specific topics of mutual interest, such as food security, social protection and youth employment. Participants have likewise undertaken to set up regular, structured cooperation as part of the EU-Africa strategy.

The representatives of EU-African economic and social stakeholders:

On the creation of an EU-Africa economic and social stakeholders' network

1. recognise the importance of the EU-Africa joint strategy as a framework for dialogue between the two continents, carried out in a spirit of mutual respect and based on common interests;
2. have decided to set up a network of economic and social stakeholders, as part of the EU-Africa joint strategy;
3. view the goals of this network to be: i) to organise the economic and social stakeholders' contribution to the EU-Africa joint strategy in a structured fashion and on a regular basis; ii) to propose concrete measures to be put in place as part of this strategy, including exchange and cooperation programmes; iii) to facilitate economic and social stakeholders' ownership of and participation in measures coming under the strategy; iv) to exchange information and good practice between members of the network; v) to help consolidate the capacities of economic and social stakeholders and help them achieve their objectives; and vi) to put development projects in place together as part of the EU-Africa joint strategy;
4. undertake, to this end, to maintain regular communication and collaboration and to put forward recommendations to political bodies and economic and social stakeholders;

5. consider that their cooperation should cover subjects such as those set out in the joint strategy and its action plans, including and in particular: democratic governance and gender equality; preservation of the peace and conflict prevention; trade and economic cooperation; the fight against poverty and social inclusion, sustainable management of natural resources; migration, mobility and employment; and steps to rebuild countries after conflicts;
6. request that the upcoming summit of EU and African heads of state and government take note of economic and social stakeholders' will to cooperate. In this connection, the 2014-2017 joint strategy action plan should confirm the creation of the economic and social stakeholders' network and the much needed contribution it makes to the EU-Africa strategy. The role of the EESC, in partnership with the relevant organisations and institutions in the EU and Africa, could be to facilitate EU-African economic and social interest groups' participation here.

On youth employment

7. note that employment represents a challenge for both Europe and Africa. With 200 million people between the ages of 15 and 24, Africa has the youngest population of all the continents. Moreover, for every ten people without jobs, six are young people. Likewise, the unemployment rate in Europe is 2.6 times higher amongst young people;
8. point out that the difficulties that such large numbers of young people encounter in finding decent jobs could become a source of social and political instability;
9. call for the employment issue, particularly youth employment, to be included in the priorities for cooperation between Europe and Africa;
10. underline the importance of securing inclusive economic growth, also by capitalising on the opportunities offered by a solidarity-based, social economy. In this connection, they would urge that the economic growth model prevailing in Africa for many years, to a great extent based on the export of raw materials such as minerals, hydrocarbons and agricultural products, shift towards the introduction of value added in order to create more decent jobs on the continent;
11. recommend that every country guarantee universal basic education and give priority to improving the vocational training system. Synergies between the education system and the labour market also need to be created. Partnerships between businesses and educational and training establishments ought to be strengthened when preparing programmes and anticipating needs. Given the importance of agriculture for employment, specific vocational training programmes aimed at young farmers, as part of integrated rural development policies, should be stepped up;

12. stress the importance of every country having social protection policies which allow families to educate their children without jeopardising their ability to support the rest of their family's needs;
13. highlight the fact that an active labour market policy which encourages jobseekers and people in employment to undertake lifelong learning helps to boost vocational and geographical mobility and thus creates more employment opportunities. Moreover, opportunities should be developed for encouraging self-employment amongst young people, as well as their capacity to set up small businesses;
14. point out that the business climate has to be improved to help boost production and investment, as well as contribute to the emergence of competitive businesses at three levels: national, regional and international. Here, what is needed is to simplify and support the process of setting up and managing firms, by reducing bureaucratic hurdles and facilitating young people's access to factors of production and financing;
15. note that good governance and the fight against corruption are essential conditions for improving the business climate and for ensuring that everyone has equal access to basic public services. The fight against corruption must take account of shared responsibility, between those who corrupt and those who allow themselves to be made corrupt. In this connection, any financial aid should be subject to its use being traceable.

On food security

16. note that food insecurity and food shortages are rife in some African regions. Moreover, the population of this continent is set to continue to grow in the future, while the relative number of farmers will dwindle due to migration towards towns and cities;
17. reiterate the topical nature of the commitments made by the African Union in the 2003 Maputo Declaration and welcome the fact that the African Union has declared 2014 the Year of Agriculture and Food Security in Africa and that the United Nations has declared it the International Year of Family Farming. The stakeholders ask that agricultural resilience, food safety and security, and nutrition be made priorities in the EU-Africa 2014-2017 joint strategy action plan, and that the necessary funds be allocated for this;
18. consider that the measures to be taken correspond to several priorities:
 - 18.1 encouraging the recognition of farmer status and endorsing efforts to structure and strengthen the capacities of farming organisations and cooperatives, making sure that these parties are consulted when agricultural policies are being devised and that they are involved in the implementation thereof, including proper management of land ownership issues and the phenomenon of land grabbing. Likewise, the role and leadership of women in farming communities must be recognised;

- 18.2 promoting higher incomes amongst farmers, inter alia through additional investment, innovation and access to knowledge and to production factors, emphasising a fair distribution of value added in the production chain;
- 18.3 boosting productivity in farming, while using fewer inputs, so as to reduce dependency on fossil fuels, in particular by practising sustainable farming and better varietal selection based on indigenous species. In this connection, special attention should be paid to public research and local knowledge;
- 18.4 reducing the volatility of farm prices by means of public policies and systems developed internationally;
- 18.5 putting in place early warning and rapid response mechanisms, as well as risk management mechanisms, making it possible to cope with the various shocks triggered by natural disasters and man-made catastrophes;
- 18.6 improving storage, manufacturing and transportation facilities so as to minimise losses after production and to improve food safety and marketing on local, regional and international markets, thereby increasing farming families' revenues;
- 18.7 strengthening policies and structures for monitoring quality in the production, processing and marketing of foodstuffs;
19. at international level, recommend that the EU and Africa build the principles of the right to food into their common trade practices and launch concerted action within the WTO to ensure that these principles become an integral part of trade policies.

On social protection systems

20. note that promising initiatives have been launched (such as the national health insurance scheme in Ghana in 2005, as well as different schemes in a number of other African countries), but would point out that in Africa, access to social protection systems remains difficult in many countries. The stakeholders maintain that the development of such systems is not a luxury reserved for the developed countries, but a human right and a means of securing national solidarity, backed up by adequate resources;
21. deem social protection to be an investment contributing to wealth creation conducive to social cohesion and inclusive development. It increases access to public services, provides risk management tools, promotes income and population stability and stimulates demand, acts as a macro-economic stabiliser, reduces inequalities and strengthens the link between generations;

22. call for social security schemes to be set up in every country, which would benefit the whole population. Special attention should be paid to traditional and community forms of social protection;
23. urge that account be taken of the particular nature of the informal economy, widespread in Africa, defined by an absence of legal and social protection, low and irregular income, difficulties accessing credit, job insecurity, failure to abide by health and safety standards, poor social solidarity in relation to disabled and elderly people, unsuitable social services and inadequate labour market institutions;
24. recommend that the informal economy be gradually incorporated into the public and private sectors. This move must seek to turn informal enterprises into viable businesses which are integrated into the formal economy; it needs to be accompanied both by steps to strengthen the social partners and by social dialogue, and also entails - amongst other things - simplifying administrative procedures for setting up businesses, promoting international labour standards and facilitating access to loans;
25. point out that in Africa, the social economy is a deep-rooted part of traditional systems of mutual support and collective and community enterprise, which often become cooperative enterprises. The stakeholders call on European and African authorities to recognise the contribution made by social economy players - including cooperatives - to eradicating poverty, building up sustainable local development and promoting decent work, and they would urge them to include the social economy and cooperatives in the EU-Africa 2014-2017 action plan;
26. insist that civil society organisations play a part in defining, devising and supervising social protection programmes and strategies, as well as in the advisory and management bodies of social protection institutions providing contributory or non-contributory benefits. To this end, provision should be made for programmes to boost institutional capacity.