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Date

14 July 2022

Subject

Urgent need for a new Dutch strategy on Africa

Dear Ministers,

On the threshold of the 21st century, the then South African vice president and later president Thabo Mbeki gave his famous speech 'I am an African'.¹ While conscious of the pain of conflicts in Liberia, Sudan, Somalia, Burundi and Algeria, of the continuing shadow of poverty, and of the immoral past with its denial of black people's human dignity, he nevertheless struck a hopeful note: 'Whatever the setbacks of the moment, nothing can stop us now. Whatever the difficulties, Africa shall be at peace.' Once president, he dubbed the 21st century 'the African century',² predicting that a young, rapidly growing population would move Africa from the periphery to the centre of the world.

Now, over 25 years on, international interest in Africa has indeed soared. China is investing billions in Africa, especially in infrastructure, mining and energy. Russia is extremely active in a number of African countries – including in the political and military spheres, promoting autocracy as a weapon against terrorism.³ In recent years, Turkey has opened 40 new consulates in Africa and a military base in Sudan. However, this international focus has done nothing to reduce poverty or improve living conditions across the continent. Development is impeded by a huge burden of debt. Moreover, the number of African countries embroiled in conflicts has increased. Many are also beset by corruption and democratic backsliding (in some cases as a result of coups d'état), all of which tends to undermine the state.

In view of all these trends, both the Netherlands and the rest of Europe need to reorient their policies on Africa. The AIV firmly believes that European and African countries have a great deal to gain from closer collaboration. Africa is our neighbour, and we need to state explicitly how we seek to relate both to the continent as a whole and to the individual countries comprising it.





The 2021-2025 Coalition Agreement announced a new strategy on Africa: 'We will also formulate a dedicated Africa strategy, aimed at encouraging economic development founded on equality, reducing poverty, improving respect for human rights and limiting irregular migration.'⁴ Through this advisory letter – which builds on earlier advisory reports by the AIV⁵ – the AIV seeks to contribute to the development of a credible, robust strategy on Africa. In the view of the AIV, such a strategy can only be successful if it centres on the complementary and converging interests of the two continents.

Identifying those interests is by no means simple, however. The two continents do have a shared history, but it is precisely that colonial history that perpetuates inequality. This starting point and its attendant constraints must be acknowledged in any strategy based on shared interests. Yet identifying complementary and shared interests is no simple task, partly because of the huge diversity of both continents. Africa is home to 54 sovereign states, numerous regional partnerships and diverse ethnic and religious groups – each with its own history and culture, and specific socioeconomic, financial, ecological, demographic and political challenges. Europe, which from a geographical and cultural-historical perspective comprises around 50 states, 27 of which are members of the European Union, is also marked by division – though rising international tensions are resulting in greater awareness of mutual dependence and a sense of solidarity.

In an era of aggressive competition between global powers, the territorial proximity of Africa and Europe makes a focus on complementary and shared interests urgent. Thanks to this proximity, benefits can be reaped from explicitly coordinating policy in a wide range of spheres: promoting peace, security, livelihood security and development opportunities for people on both continents; strengthening the rule of law, respect for human rights and democracy; and combating terrorism, disrupting the business model of people smugglers and combating international drug-related crime. Within both Europe and Africa, however, continental self-awareness is too limited to leave collaboration purely to the European Union and the African Union. That provides scope for bilateral cooperation and smart coalitions, and invests them with potential. To provide true added value, however, a strategy must have a granular focus rather than focusing on Africa and Europe as whole continents: it needs to zoom in, targeting specific regions and sectors.

The questions that the AIV seeks to answer in this advisory letter are:

How can we formulate complementary and shared interests for Europe and Africa in the current geopolitical context? What are the strategic consequences and priorities for the Netherlands of giving those interests a more central place?

The AIV believes that the starting point of a new Africa strategy cannot be a projection of Dutch or European interests onto Africa. Quite the contrary. This advisory letter is a plea for a Dutch – and by extension European – strategy on Africa which seeks to tie in with African needs and wishes, against the backdrop of the current geopolitical context and with due regard for Dutch and European interests. In this way, European and African countries can jointly formulate shared interests so as to withstand the turbulence of an increasingly grim reality. In this way, an equal relationship can be shaped – a relationship that has often been advocated, but has not yet been given concrete form.



1. Dutch and European starting point



In its relations with Africa the Netherlands has traditionally emphasised development cooperation. Every aspect of those relations was seen as the responsibility of the development minister, and any involvement with Africa was funded from the development budget. All previous Africa strategies had this focus. In the last 20 years or so, however, two major trends have emerged. On the one hand, the goal of poverty reduction has of late been linked ever more specifically to boosting Dutch earning power ('aid and trade'). On the other, there has been a dawning realisation that the relationship with Africa cannot solely be defined in terms of development cooperation, and that a pragmatic approach to the current reality requires a focus on such issues as conflict, security, religious terrorism and criminal business models (as they relate to, for example, migration and people smuggling). Both trends have sparked a considerable increase in the number of state and non-state actors active in these areas, and in Dutch contributions to peacekeeping missions on the African continent. The Dutch approach had certainly sought to be coherent, in the sense that the Netherlands recognises the need to rectify policies that proved harmful to developing countries. In practice, however, this has not always resulted in consistent efforts to achieve such coherence.

The most recent policy document on foreign trade and development cooperation already provides a first step towards the shaping of the announced Africa strategy: 'In this integrated strategy, the Netherlands will set out its activities in Africa, coherently elaborating its aims in the fields of diplomacy, development cooperation, security and trade. Relevant factors in this context include achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, promoting Dutch interests and enhancing regional stability. Equal partnerships and the reciprocity they entail will play an important role in this process.'⁶ In addition, the policy document specifically mentions the need to increase European access to scarce raw materials.

Dutch policy on Africa is closely linked to EU policy. The EU, too, has moved away from its traditional relationship with Africa based on development cooperation and now emphasises the need for partnerships to achieve shared interests. In February 2022, EU and AU leaders agreed on a joint vision for a renewed partnership. The aims of the partnership are solidarity, security, peace, and sustainable and sustained economic development and prosperity for the citizens of the two Unions, bringing together people, regions and organisations.⁷

2. Africa in an era of competition between global powers

2.1 Africa has changed

Since the publication of previous policy documents and strategies, the continent of Africa has changed greatly, due to a number of factors. Firstly, the role and position of Europe in Africa has been eroded, partly because of other regional and global players entering the stage, partly because of sensitivities about and the debate on decolonisation. Secondly, Africa has remained very much trapped in the traditional international division of labour. As a result, a rapidly growing population has little prospect of employment – to say nothing of high-quality employment – and the African business sector cannot really get off the ground in the formal economy, cannot make a profit and thus cannot pay tax and contribute to sustainable economic growth and combating inequality. The current politicisation of international economic relations makes Africa's situation extra vulnerable.



Thirdly, the role of many African states is being weakened by armed conflict, religious and other types of terrorism, coups, democratic backsliding, corruption and 'Big Man politics'. Insufficient attention has been paid to a new generation of youth and women's movements – like those in Sudan – demanding changes to governance and international relations. All this means that in every partnership continual vigilance is needed regarding the choice of partners. Fourthly – and this is closely connected to the above-mentioned factors – the African continent is extremely fragile with regard to climate issues and livelihood security. The COVID-19 pandemic has also dealt a blow to Africa's development, and the number of poor has increased rapidly, as described in recent World Bank reports.

2.2 The influence of global and regional powers

African and European reality is influenced by the geopolitical development of global and regional superpowers. The Dutch government acknowledged this in its Coalition Agreement, stating that it took geopolitics seriously: 'We live in a world of instability and shifting power dynamics in the regions surrounding Europe. As a result of the positions taken by countries like China and Russia, and the US pivot to Asia, we must be more active in protecting our freedom, security and prosperity. We face major global challenges, such as climate change, the fight against the pandemic, migration, the demands of economic recovery and inequality. The international legal order, human rights and vulnerable groups are also under greater pressure. All these challenges demand a leading role by the Kingdom of the Netherlands and a strong, decisive EU.'⁸

This geopolitical reality means that national interests and the exercise of power will prevail over the logic of hyper-globalising markets and international law. As the COVID-19 pandemic made painfully clear, long value chains and just-in-time production, tailored for maximum efficiency and profit, make African countries too vulnerable. The same applies, albeit to a lesser extent, to Europe. It has also become clear that initially attractive infrastructure investments by China, aimed at gaining access to markets and raw materials, come at a price – namely the burden of debt and the expectation of political loyalty.

At the same time, global crises and geopolitical competition have sparked a trend towards deglobalisation, in which African and European countries can increasingly join forces to boost their common strategic resilience. This is all the more essential at a time when the multilateral architecture is being eroded. A shared approach to livelihood security in African and European countries, resilience in the face of the politicisation of international economic ties, and the promotion of a more equitable international economic order are crucial.

Although a geopolitical orientation can derail into crude power politics, the AIV believes that it also provides an opportunity to focus more on shared values and long-term objectives, rather than on turning a quick profit. For instance, both Europe and Africa increasingly stand to gain from shortening supply chains and minimising strategic dependence on China and Russia. The competition between the major powers, as demonstrated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and increasing tensions between America and China in East Asia (with an appreciable risk of armed conflict), can cause major disruptions. The war in Ukraine and Russia's blockade of Ukrainian ports has given rise to huge problems with regard to the food supply, energy and scarce raw materials, and is driving up prices. Europe is learning the lesson that the promise of peace through economic interdependence paradoxically creates vulnerabilities and can even lead to the exploitation of asymmetric dependencies. A geopolitical orientation entails not just strategic resilience in the face of the exercise of power, but also greater territorial self-awareness.⁹

It would be wrong to equate a geopolitical orientation with the outmoded philosophy of spheres of influence. The AIV advocates the development of a shared vision that Africans and Europeans stand for at times of assertiveness and aggression by the major powers. A shared vision must come from two sides, however. Europe cannot unilaterally devise an Africa strategy, nor should it aspire to do so. In addition, the Netherlands and the rest of Europe must take account of growing anti-Western sentiments in Africa. In the wake of colonialism, African elites tended to adopt a pro-Western stance: they had been educated and trained in the West and espoused universal values. However, in many countries this resulted in the rise of African oligarchs who built on long-standing African power relations. Nevertheless, a study cited in a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*¹⁰ shows that a majority of the African population supports values such as democracy, free elections and freedom of speech.

Meanwhile, Beijing and Moscow are sending a clear message to Africa, blaming the West for the current food and energy crises. They point the finger at Western sanctions against Russia, NATO expansion and a global, US-initiated reversion to power blocs divided into democratic and autocratic camps.¹¹ By contrast, China and Russia portray themselves as staunch supporters of Africa and the rest of the global South. In this narrative, Beijing calls for non-intervention in the political systems of other countries and for an alternative economic development model in which democratisation plays no part. Together with Moscow, Beijing advocates a looser definition of democracy and human rights that would encompass their own (dictatorial) systems of governance.¹² They regularly impart this world vision to the leaders and peoples of African countries, for instance during the many visits paid to the continent by President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang, senior diplomat Yang Jiechi and foreign minister Wang Yi. This was also a theme of Vladimir Putin's recent meeting with the chair of the African Union, Senegalese President Macky Sall, and the diplomatic summits that both countries hold with African countries.¹³

There is certainly sympathy in Africa for Beijing and Moscow. When the UN voted to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine, over 15 African countries abstained. When, in July 2019, 22 Western countries condemned the mass internment of Uighurs, 16 African countries signed a counter-declaration in which the camps in Xinjiang were referred to as 'vocational education and training centres' as a result of which 'safety and security has returned to Xinjiang'. China was also commended for its 'remarkable achievements in the field of human rights.'¹⁴ While the French were forced to withdraw from Mali, the Russian Wagner Group stepped in, extending Russia's power into neighbouring countries.

This new geopolitical reality demands a new European action plan and a new and more convincing narrative centring on the complementary and shared interests of the European Union and Africa. The AIV therefore recommends putting this narrative at the core of the new Africa strategy. It is important to realise, in this process, that criticism of Europe is often prompted by the African perception that the West is guilty of applying double standards (for example with regard to refugees) and selective in its invocation of human rights criteria. The AIV distinguishes two vantage points in this regard: first, that of developments in Africa itself, and second, the activities of global and regional powers in the African continent.

3. Complementary and shared interests



On the basis of such a narrative, it is possible to identify a wide range of shared interests between Africa and Europe, including in the humanitarian, economic, technological, and traditional and non-traditional security spheres. On that basis, the AIV suggests various potential forms of collaboration, with the caveat that African countries must first formulate their own interests and that both sides must acknowledge their differing starting positions.

In the political, humanitarian, economic, climate-related and technological spheres, the starting point must be that European and African countries can and should help one another to, if not prevent, at least cope with the shock effects of external geopolitical and geo-economic crises. Examples include the COVID-19 pandemic, current and future crises resulting from the war in Ukraine and a potential future crisis between China and the US and its allies in East Asia. The climate crisis will also cause huge shocks. Global warming is happening faster in Africa than in the rest of the world. Increases in temperature will not only make farming even more difficult, but will also have a great impact on public health; rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns will spark an increase in insect-borne disease.¹⁵

The current food crisis highlights shared interests: Dutch and European interests are not served by irregular migration, and it is to Africa's advantage to prevent famine and political instability – both of which are exacerbated by climate change – and to halt brain drain. There is much diplomatic work to be done in all these areas: it took too long before Africa gained access to vaccines and medical supplies to combat COVID-19, and millions of Africans are deprived of such access to this day.¹⁶ Nor have the pledged climate funds been fully disbursed.

The current geopolitical crises highlight mutual interests in other spheres too: both Europe and Africa wrestle with the need to diversify and shorten supply chains for essential goods and raw materials.¹⁷ African countries can be supported in efforts to boost employment by taking over some of the production processes that currently take place in China and Russia. At the same time, there needs to be a special focus on the raw materials Europe requires for its own industry which are now often sourced from China and Russia, particularly those necessary for the energy transition and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, like semiconductors. Various rare earth metals are mined in Africa, but the vast majority of cobalt mines in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are controlled by Chinese state enterprises like China Molybdenum.¹⁸ The refining of cobalt largely takes place in China. Other rare earth metals like silicon, germanium and gallium are primarily mined in China. As a result, the energy transition and computer chip production in Europe threatens to give rise to a new generation of dependencies on China.

Connectivity is a precondition for productive collaboration between Europe and Africa. European investment must focus on increasing connectivity within and with Africa by investing in the construction of not only physical infrastructure like ports, roads and railways, but also digital infrastructure like telecommunication cables, data centres, glass-fibre networks and online networks. Realigning supply chains to Africa will need to go hand in hand with measures to increase (online) connectivity between Africa and Europe.¹⁹ Europe also needs to invest in infrastructure that promotes climate adaptation, for example by combating drought (for example with irrigation systems) and managing water (for example with dikes or nature-based solutions). Europe should also grant African partners



more equitable and greater access to downstream value creation benefits (like shares in battery production) in exchange for the sustainable use of raw materials.



The fact that Chinese (and Russian) organisations are operating strategically in Africa with government backing gives them considerably more clout. Europe needs to make better use of its own strengths. One way of doing so is by tapping into international capital markets and by mobilising and directing capital flows, for example by supporting public initiatives for blended-finance models and funds geared to activities in Africa in line with Dutch and EU strategic interests. The Netherlands must also increase its contribution to important EU initiatives like the Global Gateway and the European Raw Materials Alliance. Additionally, helping to further consolidate the rule of law will boost economic and other development, as well as attract investment.

With regard to traditional and non-traditional security, European and African countries must jointly strive to prevent crises and other disruptions from occurring in Africa and Europe. To this end, the Netherlands and other European countries must seek to operate jointly as much as possible and share responsibility for peace operations and other activities intended to bolster peace, as well as invest in more inclusive and sustainable peace accords, as for instance in the Sahel. This entails a wider geopolitical perspective: the Russian blockade of Ukrainian ports shows that Russia is prepared to ride roughshod over such principles as the freedom of the seas. Now that Russia and China are collaborating ever more closely and working together, Dutch and European investments are needed to help prevent these two authoritarian powers from tightening their military grip on the African continent (for example by means of naval bases or the Wagner Group). After all, the prosperity of African states depends on unimpeded shipping routes, particularly at choke points like the Suez Canal and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. In addition, Europe must work with African states to counteract disruption by terrorist groups (such as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara in Mali, Boko Haram in Nigeria and al Shabaab in Somalia) and related drugs crime (a large proportion of the drugs entering Europe come from the African continent). While Europe wrestles with extremely violent drug criminals, African countries are also struggling to deal with the disruptive effects of drug-related crime.

The table below gives an overview of European interests, potential African interests (the AIV does not pretend to be able to formulate these for Africa) and opportunities for collaboration. The list is not exhaustive. In the AIV's view, however, it does include some of the most urgent and significant challenges facing Europe and Africa in the coming decades. Special attention is given in this advisory letter to the acute – and probably protracted – food crisis in Africa. This topic is dealt with in greater detail in section 4.



Thema	European interest	Potential African interest	Collaboration
Humanitarian	<p>Humanitarian considerations</p> <p>Combating irregular migration</p>	<p>Humanitarian considerations</p> <p>Preventing famine and instability (both of which are being exacerbated by climate change) and brain drain</p> <p>Creating scope for legal (circular) migration</p>	<p>Short term: Increase food supply</p> <p>Medium term: support agriculture in Africa. Step up contributions to climate-adaptation measures in the field of water management and in response to heat stress. Explore scope for circular migration</p> <p>Long term: See policy recommendations in section on food</p>
Human rights and rule of law	<p>Promoting compliance and fleshing out the terms of international agreements</p> <p>Strengthening internal and international stability, thereby creating geopolitical benefits and making Africa more attractive to European investors</p>	<p>The possibility of dissent ultimately makes a nation stronger and is the best defence against humanitarian injustice</p> <p>Economic development benefits from the proper functioning of the rule of law</p>	<p>Support 'new' actors (including youth and women's movements), both with a view to supporting initiatives that strengthen the rule of law and because of the wider importance of such movements; and provide targeted support for human rights defenders</p>
Conditions for economic growth	<p>Making regional supply chains more robust at times of intense competition between major powers, pandemics</p>	<p>Increasing employment</p>	<p>European contribution to the development of physical, social and institutional infrastructure (such as ports, roads and railways, and strengthening of the rule of law). See for example the Global Gateway Initiative</p>
Raw materials	<p>Securing supply of scarce raw materials (like cobalt from the DRC) for industry, digitalisation and the energy transition</p>	<p>Ensuring sustainable development and employment, markets for products, combating poverty, expanding and strengthening infrastructure</p>	<p>Strengthen the European Raw Materials Alliance and give African partners a fairer and larger share in activities that create downstream value (like battery production)</p>
Climate	<p>Combating global warming; preventing climate-related migration flows</p>	<p>Preventing pollution; increasing high-tech activities; preventing major instability due to the impact of climate change</p>	<p>Invest in green projects in Africa, with emphasis on climate adaptation</p>

Technological	Gaining access to African internet users for the purpose of fostering commercial services and human interaction	Increasing digitalisation and preventing path dependencies on China	European strategic investment in Africa and digital infrastructure, such as submarine cables, data centres and glass-fibre cables (e.g. by tying in with the Global Gateway Initiative, with emphasis on blended finance initiatives and the EU's connectivity agenda)
Security (traditional)	Combating rivals' ability to amplify the projection of military power (e.g. Chinese and Russian military bases and the Wagner Group)	Lessening dependency on autocracies and maintaining access to free and unimpeded seagoing routes (as in the case of Ukrainian ports)	European strategic investment in African ports (with an emphasis on locations near maritime hubs and choke points like the Suez Canal and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait)
Security (non-traditional)	Reducing the threat posed by terrorist groups to European civilians and the disruption of local economies (e.g. by Boko Haram, al Shabaab and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara)	Preventing political instability and reducing the threat of terrorist attacks on local populations (e.g. by Boko Haram, al Shabaab and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara)	Dutch and European contribution to peace operations and diplomacy, including training and other measures to reinforce security apparatuses relevant to fragile states
Security (non-traditional)	Combating the supply of drugs from Africa and drugs crime and drug-related violence in Europe	Combating drugs crime and addiction problems	European contribution to training and other measures to reinforce security apparatuses relevant to fragile states

Table 1: Shared interests and potential forms of collaboration between Europe and Africa

4. Africa: From food crisis to food security

An acute and protracted food crisis threatens a number of African countries. Food security was already vulnerable: in 2019, in Sub-Saharan Africa, an average of 58% of total household expenditure was on food and energy.²⁰ The immediate cause of the crisis is the Russian invasion of Ukraine, while the underlying cause is the persistent underdevelopment of the African agricultural sector.

Individually and collectively, Russia and Ukraine are big players in sunflower oil, barley, wheat and maize.²¹ In the short term, the war in Ukraine will prevent or severely hamper that country's ability to export goods. There is also a risk that Russia will impose export restrictions to keep a lid on domestic food prices.²² The coming harvest is projected to be lower because fewer crops have been sown.²³ In the past, smaller disruptions to food prices led to speculation, resulting in the food crisis of 2008, which in turn sparked the uprisings of the Arab Spring.

Whereas in the vast majority of countries agriculture has been the driver of growth, in Africa a self-sufficient farm sector has failed to develop. In every other part of the world, increases in agricultural production and farming efficiency created scope for development in other sectors. The use of artificial fertilisers, plant breeding techniques, pesticides and mechanisation in the Green Revolution of the 1960s boosted productivity even further, allowing agriculture's share in the economy to shrink: fewer and fewer people are needed to produce ever more food. In Africa, however, agricultural development has lagged behind, though there are considerable differences between countries.²⁴ The geopolitical shock from Ukraine will hit Africa particularly hard, as the continent is greatly dependent on imports, importing around €35 billion of food annually. The expectation is that this figure will rise, if only because of population growth.²⁵

The consensus is that Africa must become more self-sufficient in food. The growth of agriculture (and thus of the economy) on other continents largely preceded the wave of globalisation in the 1990s. At present, global food chains currently ensure a supply of relatively cheap food that has been mass-produced with high-tech input. It is unrealistic to expect African farmers to produce for domestic consumption as long as cheap (and sometimes subsidised) food products dominate the market. In addition, high energy costs and export restrictions in a number of countries have caused the price of artificial fertiliser to spike.²⁶ These price increases will put local production under even greater pressure.²⁷

African agriculture only plays a modest role in global food chains. Exports from Africa consist mainly of primary products. The fact that processing activities with a higher added value often take place outside Africa is partly the result of targeted import tariffs and trade restrictions.²⁸ The EU has reduced or abolished import tariffs for many African countries. As yet, however, this has had little positive impact. Deficient local infrastructure also hampers Africa's ability to optimise added value: storage capacity, transport and the expertise necessary to organise processing are in general insufficient.

There is no doubt that targeted investment could bring about an enormous increase in agricultural production in Africa. But copying the international model would create new problems. In the Netherlands – and many other European countries – the disadvantages of our approach to food production (and consumption) are becoming painfully clear: manure surpluses, greenhouse gas emissions, loss of biodiversity due to monocultures and pesticides, and concerns about animal welfare and public health. Reducing production within the EU could create more opportunities for African producers, but it could also lead to greater competition in Africa in response to the demand for bulk and other products, and thus potentially to food shortages. For some years now, the United Nations – in particular its Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) – has been working to achieve a transformation of global food systems.²⁹ The FAO aims to make food systems sustainable in a way that meets both the demands of the Sustainable Development Goals and the targets set in the Paris Agreement. The current food crisis only underlines the need to establish a more resilient, sustainable and efficient food system.

4.1 Negligence

The causes of the current and projected food crises have sparked exchanges of serious accusations and disparate analyses.³⁰ Analyses of dependency on imported food show an equal lack of consensus. Whereas some analysts see

multinationals as creating opportunities in the Global South, to others they are the embodiment of exploitation of workers and overexploitation of natural resources. There are instances of multinationals that aspire to a more sustainable and social approach, but also of good intentions failing to translate into stronger local value chains.³¹ Countless NGOs work to highlight the difficult position of African food producers. The West has not deliberately sought to undermine African food security, but Western players have been careless – inattentive to the impact of the rise of the food industry on African agriculture and societies. Deficiencies in logistics and infrastructure also play a role, as do shortcomings in the rule of law and institutions, as Amartya Sen has emphasised.³²

4.2 African solutions

Meanwhile, in Africa itself, efforts have been made – and continue to be made – to improve food supply.³³ The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), a farmer-centred, African-led and partnerships-driven organisation, supports government authorities and private actors in 11 countries to create the policy and conditions necessary to ensure that investments can be made in agriculture. The focus is regional; countries do not have to be self-sufficient; and the emphasis is on regional partnerships and open markets to strengthen all parties concerned. AGRA has partnerships with businesses, knowledge institutions and government bodies in a number of Western countries, including the Netherlands.³⁴ The expectation is that promoting and facilitating intra-African trade can boost local value addition.³⁵ It is also clear, however, that the solution cannot just come from the African side: the problems are too great and the relationship between Europe and Africa has become skewed.

4.3 Steps towards complementary and shared interests

How to proceed? In many respects, the EU and Africa can complement each other. Geographical proximity, combined with contrasting harvest seasons, constitutes an excellent basis for joint efforts to increase food security and economic self-reliance in African countries. But how can such efforts be put into practice, and how should the current food crisis be tackled?

The AIV believes that three steps are necessary. The first is to **show consideration for Africa's situation and to be honest**. Acknowledge the difficult position of African agriculture and show readiness on the part of the EU to work with Africans to seek solutions. If necessary, structurally ensure such consideration, for example by imposing a reporting requirement in businesses' annual reports and by rendering accounts to parliament on an annual basis. Acknowledge that agriculture is much more productive in Europe than in Africa and that Europe possesses both the capital and the technology to make agriculture sustainable. Having acknowledged the differences, define shared interests in the sphere of food production and be honest about intentions.

A second necessary step is **coherence**. It is necessary to assess trade policy, the policy on food and food security, EU agricultural policy and the policy on bio-based materials for negative impacts on Africa and tackle such impacts. For example, abolish the biofuels blending mandate in the short term, except in the case of waste flows. This will directly free up more maize, wheat and vegetable oils for the food market. Devise a system in which biofuels can be a buffer for the food market. Scrutinise the production of artificial fertiliser, too, and prevent shortages in the short term. Provide technological support for the production of artificial fertiliser in African countries that have access to gas. But above all, focus on the use of fertilisers that do not harm the soil.

The third step is to set up complementary **partnerships** with African countries in fields in which Europe and Africa have something to offer each other: for example, not only an inclusive food supply, but also climate targets, adapting agriculture to climate change, making use of circular farming, technology, combating disruptive migration and brain drain, and setting up a sound legal infrastructure with a view to creating a stable investment climate and preventing exploitation and speculation.³⁶ A complementary partnership sets out intentions and rules of play for collaboration in a well-defined area, for example food security. Such partnerships can comprise more than one country. Ensure that a fair income can be generated at every stage of the value chain and that processing also takes place in African countries. Complementary partnerships certainly also provide opportunities for the export of Dutch cultivation systems, technology and expertise geared to increasing production and reducing the use of fertilisers, pesticides and water.

The AIV would stress that there are no simple solutions. Taking measures that clash with short-term self-interest or the interests of Western businesses calls for clear policy, conviction, empathy and financial generosity. The AIV would also point out that steps need to be taken to protect the rule of law, the environment, the climate and humanity.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, the AIV is gratified that a new strategy on Africa will be forthcoming, but it expects this strategy to expand the traditional narrow focus on aid and trade to take account of much wider geopolitical, political and social contexts, otherwise it will completely fail to do justice to the far-reaching developments on the African continent and their consequences – or potential consequences – for the Netherlands and Europe. Over the course of two decades, global powers like China and regional ones like Russia and Turkey have established positions of considerable power in Africa. We need to start by acknowledging that situation, after which shared interests can be jointly identified. This new state of affairs entails a change to strategic consequences and priorities for the Netherlands.

An Africa strategy must clearly identify these developments and positions of power and include an explicit, guiding framework for action, for the Netherlands and the EU. The Dutch approach to collaborating with African countries has always been based on a focus on norms and values, respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. That focus now needs to be given shape in an altered geopolitical reality. It is important, in this process, to abandon traditional European projections and delivery mechanisms, and to truly accept Africa as a partner that will help determine a common agenda.

The Dutch government is urgently advised not just to set out a strategy, but also to demonstrate in the short term that the Netherlands is prepared to join with Africa in taking direct action to tackle one of the most acute problems: the food situation. European and African countries will have to act swiftly to deal with the food crisis – in the short term by providing emergency aid and optimising food supply, in the medium term by acting on the basis of complementary and shared interests. The Netherlands and Europe need to take greater account of the situation of food producers in Africa, and at the very least to rectify policy that disadvantages Africa.

The AIV makes the following five recommendations:

I. Define complementary and shared interests in appropriate fields in collaboration with – not on behalf of – Africa.

A Dutch Africa strategy must be based on mutual respect and a recognition of the problems experienced by African countries and their unequal starting position, and must take account of the geopolitical context. Complementary interests can be used as a guide to create a genuinely equal relationship and shared ambitions. It is crucial that Africa participate in this process, and that account is taken of its needs. It is also necessary to ensure adequate funding and make Africa a long-term priority. This will mean increasing the budget for integrated Africa policy and partnerships. Assign the tasks of analysing Africa's changing security situation and making policy to an operational conflict unit that integrates diplomacy, development cooperation and security. Work actively with and within the EU, for example through the proposed Global Gateway Initiative and the European Raw Materials Alliance, and with other multilateral institutions such as WHO, FAO and the World Bank. The main challenge is connecting policies on security, the economy and empowerment.

II. Take the geopolitical context and Europe's waning position seriously.

The African reality is turbulent and volatile; great differences exist in a variety of areas; and there are many African and non-African actors to take account of. Beyond all these differences, a general picture emerges: towering debt, ongoing conflicts, a shaky adherence to the rule of law, lagging economic development, vulnerability to climate change, poverty, inadequate protection of basic human rights, malnutrition and insufficient livelihood security. Acknowledge that Western ideals do not resonate everywhere in Africa by any means, that the West has forfeited a great deal of goodwill in Africa, and that this is certainly Europe's loss as well. Acknowledge that Europe has not played a positive role in Africa – not just through colonialism, but also through EU agricultural policy and trade barriers.

III. Pay consistent attention to Africa and on that basis, act decisively to achieve coherence.

Enter into dialogue with African countries and invite them to formulate their concerns and challenges. Be prepared to assess Dutch policy for inconsistencies and discuss this with African partners. Make it a priority to tackle lack of coherence in the field of agriculture and climate in both Dutch and EU policy, and formulate a long-term agenda on coherence in areas like trade, migration and taxation. Such a wide-ranging approach implies the involvement of not just the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, but also the Ministers of Agriculture, Nature & Food Quality, Finance and Economic Affairs & Climate Policy, as well as their European counterparts. Work at the same time on realistic trade relations, for example by waiving patents, sharing knowledge and solving import issues.

IV. Act now!

The food crisis is upon us and becoming more urgent by the day. Exploring and implementing solutions in the medium and long term is advisable, but in the short term, it is necessary to provide urgently needed emergency aid. Action should be guided by the principle that the Netherlands and the EU

must not reduce the food supply by sacrificing food crops for fuel.



V. Collaborate within the EU as much as possible, but invest as well in bilateral activities.

Working together with other member states in the EU will enable the first moves to be made towards coherence. Collaborating with multilateral institutions will also increase financial clout and create a bigger impact. At the same time, the Netherlands can invest in bilateral activities, providing they are informed by African interests and do not lead to incoherence. All this also calls for a painstaking review of geographical and sectoral activity focuses, and for a careful choice of state and non-state, national and international partners, on both the Dutch and African sides. The AIV accordingly recommends a concomitant increase in the budget for international cooperation in the interests of an integrated Africa policy and partnerships. When formulating these ambitions, account must be taken of available financial and human resources. The selection of priority countries needs to be made with care.

The AIV is confident that the Netherlands can make a major contribution to a modern, up-to-date policy that focuses on acute need as well as on the medium and long term.

Yours sincerely,

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Chair, AIV

This advisory letter was drawn up by the following members of the AIV: Koos Richelle, Dr Dorette Corbey and Monika Sie Dhian Ho in consultation with the following committee members: Dr Maarten Biermans (Human Rights Committee) and Joris Teer (Peace and Security Committee). The executive secretary was Dr Marenne Jansen.



Endnotes



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- ² Temin, J. (2021, 8 October). 'Africa is changing – and U.S. strategy is not keeping up.' *Foreign Affairs*.
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- ⁴ Government formation press office. (2021). Coalition Agreement 'Looking out for each other, looking ahead to the future.' The Hague.
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- ⁹ See also: Daan de Vries (2022). 'China laat Rusland niet vallen, maar steunt inval Oekraïne niet.' Raam op Rusland.
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