



Lisbon Africa-EU Civil Society Forum

15th to 17th November 2007

**Political Declaration of the Lisbon Africa-EU Civil
Society Forum**



We, African and European participants of the Civil Society Forum having met in Lisbon between the 15th and the 17th of November, to share our experiences and discuss our concerns, acknowledge that changes in the national, regional and international environments have created a new context for the African-European relationship. This new environment requires a fundamental change in relations as they have existed until now in order to create a new, shared vision of the future of the EU-Africa relationship.

Partnerships are at the core of the development concept and as such, the stronger the solidarity networks between Africa and the EU at every level, the more impact it will have on development.

But building such networks takes time.

This is why any strategic partnership between Africa and Europe must respect the time and agenda of each actor involved in the process, allowing for the inequalities to be narrowed and for the maturity of institutions to be advanced enough to allow for a true balance of power.

The future Africa-Europe relationship therefore must be based and rooted on a true mutual understanding and full respect. Principles agreed at the political level must be put into practice and properly reflected. These include:

Mutual accountability: any future partnership between the EU and Africa must be rooted in mutual learning and respect, honest political dialogue and the recognition that human rights are universal. Both continents must learn from each other, and the EU must be willing to debate and question its own policies and governance.

Governance cannot be presented as a political issue for Africa and as a merely technical issue for Europe. There must be a political demand for the democracy-building process on both continents which lives up to the rights and responsibilities as enshrined in international and continental treaties.

An equilibrium of power between the EU and Africa, in terms of finance, economic relations and political dialogue. Resources must be made available to achieve this balance, and until then the imbalance must be taken into account in any international negotiations. This also



means that no development will be effective without women playing a central role and having access to resources and legal mechanisms to increase their economic and cultural power.

Trust: Trust is built upon a common understanding and respect of each other at different levels. It is also permanently built and strengthened through coherent policies, concrete and joint actions and delivered outcomes. However, the combination of a lack of policy coherence by the European Union and their double standards for partner countries has led to a degree of scepticism on the part of civil society in Europe and Africa towards the idea that this relationship is a true partnership. The bilateral free-trade agreements, as they are currently defined, especially the Economic Partnership Agreements, are a clear counter-example of this trust-building process, since they are incoherent with development goals and even with key principles of the New Strategic Partnership, undermining the very processes of continental integration they are supposed to support.

Moreover, a new strategic partnership requires political will and new resources if it is to be successfully implemented, neither of which is currently evident. These resources must also be dedicated to the re-enforcement of pre-existing African mechanisms and instruments and insuring they deliver expected outcomes.

For a shared vision to be truly owned by societies of both continents the strategic process must be people-centred, not only on paper, but through concrete actions.

Genuine civil society participation must be made possible in policy-making at the local, national and regional level, through the existence of concrete frameworks for dialogue based on solid and effective institutions, this will ensure that the views of a wide range of stakeholders, and in particular marginalised groups, are integrated into the policy making process.

But institutionalizing dialogue does not mean institutionalizing civil society. A people-centred partnership means that adequate and timely spaces should be created to allow for the diversity of civil society organisations to take part in all strategic and operational aspects of this relationship. This must be done through a formalised dialogue, and encouraged by adequate and ambitious funding mechanisms.



Finally, we insist that this dialogue process must include mechanisms and instruments for mutual learning, continuous assessment and review, follow-up, scrutiny and mutual accountability, so that this strategic partnership can truly be a live and dynamic one, able to respond to and reflect the fast changing environment in which it is being established.

It is under these conditions that African and European Civil Society Organisations present at this Forum are willing to be a partner in the construction of this new and challenging relationship.