



© EU/ECHO/Martin Karimi

Travelling to Brussels to attend an EU development aid event, **Portal** heard from the European Commission's **Nienke Buisman** on establishing closer collaborative research and innovation ties

## Building the bridge

**2015** has been designated as the 'European Year for Development'. According to the European Commission, the series of events offers development organisations 'unparalleled opportunity to showcase Europe's commitment to eradicating poverty worldwide and to inspire more Europeans to get engaged and involved in development'. Being the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals, this year will also see international leaders come together to agree a new global framework towards realising these commitments.

### Relationship

The EU and Africa held their historic first summit in the Egyptian capital Cairo in 2000 and have since developed close international political ties. The continents are also closely co-operating in the area of research and development, as Portal discovered when the journal travelled to Brussels to attend the 'EU Development Aid: Experiences and Recommendations from Stakeholders Driving Science and Innovation' breakfast seminar.

Addressing delegates was Nienke Buisman, policy officer for Africa, South Africa and the African Union Commission in the European Neighbourhood Policy, Africa and the Gulf Unit of the International Co-operation Directorate, DG Research and Innovation in the European Commission. She began by detailing the participation of African countries in Horizon 2020's predecessor, the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), and the main areas of research collaboration between the EU and Africa.

"As a region, Africa was number one in terms of third party, non-EU participation in the programme. EU researchers have worked together with African researchers from 45 countries. In total we have supported around 570 projects and a total of €190m went to researchers from Africa. The main co-operation is in the traditional areas such as food security, environment, climate change and health, but we also have a couple of less traditional areas of co-operation.

"Not surprisingly, because we have a bilateral agreement with South Africa and because the EU research and innovation programme is still a programme where the evaluation of project proposals is based on excellence, we can see that the first countries that we participate with are South Africa and mostly the countries of northern Africa. Yet we also have a lot of co-operation with researchers from Kenya, Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania."

### Flagships

Buisman then highlighted three pivotal points on which EU and Africa research co-operation



**The fourth EU-Africa Summit took place in Brussels in April 2014**

rests and drew attention to key projects symbolising this relationship.

“There are three flagships of our co-operation, where the values of partnership, co-investment and mutual benefit are really enshrined in the programmes.

“The Square Kilometre Array sees the EU and South Africa as strong collaborators in setting up the largest radio telescope. We also have the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership programme, now in the second phase that has just recently started. There is a real co-investment in the programme from the side of the European Commission, but equally the European countries ... 13 countries from Africa are also participating with their own funding to this programme, dealing with clinical trials in the areas of HIV, malaria and tuberculosis.

“Finally, we have the Group on Earth Observations, where many European and African countries are working in the area of Earth observation.

“These are really large co-operative programmes where many countries from both sides are coming together to discuss and look at common priorities and, in certain cases, also to co-invest in these programmes.”

### **ERAfrica**

Set up under FP7, the ‘Developing African-European Joint Collaboration for Science and Technology’ project, or ERAfrica, aimed ‘to reduce the fragmentation of the European Research Area by increasing the co-ordination between national research programmes across EU member states and associated countries, in close co-ordination with national research programmes in Africa’, according to the European Commission.

The project received €1.9m of funding from Brussels and ran from 2010-2014. ERAfrica

saw nine European and three African countries (South Africa, Kenya and Egypt) come together to support and promote international research co-operation.

“They managed to set up a small, jointly funded research programme,” said Buisman, who then drew attention to the research calls launched in the areas of ‘renewable energy’, ‘interfacing challenges’ and ‘new ideas’. “They managed to put together a virtual fund of €11m, from which these research projects and calls are jointly funded. In the end, 17 projects started last September, and it is the first example, at least within the context of the EU research programme, where money is not only coming from the European Commission, money is not only coming from European countries, but there is co-investment in the research undertaken by European and African researchers.

“The European Commission looks very favourably on this model of co-operation. We cannot say very much yet about the impact of the projects because they have only just started, but we have lots of interest in this model and we are looking into how we can actually expand this in the future.”

Buisman added that the countries involved in the project, as well as others, are exploring the opportunity of a further joint initiative that the Commission may support.

### **Horizon 2020**

The European Commission representative then turned her attention to the current EU research and innovation framework programme and the role it is playing in encouraging deeper and further co-operation between the EU and Africa in the area of research: “In terms of our co-operation with developing countries, it is important to note that this is not development aid – it’s an EU programme to support excellent research, to work with the best researchers in the world, to tackle our common challenges together, and also to make our industries more competitive.

“However, as before, this programme is entirely open to participation by researchers and innovators from all over the world, including from Africa, so we are very much promoting this programme in the different African countries.”

The 2014-2015 Work Programme includes specific calls encouraging co-operation with developing countries, including those in Africa. The calls mainly focus on the area of health, but they also include food security and research infrastructures as part of the energy programme.

## Bottom-up

Whilst Horizon 2020 is very much focused on bottom-up research co-operation, Brussels is also encouraging top-down collaboration. As Buisman explained, the EU has a “very vibrant policy dialogue with the African Union”.

“In this policy dialogue, it does not only concern the European Commission and the African Union Commission, but it also concerns all EU member states and all African countries. It is really embedded in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy and has been going since 2010.

“We have had two big plenary sessions where all or most of the countries came together. The last one was in November 2013, where we decided together that we would want to work in the future, in the next ten years ... towards a new research and innovation partnership in the area of food and nutrition security and sustainable development.”

Speaking to delegates, Buisman emphasised the importance of a balanced partnership, co-investment and joint action, highlighting the development of an “expert working group” to determine “niches” in the current R&I co-operation environment in order to encourage food and nutrition security.

“We really believe that there is this need because there are lots of little initiatives on both sides, or even joint initiatives, which makes the landscape very fragmented, so indeed there is the need for better co-ordination.

“From the start, we are therefore getting the different stakeholders onboard. The main areas, for example, we are looking at now are sustainable intensification, agriculture and food systems for nutrition and the expansion and improvement of the agriculture markets and trades and, of course, all the cross-cutting areas in the area of innovation, capacity building and research infrastructures.”

Buisman added that the Commission is in discussions with potential funding partners to build upon the successes of ERAfrica and to ensure that investments in partnerships come from both Europe and Africa. Consideration of the involvement of private stakeholders and those from civil society is also likely.

## Year for Development

The European Year for Development sees a number of events take place, and the Commission hopes to raise awareness of development across Europe and demonstrate how EU money is being spent in order to bring benefits to both the recipients and EU citizens.



© EC/ECHO/Elisabeth Coelho

## Joint strategy

Announced and adopted in 2007 by 80 heads of state and government at the Africa-EU Summit in Lisbon, Portugal, the Joint Africa-EU Strategy strengthens the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership and increases co-operation in priority areas for both the EU and Africa. The strategy outlines a long term vision of the future of Africa-EU relations in a globalised world and focuses on moving beyond developmental co-operation, helping to address global and European issues, developing regional and continental solutions to African challenges, and helping to strengthen civil society in both continents.

In realising these priorities, the Joint Africa-EU Strategy includes the development of eight partnerships, including ‘Science, information society and space’. The partnership has led to a number of achievements, including the 2011-2012 African Research Grants scheme, the Kwame Nkrumah Science Awards, a specific call for Africa in FP7, and the African Internet Exchange project.

The 2010 Tripoli Summit called for increased co-operation in the fields of science and the information society to create a more inclusive, knowledge-based and globally competitive economy.

“DG Research and Innovation would like to make the benefits of co-operation between the EU and developing countries in research and innovation more visible within the landscape, for example within the development aid landscape.

“We are planning several events this year and we are also planning several information products, such as a publication on success stories in FP7, and we plan to present at the European Development Days in June to really showcase some of the project results.”

The EU and Africa are equal partners in terms of science, technology and innovation co-operation, enhanced by both FP7 and now Horizon 2020. Furthermore, other projects and schemes present new opportunities. Both continents are working together to tackle common societal challenges in the areas of health, food security and climate change, and with the development of new partnership schemes, EU-Africa co-operation will continue to intensify.

**The European Commission is funding efforts to help detect early stages of malnutrition**

HORIZON 2020

## BROWSE

[ec.europa.eu/research/](http://ec.europa.eu/research/)  
[www.africa-eu-partnership.org](http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org)