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PRESS RELEASE

African Union and European Union step up digital cooperation for Sustainable Development in Africa following EU-AU Summit

Addis Ababa/Brussels, - Digital cooperation is a cornerstone of the AU-EU strategic partnership. This was underlined by representatives from the European Union and the African Union on 18 March 2022 at the Africa-Europe Digital for Development (D4D) Hub Multi-Stakeholder Forum with a theme “Digital Transformation for Sustainable Development in Africa”. The event, which took place virtually, was co-hosted by the African Union Commission and the European Commission with the aim of promoting exchanges and collaboration with private sector, enterprises, civil society organisations, and experts in the digital field from both continents.

Dr Amani Abou-Zeid, AU Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy, highlighted Africa’s Digital Transformation journey and said “The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the importance of digital technologies, data and innovation to keep our businesses, healthcare, education and public services running among others. These exceptional times have also shown the urgency to invest in secured and affordable Africa's digital infrastructure, digital skill, digital identity, data management and build on Africa’s innovation potential and entrepreneurship. The African Union welcomes the enhanced partnership with the European Union that is based on respect, transparency, equal opportunity, win-win approach and agreed tangible outcome and further engagement with African and European stakeholders to accelerate the digital transformation of our continent.”

Ms Jutta Urpilainen, EU Commissioner for International Partnerships said: “Today we kicked off a much-needed dialogue with our private sector and civil society partners in Africa and Europe on how to build a shared digital future that leaves no one behind.

The EU is committed to scale up investments, support innovation, and uphold digital rights. Bridging the digital divides, particularly those based on gender and income, is key for inclusive sustainable development and to fight inequalities. To achieve this, we must work in close collaboration with all the stakeholders of the digital ecosystem.”

The Africa-Europe D4D Hub Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Digital Transformation for Sustainable Development in Africa was held one month after the 6th European Union –African Union Summit, where leaders from both continents announced a EUR 150 billion [Africa-Europe Investment Package](#), which amongst other priorities aims to accelerate Africa’s sustainable digital transformation. This ambition aligns with the EU Global Gateway, a strategy set out to boost smart, clean, and secure investments in connectivity, and the AU Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa 2020 - 2030, which aims to transform Africa’s economies and societies by harnessing digital technologies, the potential of data and innovation for the benefit of people. It also supports the 35th AU Summit held from 5 to 6 February 2022 which called for the acceleration Africa’s quality infrastructure development.

As reportedly only 33 % of African people use the Internet, compared to a world average of 63 %, closing the digital divide and connecting the unconnected meaningfully has become a top priority in AU-EU relations. Joint efforts are particularly needed to ensure that women, rural populations, and youth reap the benefits of the digital transformation.

A safe, sustainable, and inclusive digital transformation holds a great potential to support a green recovery and a more resilient economy. The AU-EU digital partnership can help address the pressing need to expand and deepen regional value chains and harmonise policies, legislation, and regulations, as well as safeguarding data sovereignty.

Participants at the forum also stressed the need to invest in digital skill so as to exploit the potential of digital innovation for decent job creation in the digital world. With 70% of Africa’s population under the age of 30, digital entrepreneurship offers untapped opportunities for youth. Best practices were identified to steer multi-stakeholder collaborations for digital skills development and support of local innovation ecosystems.

Background

The African Union and the European Union have jointly agreed on the importance of digital technologies, data and innovations as drivers for inclusive job creation and sustainable development. In December 2018, both parties launched the EU-AU Digital Economy Task Force aimed at identifying concrete policy recommendations and proposing concrete actions to address the principal barriers and increase cooperation in the digital field. The recommendations of the Task Force are mirrored in the AU Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa 2020 - 2030, and have guided the design of cooperation projects funded by the EU and its Member States, such as the AU-EU D4D Hub.

For more information

[The Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa \(2020-2030\)](#)

[Africa-Europe Global Gateway Investment Package](#)

[6th European Union – African Union Summit: A Joint Vision for 2030](#)

[D4D Hub launched to help shape a fair digital future across the globe](#)

[AU-EU Digital for Development \(D4D\) Hub: Shaping a joint digital future](#)

[Report of the EU-AU Digital Economy Task Force](#)

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