EU-AFRICA: TRANSLATING GREEN AGRIFOOD AMBITIONS

EVENT REPORT | FEBRUARY - APRIL 2021

https://eurac.tv/9Se8

With the support of syngenta
On the backdrop of the COVID-19 crisis, the EU is currently establishing a new ‘strategic partnership’ with Africa, of which agriculture is a key focus.

The aims of the EU’s flagship environmental policy, the Green Deal, combined with the COVID-19 crisis underscoring the need for resilient food systems, have seen sustainability placed at the forefront of the EU-Africa agenda when it comes to agriculture.

The question now is how this partnership can help shape future sustainable growth strategies in global food systems in an equitable way which ensures both the livelihoods of African farmers as well as the food security of the continent.

In this Event Report, EURACTIV explores what the future of sustainable food systems looks for Africa and how green aspirations can be best translated to an African context.
EU-Africa partnership must reflect ‘realities of African agriculture’

African farmers say they must be trained for Farm to Fork

EU-Africa Partnership: Let African Farmers trade rather than being dependent on aid
Future agrifood partnerships between the EU and Africa must take into account the realities of farming in Africa, especially in the context of a drive for a greener transition, agrifood stakeholders have warned.

The comments come in the context of talks between the two continents aimed at agreeing a new EU-Africa ‘strategic partnership’.

Although discussions between the European Commission and African Union have stalled in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, the pandemic has also underscored the need for stronger cooperation between the bloc and the African continent, highlighting both the growing urgency of the climate crisis and food security, and the interdependence of the two continents.

Portugal, which holds the rotating EU Council presidency until July, is keen to push the agenda, with a Portuguese diplomat stressing back in January that “Africa should and could

Continued on Page 5
Agriculture is one of the key focus areas of the partnership, with the EU’s focus being on facilitating a green transition in line with its Green Deal ambitions.

However, visions for a green transition must be keeping with the specific circumstances on the African continent, stakeholders highlighted during a recent event on sustainable food systems and trade.

“It is important that the strategy and partnership areas are adapted to the reality on our continent. We need an African green transition that takes into account the ongoing yield gap and the lower use of modern innovative practices and instruments in Africa,” Antonie Delpot, head of South Africa and strategic partnerships for Africa and the Middle East for Syngenta, highlighted.

“Compared to Europe, we need an African green transition that enables Africa to make the most of technology and innovation, but in a sustainable way and in partnership with the different parts of society, including the private sector,” he said.

Delpot highlighted that Africa’s main trading partner is the EU, with trade with the EU accounting for 31% of Africa’s exports and 29% of its imports, and stressed the importance of regulation impacting both continents being “fit for purpose” in order for to maximise the potential for free trade agreements.

**CLIMATIC, PEST PRESSURE**

One way in which differences must be acknowledged between the two continents is in climatic and pest pressures.

Highlighting the difficulties that Kenyan producers face in adapting to changing regulatory frameworks elsewhere in the world, Okisegere Ojepat, chief executive officer of the Fresh Produce Consortium of Kenya said that the country’s unique geographical location straddling the equator creates challenging climatic conditions throughout the year.

“‘平等’PARTNERSHIP

As such, Ojepat stressed there was a need to have a “more accommodative global space” for discussions that have far-reaching consequences on producers.

“What I want to see in this strategy between EU and Africa is a more acceptable partnership, where there’s no big brother, where we all partners, where we all have in roles to play,” he said, adding that he wants to see a “win-win situation across the globe”.

“For me, the best way forward at the global level is to appreciate that we are all participants, in whatever level you are, that we are passionate, and we bring to the table unique products, unique characteristics. And we bring to the table unique opportunities that are open to each one of us,” he stressed.
African farmers fear being left alone in making sense of and applying environmental standards required by the European Union's new food policy, said the voice of Kenya's horticulture producers, who warned that without help, the new rules could jeopardise trade with Europe.

The European Commission’s Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy aims to make the European food system more sustainable through a set of stringent targets.

In order not to affect their competitiveness on the global stage, European farmers have asked that imported products should meet the same environmental standards they have to comply with.

The Commission is now also re-evaluating its trade goals to bring them in line with the EU’s ambition to become climate-neutral.

But African farmers say the requirement to meet those targets if they want to sell their products to Europe is fast becoming a major hurdle to trade.

In an interview with EURACTIV, CEO of Kenya’s Fresh Produce Consortium Okisegere Ojepat said farmers are struggling to understand this new regulatory framework and how this will influence the entire value chain in Africa.

“At the moment, it is scary and heavy. It is like interpreting the Bible within one or two months, while we are expected to understand it and live by it,” Ojepat said.

African farmers should be trained whenever the EU changes regulations within a short period, to ensure they are not shut out of the European Single Market, he added.
The biggest concern for African farmers is that the EU regulatory framework could become unfair because of the demands being imposed and the requirement to comply with no specific timelines to catch up with European farmers.

“Reciprocity is not one thing we refuse but European farmers are getting subsidies directly from the EU,” Ojepat said, adding that African farmers are not getting any training to raise their capacity to fulfil the F2F requirements.

AFRICA’S UNIQUENESS

African farmers would particularly struggle to meet the EU’s new organic requirements, according to Ojepat. The F2F strategy has set a target of 25% of agricultural land in the EU being farmed organically by 2030, a three-fold increase.

Up to 90% of Kenyan fresh product output relies on smallholders owning land of between half an acre and five acres in size.

These smallholders will also struggle to meet the EU requirement to reduce pesticide use, Ojepat said, mentioning as an example the recent devastation caused by locusts.

“The African continent is between the tropics and, therefore, the pressure from plant pests is not going to ease,” he said.

East Africa last year experienced the worst locust plague in decades, with the Horn of Africa invaded by swarms of insects that destroyed entire crop harvests.

“When the EU says you need to go organic, you’re telling us we must stop using certain molecules. And yet, we’re not given an alternative to deal with locusts,” he said.

Ojepat said it is not possible to expect African farmers to meet the same environmental standards without any subsidies and with the pest pressure they suffer in the tropics.

“Going organic in compliance with the EU’s Green Deal is not something we can do, or not for free,” he concluded.

The lion’s share of Kenya’s exports to the EU is represented by agriculture commodities such as cut flowers, fruits and vegetables, accounting for more than 90% of the total export value.

AU-EU SUMMIT

According to Ojepat, the African farmers are currently struggling to ensure they are able to produce sufficient food to even feed their families and the population in Africa.

Any standard proposed by the EU has to take into account the issues they have in terms of availability, affordability, and accessibility of food.

“We’re not against standards to ensure food safety, but the first challenge we’re dealing with is food security in terms of availability for our people,” he stressed.

The 6th summit between the African Union (AU) and the EU will be held in 2021 to relaunch the trade partnership between the two neighbouring continents.

Ojepat’s hope is that the EU will look at Africa as a trading partner and not as an enemy or a younger brother to order around.

“We are a growing continent that has the best available arable land that we can grow. We can supply the world with food if only we can be supported and be listened to,” he said.

The pandemic has also exposed Africa’s weaknesses, as farmers struggled to get to work on their farms and to move around in the countryside, leading to food loss and food waste.

For Ojepat, the AU-EU summit should discuss innovation and technology to empower African farmers with practical solutions for production and post-harvest handling.

“My prayer is that there will be sober minds in the room during the summit who will give sense when it comes to discussing food, science and agriculture trade in the world,” he said.
As an African farmer and exporter, I know all too well the potential of agricultural trade for the development of my country Kenya and my continent. As the European Union and the African Union prepare to agree on their new joint partnership areas, leaders on both sides of the continent need to ensure that the agri-food standards work in the interest not only of Europeans but also of Africans. The danger otherwise will be the perception is that the EU is imposing its own interest on Africa moving away from a science-led approach to the detriment of Africans. The EU-African partnership needs to deliver a genuine partnership with policy objectives, standards and rules that are in the interest of both continents.

Continued on Page 9
Okisegere Ojepat is the Chief Executive Officer of Fresh Produce Consortium of Kenya.

Agriculture is a key industry in Africa accounting for a large portion of jobs and acting as the economic backbone of many countries in the continent. Pest infestations that Europeans do not have to struggle with like Fall Armyworm and Desert Locust infestations impacting key crops for food security like corn and causing a serious risk to food security and to the livelihoods of over 300 million people in Africa.

To put it into perspective, a Desert Locust swarm the size of Rome eats the same as everyone in Kenya, and East Africa has been suffering the worst infestation of locusts in a quarter of a century.

Asking African farmers not to use the necessary technology to manage the threat of current and evolving threats is the ultimate means of asking more Africans to go hungry and be left dependent on aid.

Personally, I would like to see my continent achieve its food production potential sustainably. We have around 60% of the world uncultivated arable land but we also have some of the world natural beauties that need to be preserved. Agriculture should not be advanced to the detriment of our rainforests that are crucial for climate action, for example. The world’s second-largest rainforest is in the Congo Basin and is deemed crucial for regulating the world’s climate. Sustainable transformative technologies can help protect forestry while enabling Africans like myself to produce more food with existing farming land.

As the EU strives to pursue “green diplomacy” it is important that our European partners strive to support Africa in its efforts to produce more and be the trading partner that Europe needs. We all have growing populations and as a result, a growing demand for food production.

As Europe looks into how it can reduce its own use of pesticides, it is important to remember that Africa’s pesticide use and yields are not comparable to that of Europe. We are not talking about the same starting base. Africa uses less crop protection than Europe. Even in corn, a staple crop in Africa, more crop protection is used per hectare in Europe.

The average African farm performs at only around 40% of its potential, and on present trends, the continent is set to produce only 13% of its needs by 2050. Already in 2019, half of the world’s population facing food insecurity lived in Africa despite the continent containing 60% of the world’s arable land. Studies also suggest that in Africa, for every 10% increase in farm yields, poverty falls by 7%.

As African farmers strive to improve their farming practices to help them produce more, let us not forget that they are not able to rely on tens of billions of Euros of subsidies like their European counterparts.

I would like to see policy objectives, standards and rules improved in my continent but these need to be adapted to the reality of Africa. They also need to reflect our need to make better use of existing land without expanding into forest land. The African Continental Free Trade Area, the world’s largest free trade area, came into force on 1 January. Let’s talk about how our two continents can trade more so that trading opportunities can deliver inclusive and sustainable growth for all. Let’s avoid standards that would leave African’s worse off and fuel resentment. I’m ready for dialogue and positive negotiations like many other African farmers.