

V3: 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 have 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 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 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: all those concerned contribute to the generation of knowledge. Knowledge is not simply transferred from one place to another. 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.

Role of Civil Society Organizations (CSO): °1

[PREVIOUS: CSOs in both continents can act as ‘bridge builders’, assisting in closing the gap between principles and practice, between different levels of society (especially the grassroots and the policy levels), between member states and regional institutions, between broader abstract notions of the partnership and technical thematic areas, and between the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the needs of the future. In an increasingly interconnected and complex world, these bridges are key for global partnerships, but their value needs to be recognised.]

V2: Reflecting on the Africa-Europe Partnership

Over the last year the Brussels Office of the Baha’i International Community (BIC) has hosted a series of informal roundtable discussions to reflect on different aspects of the Africa-Europe Partnership. Several civil society organizations and academics have joined us in our offices to share their thoughts in an open and reflective space that seeks to delve more deeply into the underlying dynamics of the partnership. Our aim was for the space to serve as a thinking board for those who attended to reflect on their work, as well as to contribute to ongoing conversations on how to fundamentally change the partnership so that it becomes a source of wellbeing for both continents. Some of the points that have emerged from the previous sessions are summarized below:

Beyond a change in narrative: The narrative of the partnership has improved over the years at the level of language, particularly shifting during the African Union (AU) - European Union (EU) Summit in February 2022 as leaders called for a “partnership of equals”. While the change is welcomed and a positive step forward, (‘it has proven difficult’ or ‘policymakers are still exploring/learning about how’) to concretely reflect this new outlook in consequent decisions and actions. Nonetheless, building such a partnership, unprecedented in global history, will take time and effort at many levels. Thus, changes in narrative and language need to be accompanied by deeply examining the underlying assumptions and foundational elements of the relationship so that it can be changed from its core and give way to a meaningful partnership.

Understanding realities: A meaningful partnership is based on a thorough understanding of each other’s reality. Beyond acknowledging the experiences of one another, getting to know each other’s capacities and becoming acquainted with each other’s perspective are also important for developing an understanding which can foster fitting attitudes and engender qualities such as respect, humility, reciprocity, and trust.

Incorporating the experiences of the grassroots: The experiences of those at the grassroots are a crucial element of this understanding. More thought needs to be given to how these are incorporated beyond the presence of representational bodies, both in the design and the evaluation of policies, as well as in the reflective conversations on more fundamental aspects of the partnership. Increased understanding about the challenges of a particular place can only be gained through including those who have insights into their immediate socioeconomic reality, appreciate cultural dynamics, and are able to identify and draw on

existing local networks. Enabling environments that allow communities to generate this self-knowledge is a prior step to this inclusion.

Role of Civil Society Organizations (CSO): CSOs in both continents can act as ‘bridge builders’, assisting in closing the gap between principles and practice, between different levels of society (especially the grassroots and the higher levels of policy), between member states and regional institutions, between broader abstract notions of the partnership and technical thematic areas, and between the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the needs of the future. In an increasingly interconnected, complex, and conscious world, these bridges are key for global partnerships, but their value needs to be recognised.

Broadening the bases of knowledge: Going beyond the rhetoric of an equal partnership implies being able to see each other as a source of knowledge to solve joint crises. The current posture is one in which one side is seen as holding all the answers to the problems of the other. That one continent has all the answers is an example of one of the flawed assumptions permeating the partnership which needs to be revisited. Further, a conception of the knowledge needed for the partnership to be fruitful which is limited to only sophisticated academic forms needs to give way to other forms of knowledge which institutions may be less familiar with and which predominate local areas.

Coherence in all its dimensions: The partnership should be conceived in its totality, beyond just the Global Gateway initiative. Equating the partnership to this investment strategy narrows a rich historic relationship to financial instruments and material investments. The intangible aspects of the partnership are important constituents of it too, including the way policy is made in each continent with considerations of the other, the kind of cooperation that takes place, the communication between the two, and other relational aspects. These different dimensions of a complex relationship require coherence in their aim and approach with more formal policy instruments such as the Africa-Europe Strategy, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation instrument (NDICI), the presence of delegations in each other’s territory, and committees such as the African Caribbean Pacific (ACP) States - EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly. Within the EU, coherence between member states and EU institutions, as well as within institutions (such as amongst ministers of foreign affairs with those of development, environment, finance and agriculture), is also necessary for an impactful role in the partnership.

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Paradigm of prosperity: Another example of an assumption to reevaluate is that of prosperity and development. Replicating aspects of European society in a different context is not helpful and what it means to truly prosper will take a different shape than what it did in the past in light of new realities, crises, and humanity’s advancement in many areas of knowledge and experience. Eventually, as

conversations such as these take place and efforts are made, a new order will replace the current one which stands at the heart of many of the challenges society faces and which is increasingly recognised to be in need of change. Honest conversations about it, however, are a practical starting point towards this long-term end.

Ongoing conversations: Ongoing dialogue protects against conversations that remain at the superficial level and from the tendency for these to take the shape of once-off events in which meaningful relationships are difficult to build. Continuing conversations with actors at all levels might sound simplistic and ineffective on the surface, but there is value in dialogue that helps build common understanding among many and which sheds light on the different perspectives to be considered when reading the reality of a situation. Further, ongoing conversations can give momentum to change at the level of principle and norms.

~~**A change in policy culture:** While several formal spaces have been created for discussion on the partnership, exploring the assumptions, attitudes, behaviors, and postures underlying it requires conversations of a more reflective nature taking place at all levels. Recognizing the value of such conversations and thinking about how they can be meaningful spaces of mutual learning implies a shift in the culture of policymaking. Being comfortable with complexity and more abstract conversations which are not limited by the requirement of immediate technical solutions is part of such a change. It is widely recognized that a change is needed at the structural level, but transformative shifts also happen at the cultural level. While hierarchies and other forms of organization are in need of modification, assumptions of each other and of the world also need to simultaneously change and give rise to new interactions. Agreeing on a frame of engagement is a cross-cutting element as an entry point to shifting dynamics.~~

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V1 : Reflecting on the Africa-Europe Partnership - original

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Beyond a change in narrative: The narrative of the partnership has improved over the years at the level of language, particularly shifting during the African Union (AU) - European Union (EU) Summit in February 2022 as leaders called for a “partnership of equals”. While the change is welcomed and a positive step forward, action and decisions that have followed have not fully reflected this fundamentally new outlook. Nonetheless, building such a partnership will take time and effort at many levels given that it is unprecedented in global history. Thus, there is a need to deeply examine the underlying assumptions

and foundational elements of the relationship so that it can be changed from its core and give way to a meaningful partnership.

Understanding realities: A meaningful partnership is based on a thorough understanding of each other's reality. Beyond acknowledging the experiences of one another, getting to know each other's capacities and becoming acquainted with each other's perspective are also important for developing an understanding which can foster appropriate attitudes and engender qualities such as respect, humility, reciprocity, and trust. This starts first with the ability to assess one's own potentialities and limitations.

Incorporating the experiences of the grassroots: The experiences of those at the grassroots are a crucial element of this understanding. More thought needs to be given to how these are incorporated beyond the presence of representational bodies, both in the design and the evaluation of policies, as well as in the reflective conversations of more fundamental aspects of the partnership. Increased understanding about the challenges of a particular place can only be gained through including those who have insights into their immediate socioeconomic reality, appreciate cultural dynamics, and are able to identify and draw on existing local networks.

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Paradigm of prosperity: Another example of an assumption to reevaluate is that of prosperity and development. Replicating aspects of European society in a different context is not helpful and what it means to truly prosper will take a different shape, look, and approach than what it did in the past in light of new realities, crises, and humanity's advancement in many areas of knowledge and experience. Eventually, as conversations such as these happen and efforts are made, a new structure and order will replace the current one which stands at the heart of many of the issues and which is increasingly recognised to be in need of change. The honest conversations about it, however, are a practical starting point towards this end.

Ongoing conversations: There is a need to continue having these types of conversations with many actors, including policymakers, in order to continuously reflect on the impact of the partnership as a whole as well as the unfoldment of its narrative in both language and practice. If conversations are not ongoing, they stay at the superficial level and tend to take the shape of once-off events in which meaningful relationships are difficult to build. Simply continuing conversations with actors at all levels might sound simplistic and ineffective on the surface, but there is value in dialogue that helps build common understanding among many and which sheds light on different perspectives to be considered when reading the reality of a situation. Ongoing conversations can give momentum to change at the level of principle and norms.

A change in policy culture: While several formal spaces have been created for discussion on the partnership, exploring the assumptions, attitudes, behaviors, and postures underlying it requires conversations of a more reflective nature taking place at all levels. Recognizing the value of such conversations and thinking about how they can be meaningful spaces of mutual learning implies a shift in the culture of policymaking. Being comfortable with complexity and more abstract conversations which are not limited by the requirement of immediate technical solutions is part of such a change. It is widely recognized that a change is needed at the structural level, but transformative shifts also happen at the cultural level. While hierarchies and other forms of organization are in need of modification, assumptions of each other and of the world also need to simultaneously change and give rise to new interactions. Agreeing on a frame of engagement is a cross-cutting element as an entry point to shifting dynamics.