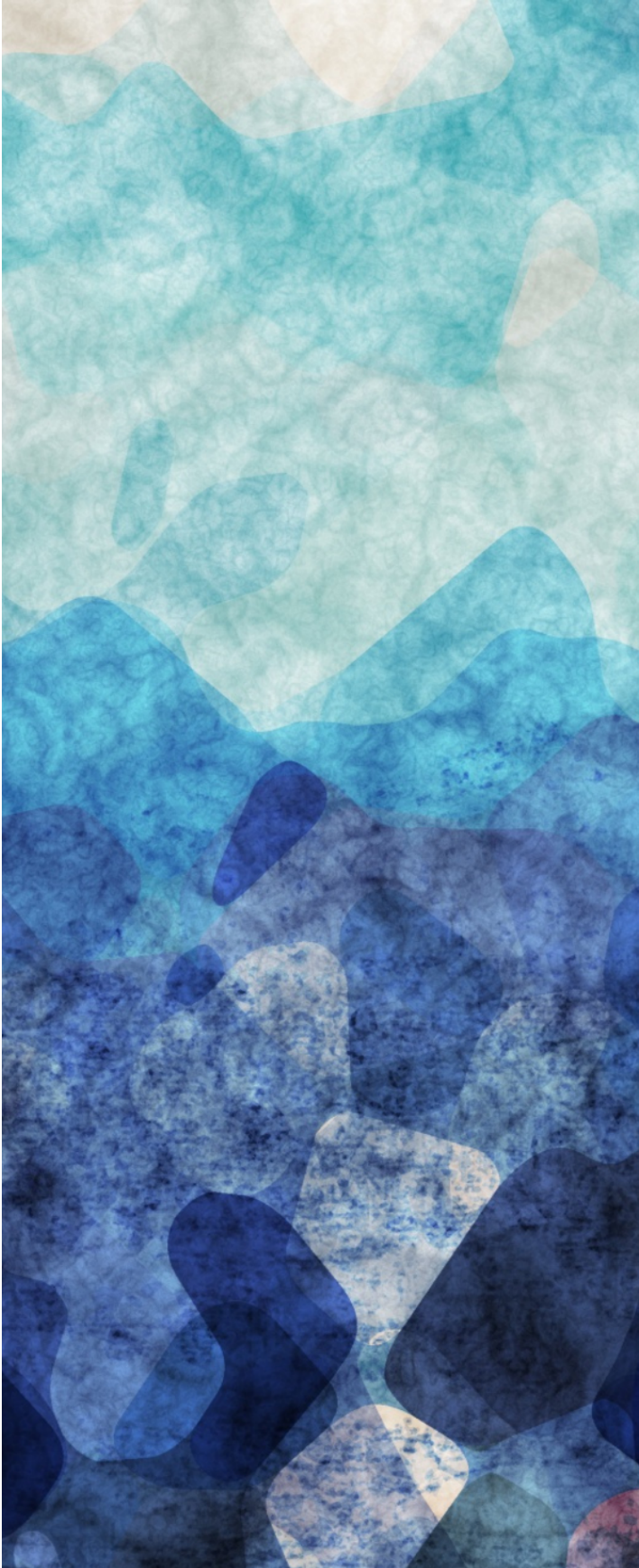


REFLECTING ON THE AFRICA- EUROPE PARTNERSHIP

A summary of insights
and suggestions from a
dialogue series

Over the last year, the Brussels Office of the Baha'i International Community (BIC) hosted a series of informal roundtable discussions to explore how the Africa-Europe partnership can become a source of wellbeing for both continents. Several civil society organizations and academics joined us to share their thoughts in an open and reflective conversation that sought to delve into the underlying dynamics of the partnership. Our aim was for the discussions to serve as a sounding board for participants to learn from each other and to reflect on their work, as well as to contribute to policy conversations on how to shape the partnership. Some of the points that emerged from these sessions are summarized below:



Beyond a change in narrative

Over the years, the narrative of the partnership has shifted to a “partnership of equals”, highlighted once more during the African Union (AU) - European Union (EU) Summit in February 2022. Translating this narrative into concrete actions will take time and effort at many levels. As a first step, our conversations have identified how the underlying assumptions and foundational elements of the relationship between both continents need to be revisited to give way to meaningful interactions.



Interconnectedness of both continents

At the core of the partnership should be the recognition that Africa and Europe are inextricably linked. Beyond a mere practical consequence of the process of globalization, this interconnectedness is the manifestation of the oneness of humanity. It implies that the very foundation of each continent's wellbeing is dependent upon, and inevitably bound up with that of the other. Further, it beckons both regions to consider how to purposefully organize their affairs in full consciousness of each other as being one.

Paradigm of prosperity

One assumption in need of reevaluation is that of prosperity and development. What true prosperity entails needs to be revisited in light of new realities, insights gained from current and past crises, and humanity's advancement in many areas of knowledge and experience. This requires the recognition that all regions of the world are on a common path of learning, with no region yet to have perfected a paradigm of prosperity that is sustainable and furthers global justice.

Acknowledging the history of the partnership

The ability of the partnership to break away from unfitting models of engagement and to offer solutions to the challenges faced by both continents will partly depend on the extent to which the historical context and current dynamics of the relationship are understood. This allows for lessons learned to be incorporated into the development of new models of engagement.



Due emphasis on rural dimensions

While the partnership appropriately identifies peace, digitalisation, health, mobility, investment, and education as central themes to focus on for the progress of both continents, the rural reality of many communities, especially in Africa, should be given due attention. A core aspect of this rural reality is agricultural activity. Recent events have shed light on the frailty of our food systems and its shortcomings in sustainably caring for all. Topics related to agriculture and the sustainability of food systems should

therefore be essential elements of the partnership, so that the partnership can benefit all of society, without prioritizing any group.



Coherence in all its dimensions

The partnership should be conceived in its totality, beyond just investment strategies or the flow of financial and technical assistance. Policies pursued by each continent or country in areas such as agriculture, migration, development, trade, and finance, should be consistent with the aims and provisions of the partnership. The partnership should not just be conceptualized as a series of arrangements, but rather as a holistic engagement between Africa and Europe.



Understanding realities

A meaningful partnership is based on a sound understanding of one another's reality. Acknowledging the experiences of one another forms a helpful basis for knowing each other's capacities, perspectives and social context. This genuine, mutual understanding of one another's realities engenders attitudes of engagement characterized by qualities such as respect, humility, reciprocity, and trust.

Broadening the bases of knowledge

Going beyond the rhetoric of an equal partnership implies being able to see one another as a source of knowledge and as capable of resolving joint crises. This requires ensuring that one side of the partnership is not considered as holding the solutions to the problems of the other. It also implies a change in the flow of knowledge. Knowledge is not simply transferred from one place to another; all those concerned contribute to its generation. Further, our conception of the kind of knowledge required to make the partnership fruitful needs to be broadened to include local knowledge as a source of insight.

Incorporating experience from the grassroots

One way to better grasp the reality of a continent is to become acquainted with the experience of those at the grassroots. They are the ones who hold the necessary insights into their immediate socioeconomic and cultural reality, and can identify short and long term needs. More thought needs to be given to how this experience can be incorporated into the design and the evaluation of policies, as well as in the reflective conversations on more fundamental aspects of the partnership.

Including the aspirations of youth

Amongst the diverse groups at the grassroots, young people have an irreplaceable role in contributing to processes dedicated to the betterment of their communities. This implies a need to go beyond merely extending them invitations to existing spaces. The contributions of youth need to be regarded as invaluable and arrangements that empower youth and tap into their true potential require careful consideration.

Ongoing conversations

The inherent complexity of the partnership, evident in all the aspects mentioned above, implies that an ongoing and meaningful conversation between all actors involved needs to be established. From the grassroots to the policy world, conversations should not be limited to one-off events - an established mechanism for ongoing engagement is required. In this way, relationships are built, new insights incorporated, different policies are revisited over time and a common vision of the partnership's aims can be gradually refined.

We extend our gratitude to all those organizations who joined us in these rich conversations and look forward to continuing the dialogue on other related topics and with others willing to join us.