

Just, sustainable and resilient food systems:

Some considerations for the
African Union (AU) - European Union
(EU) partnership

Bahá'í International Community

Addis Ababa and Brussels Offices

The Addis Ababa and Brussels Offices of the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) offer the following initial considerations for the development of sustainable, just, and resilient food systems in the context of the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) Partnership. The bedrock of these considerations is that the nature of the relationship established between the AU and the EU allows both continents to prosper, and ensures that none is an object exploited for the advantage of the other.

Addressing systemic challenges in the global food order by giving attention to underlying principles and assumptions

A food system that is sustainable, non-exploitative, and able to provide for the entirety of the global population will need current discussions to rise above concern for immediate causes of food insecurity and address systemic challenges in the global food order. This will require not simply the application of new technology or superficial adjustments to make current processes more sustainable, but also giving attention to the principles and assumptions underlying agricultural practice and policy from the local to the international level.

Reassessing the concept of prosperity and development

One assumption in need of reevaluation relates to the nature of true prosperity and development. What true prosperity entails needs to be revisited in light of insights gained from current and past crises, and humanity's advancement in many areas of knowledge and experience. It is not enough to simply make minor modifications to the existing global order, and hope for fundamentally different results. Thought therefore needs to be given to how the AU, the EU and individual Members States can work towards a system which does not promote the unfettered pursuit of narrowly-defined economic growth, uncompromising competition between regions and nations, limited conceptions of efficiency, and high levels of consumption, but rather becomes a model for sustainable progress which provides for the wellbeing of all.



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Understanding the impact of the historical relationship between both continents

Another area for re-examination concerns the history of the relationship between the two continents. Beyond acknowledging historical injustices, it is important to understand why and how shortcomings in the existing global food order have developed in such a way that, for example, Africa is reliant on food imports despite being rich in agricultural resources. Ongoing reflection on this question will allow insights to emerge that can increasingly inform the design of new models of agricultural production and distribution, and inform the attitudes and approaches used in developing them.

Considering the impact of EU initiatives beyond Europe's borders

The tightly interconnected history and current realities of both continents means that policies and decisions implemented in one, such as trade agreements, the setting of standards, and consumption choices made, are invariably linked and affected by those in the other. Given the impact of the European Union's policies on other continents, any initiative should be designed and assessed with consideration of its impact on farmers, rural communities, and economies beyond Europe's borders.

Recognizing the importance of multi-directional knowledge flows

Efforts to reform the global food system must begin with the recognition that no single set of actors and no individual continent possesses all the insights necessary to place the global food system on a firm foundation. This requires ensuring that one partner is not considered to possess all the solutions to the problems of the other. This implies a change in the flow of knowledge between the two continents - not simply transferred from one place to another, but rather multi-directionally exchanged as stakeholders on both continents are seen as capable of contributing to the generation and application of knowledge relevant to the design of food systems. Additionally, the conception of the kind of knowledge required to make the partnership fruitful needs to be broadened to include local and grassroots knowledge as an invaluable source of insight.

Moving towards meaningful participation

Consequently, thought needs to be given to spaces and mechanisms for participation and engagement on the topic at all levels of African and European society. However, widening participation must be understood not merely as a symbolic listening exercise nor as an act of negotiation aimed at producing a tolerable consensus, but rather as a collective investigation into what sustainable food systems entail, a thorough exploration in which all meaningfully engage and to which all contribute.



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