



REPORT

**Africa–Europe 360° Cooperation Based on Equitable Research & Innovation
Partnerships
SwissCore, University of Bern, The Guild**

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Context

On April 9, 2025, an event on Africa–Europe cooperation in research and innovation was held in Brussels. Organized by SwissCore, the University of Bern, and The Guild, the gathering was part of the broader Joint AU–EU Innovation Agenda, adopted in 2023. The agenda seeks to strengthen scientific, technological, and academic collaboration between Africa and Europe. The event brought together researchers, policymakers, diplomats, and institutional representatives to explore shared initiatives under the Africa–Europe Clusters of Research Excellence (CoRE).

Speakers:

- **Rita Adam** - Head of the Swiss Mission to the European Union

Introductory remarks: “Initiative Afrique” from the University of Bern

- **Prof. Dr. Hugues Abriel** - Vice-Rector for Research and Innovation, University of Bern

Presentation of Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence (CoREs)

- **Prof. Dr. Carmen Faso** - Co-Chair Multidisciplinary Centre for Infectious Diseases (MCID), University of Bern
- **Prof. Dr. Shahida Moosa** - Head of Medical Genetics, Tygerberg Hospital (South Africa) – Video message
- **Prof. Dr. Thomas Breu** - Director Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern
- **Dr. Gete Zeleke** - Director Water and Land Resource Centre (WLRC), Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia) - Video message

The Beneficiary’s journey

- **Jean Claude Makangara** - Phd Candidate, University of Bern

International cooperation: the way forward for equitable partnerships

Panel discussion :

- **Agnieszka Skuratowicz** - Head of Unit, Youth, Education and Research, Culture, DG INTPA
- **Nienke Buisman** - Head of Unit, International Cooperation, DG RTD
- **Dr. Djouroukoro Diallo** - Head and Coordination, Member of the Executive Board of Initiative Afrique, University of Bern
- **Eudy Mabuza** - Senior Science and Innovation Representative, South African Mission to the EU
- **Dr. Jan Palmowski** - Secretary-General, Lead on Africa-Europe CoRe, The Guild (Moderation)



Academic and Scientific Cooperation Initiatives

One of the central initiatives discussed was the “Initiative Afrique” developed by the University of Bern. It promotes equitable partnerships in knowledge creation by moving away from aid-based models toward collaborative academic relationships. The initiative includes a four-year doctoral fellowship program in partnership with several African countries, aiming to foster joint research and develop shared talent.

Examples of collaborative research included efforts in genomics for health, with a focus on decolonising biomedical research and addressing neglected fields such as rare diseases in Africa. Emphasis was placed on equity in knowledge production, open data sharing, and co-creation of research.

In the area of environmental sustainability, projects on water and land resource management were highlighted. These initiatives involve universities from Switzerland and multiple African countries, working together to implement locally adapted, sustainable solutions. Both small-scale (metabolic) and large-scale (market-driven) agricultural models were addressed, along with training programs and researcher exchanges, all contributing to capacity development on both continents.

Political and Institutional Perspectives on Equitable Partnerships

Discussions underlined the importance of the EU’s Global Gateway strategy, framed as a comprehensive tool to support sustainable infrastructure and economic development in partner countries. It aims to connect public institutions, private stakeholders, academia, and civil society around shared goals, shifting away from traditional top-down models of engagement.

The debate also highlighted that building true equity in partnerships requires long-term commitment. A new paradigm was proposed, grounded in mutual respect, shared responsibility, and recognition of African capacities and leadership. African stakeholders were positioned not as aid recipients but as co-architects of global priorities, particularly in critical areas such as energy and climate transition.

It was also emphasized that the variety of cooperation models across Europe, the UK, and Switzerland could be leveraged as a strength—provided benefits are balanced and local needs are considered. Strategic capacity development emerged as a cross-cutting priority, with tangible measures such as mobility schemes, bilateral research programs, and local adaptation of project implementation.

Conclusion

A key theme of the discussions was the need for resilience in research and innovation partnerships. The role of the private sector was especially highlighted, not only as a funding source, but also as a driver of technical expertise and innovation. Diversifying financing mechanisms by including banks, foundations, and private companies was seen as crucial to strengthening the long-term viability of projects.

Another major challenge discussed was the limited access to education and skills development in some partner countries. To address this, investing in local capacity-building, training, and awareness is considered essential for the success and sustainability of initiatives.

In conclusion, the event marked a significant shift in the way Africa–Europe cooperation is being conceptualized and implemented. The emphasis is now on horizontal, co-created, and transparent partnerships. Switzerland, through the University of Bern and its growing network of African collaborators, is playing a proactive role in advancing this new model of cooperation.