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A call for realignment on Africa-Europe climate and energy cooperation

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Summary

Africa–Europe climate and energy cooperation is evolving, bringing both new opportunities and risks. At the second Africa Climate Summit in September 2025, African leaders articulated a vision for the continent to leverage its vast resources and renewable potential to drive 'climate-positive growth'. Meanwhile, the EU's focus has been shifting towards strengthening its own competitiveness and energy security. The key question is how far these ambitions can be aligned.

Ahead of the 2025 AU–EU summit, both sides share an interest in rebuilding the partnership on the basis of mutual accountability, transparency and a shared sense of purpose, while recognising their distinct interests and capabilities.

This brief outlines five recommendations for the summit and calls for a broader shift in narrative: from supply chain security to co-created green value chains, and from viewing adaptation as a cost to recognising it as a driver of economic transformation. Only through a pragmatic, co-owned approach can Africa and Europe forge an effective alliance to advance their interconnected climate and energy goals.

Introduction

The upcoming African Union–European Union (AU–EU) summit (24–25 November 2025) in Luanda, Angola, takes place against a tense backdrop of eroding global trust. The EU faces mounting pressure on its industrial competitiveness and economic security, while African countries grapple with a volatile and uncertain global trade and finance environment. This moment tests the very premise of the AU–EU partnership: that intercontinental cooperation can drive shared progress and strengthen rules-based global governance. Yet, by late 2025, this vision is under strain, undermined by years of under-implementation and the risk of becoming a 'tick-the-box' exercise sustained by path-dependent institutions.

Despite the risk of stagnation, a new Africa-owned climate and energy agenda has emerged since the first Africa Climate Summit in 2023, marking a clear shift from a narrative of vulnerability to one of agency. It positions Africa as a partner, rich in resources and in opportunities for 'climate-positive growth', calling for deeper cooperation, capital and technology to unlock its role in the global energy transition and green industrialisation.[1]

Conversely, the EU is increasingly viewed as acting unilaterally, prioritising economic competitiveness and its own energy security amid geopolitical uncertainty. This perception has been compounded by widespread cuts in official development assistance and persistent doubts over the quality, transparency, and predictability of EU climate finance, further widening the trust deficit among African partners. Yet, the EU maintains an explicit objective of international cooperation, and remains committed, at least politically, to renew its partnership with Africa to address shared challenges, such as climate change.[2]

The interdependence between African and European climate and energy interests is undeniable: Europe needs Africa's resources to achieve its green economy ambitions, while Africa needs European investment, technology, and markets to drive its economic transformation. The challenge lies in managing this interdependence when trust is low and strategic visions diverge.

This brief explores how Europe–Africa climate and energy diplomacy can be realigned in the short to medium term. It outlines the competing narratives and proposes an alternative framing for a more functional partnership, one built on accountability, transparency and realignment, alongside concrete recommendations ahead of the AU–EU summit.

1. Africa defines its new agenda…

Both African and European priorities on energy and climate action have shifted since the 6th AU-EU summit in 2022. At that time, the African position emphasised equity, common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), and, critically, Africa's right to develop its fossil fuel resources alongside renewables, as exemplified by the African Common Position on Energy Access and Just Energy Transition.

Today, African countries engage in climate and energy diplomacy with a much stronger, opportunity-driven narrative, championing a sovereign vision for the continent's transformation through rapid industrialisation and economic diversification, notably through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). This approach, clearly articulated in the 2025 Addis Ababa Declaration at the close of the second Africa Climate Summit in September 2025, marks a shift from portraying Africa as vulnerable to positioning it as a global leader in the energy transition. It reflects a new sovereign vision that frames the continent as a future clean energy powerhouse, rich in critical minerals and opportunities for green industrialisation, while still underscoring Africa's significant climate adaptation funding gap.

The launch of the Africa Green Industrialisation Initiative (AGII) in 2023 embodied this same investment-driven narrative, which gained momentum across the continent. In 2025, AGII entered a new phase with the announcement of $100 billion in combined African and international financing to develop African green industrial clusters. The AfCFTA, previously criticised for lacking a greening dimension, will now integrate and host AGII, embedding industrialisation within a continental framework for sustainable trade and value creation.

2. …but misalignment between Europe and Africa remains

Africa's new 'green opportunity' narrative is not without criticism. Civil society actors warn that in the push for green growth and carbon markets, climate adaptation is being sidelined. The second Africa Climate Summit also softened earlier commitments to phase out fossil fuel subsidies, reflecting the continent's diverse energy realities, as well as the difficulty of balancing climate ambition with energy access and development needs.

Climate-positive growth does not replace Africa's ambition to develop both fossil fuel and clean energy resources. In 2025, fossil fuel-producing countries, together with Afreximbank, launched the $5 billion African Energy Bank to fill the financing gap left by foreign divestments from African fossil fuels. Resentment towards

Europe's ambiguous stance on natural gas persists. Nevertheless, Africa's opportunity-driven narrative offers a more constructive entry point for dialogue on interdependence, strategic investment, and climate finance for clean energy development.

The vision of Africa as a driver of global decarbonisation also coexists with another powerful narrative, rooted in climate justice. Championed by civil society networks, it calls on developed nations to honour their finance commitments, particularly for adaptation and loss and damage, in line with the principle of historical responsibility. This justice-based agenda remains central to the AU's Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy (2022–2032) and was reinforced at the second Africa Climate Summit.

From an African perspective, Europe is often viewed as a key partner, a source of finance, technology and investment, but also as an increasingly opportunistic and unreliable actor, driven by self-interest. Many point to the EU's transactional approach to cooperation.[3] Compounded by internal budget pressures and perceived geopolitical weakness, the EU's climate agenda is often viewed as instrumentalising cooperation to serve its own competitiveness and security, an inward turn also visible in the agri-food sector, for instance.

The previous 2022 AU–EU summit promised a 'renewed partnership' grounded in shared values and mutual interests, with the Global Gateway unveiled as the EU's flagship investment strategy. However, the initiative faces challenges in balancing the EU's strategic interests with its development goals, leading to concerns from African partners about its top-down nature, transparency and whether it ensures meaningful local ownership. Despite talk of partnership, decision-making on priorities, financing, and project design remains largely European-driven. The lack of clear communication on funding sources, debt implications, and project criteria has only deepened mistrust, echoing long-standing concerns about Europe's tendency to securitise cooperation, from energy to migration.

Friction also remains around European regulatory measures such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). Many African partners view CBAM as externalising the costs of the EU's own decarbonisation, and a critical barrier for their existing industries, even if some countries may be well positioned to competitively export low-carbon goods to the European market.

Some African thinkers argue that the rhetoric of a shared planetary mission often masks the industrial and security imperatives of developed countries. This perception – compounded by the opacity surrounding climate finance pledges, despite the EU's contributions having increased in recent years – and by unilateral

EU measures, has further weakened mutual confidence and the cooperative spirit the partnership is meant to embody.

3. Reframing the partnership

Green industrialisation and climate adaptation are shared priorities rooted in shared risks, even if they reveal consistent disagreements on the way to achieve them. A functional Africa–Europe climate and energy partnership must strike a balance between interests and accountability and transparency, both in commitments and in policy design. The following sections outline how this can be achieved across two key domains: green industrialisation and climate adaptation.

3.1 From supply chain security to co-created green value chains

Africa–Europe energy cooperation is increasingly seen through a transactional lens. African countries aim to harness their renewable energy potential, mineral endowments and international cooperation to drive industrialisation, while Europe views Africa as a key supplier of the electrons, molecules and minerals it needs for its own decarbonisation and industrial competitiveness.

Beyond supply chain deals, Europe and Africa today have an opportunity to leverage their interdependence and establish the foundation for a 'shared green industrial geography' that generates value across both continents.

Africa and Europe have concrete opportunities to design new, mutually beneficial interdependencies. In the green iron and steel sector, for instance, the EU's high energy costs could be partially offset by importing green iron, processed with African green hydrogen, for further processing in European steel plants.

Similarly, African green ammonia offers a dual opportunity: creating a stable export market for Europe while strengthening Africa's domestic fertiliser production and food security. By leveraging its vast renewable potential to produce green hydrogen, the feedstock for green ammonia, African countries could simultaneously drive local green fertiliser manufacturing and supply Europe's clean energy transition. Done right, this creates a win-win: Europe secures its green transition by lowering decarbonisation costs, diversifying supply chains, and building growth markets for green industrial goods, while African countries industrialise.

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Corridor create concrete opportunities for local processing and manufacturing would be a key test of this approach.

However, while mutually beneficial investments in green industrialisation are central to the EU's external narrative, consistent implementation is crucial. Many African partners, particularly civil society, question whether initiatives are truly transformative or simply a new form of 'green extractivism'. Supply chain deals such as critical raw materials (CRM) partnerships, investments in large-scale hydrogen and derivatives exports align well with the transactional interests of partner governments, also seeking to export resources for foreign currency. Yet some analysts see these partnerships as a 'climate façade' masking elite economic interests and with a high risk of perpetuating the continent's underdevelopment. Co-creation and inclusive project design from the outset, are therefore crucial for these partnerships to be credible. The EU must demonstrate, through concrete investments and governance reforms, that it is ready to invest in Africa's broad-based development pathways, not just interested in its export potential.

3.2. Towards adaptation as an enabler of long-term economic resilience

Climate adaptation in Africa faces a stark financial reality: African Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) require nearly $3 trillion by 2030. While African leaders at the second Africa Climate Summit, citing climate justice, called for a legal obligation on adaptation finance, concessional public finance is likely to remain scarce, and adaptation continues to be seen as a poor investment opportunity by most financiers.

EU policy-makers informally maintain they will uphold their climate adaptation finance pledges under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF; 2028–2034). Although the new MFF proposal includes a 35% horizontal climate target, it lacks a dedicated allocation for external action. This raises the risk that this target will be met primarily through large-scale energy projects at the expense of priorities such as adaptation.

For many years, adaptation finance delivery has also been hampered by a persistent lack of transparency and accessibility. Many African partners struggle to track or access funds, with initiatives like the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on Adaptation and Resilience offering little clarity on progress towards its €1 billion target.

Maintaining public support for adaptation finance is important, but these resources will always be finite and insufficient. A bigger change is needed: making adaptation investable to mobilise private capital alongside continued public support. This requires a shift in both narrative and practice, backed by numerical evidence, treating adaptation not as a sunk cost but as an enabler for economic transformation and long-term economic resilience. An international consensus is growing, including within the G20, that credible 'adaptation and transition plans' are key to transforming needs into bankable projects that can attract private capital. Linking agricultural adaptation to green industrial growth offers a clear entry point: investing in low-carbon fertiliser production, using Africa's renewable potential, can simultaneously boost food security, stimulate green industries, and create a compelling business case for private finance. Such co-benefits turn adaptation from a burden into a compelling business case for scalable private finance.

Yet, without stronger political coordination and a unified strategic direction, these efforts risk remaining fragmented. Efforts to strengthen Africa–Europe cooperation on climate finance remain hampered by limited alignment in multilateral fora. While both continents face growing pressure to mobilise adaptation finance and address debt vulnerabilities exacerbated by climate impacts, their influence is diluted by the absence of joint strategic alignment. This gap has become more consequential as geopolitical tensions shape the agendas of institutions such as the Bretton Woods system and multilateral development banks (MDBs), where climate priorities are increasingly contested, particularly under pressure from the US to downplay mitigation and adaptation commitments. Structural barriers, including unfair credit rating systems, rising debt burdens, and inconsistent approaches to international tax cooperation, further constrain progress. Although these issues are discussed across multiple platforms, they remain disconnected, preventing a coherent response. The May 2025 AU–EU communiqué underscored this fragmentation, but fell short of translating political declarations into actionable pathways for joint influence and financial reform.

Conclusion: towards a two-continent partnership with impact

The Africa-Europe climate and energy partnership, long hampered by built-in asymmetry, has underdelivered on its potential. Yet, new interdependencies create an opportunity and an urgency to forge a more effective climate and energy alliance. The path forward is twofold: first, leverage immediate transactional needs to build co-created green value chains and drive shared prosperity. Second, in a world retreating from multilateralism, a joint commitment to long-term adaptation for economic transformation, based on shared resilience and pragmatism, can demonstrate a unique strategic foresight, where others retreat to short-term thinking.

The upcoming 7th AU-EU summit in Luanda offers an opportunity to translate this vision into concrete action and demonstrate joint climate and energy leadership in a fractured multilateral environment.

The summit will take place in an exceptionally busy diplomatic autumn, with global attention divided among other high-profile events such as the G20 Summit in Johannesburg and COP30 in Belém. These events risk overshadowing the meeting's visibility and political impact, making it all the more essential for both the AU and the EU to articulate a strong and coordinated message. The stakes for the climate agenda are high: at COP29, African countries left disappointed over climate finance, and with official development aid shrinking and the US retreating from global commitments, trust in multilateralism is at an all-time low. Ahead of COP30, both the EU and African countries have articulated coherent visions for global climate action. The EU, for its part, has affirmed its ambition: its 2025 Global Climate and Energy Vision, recent Council Conclusions for COP30, and new NDC all show ambitions for a global clean transition, champion multilateralism, and promote adaptation finance, underpinned by its legal commitment to a 90% emissions reduction by 2040. This finds common ground with Africa's 'climate-positive growth' agenda. There are clear points of alignment, particularly on the need for investments in shared resilience and a new openness to carbon markets. The challenge for the upcoming AU-EU summit, therefore, is to seize this convergence and make it politically operative, translating parallel visions into a joint, actionable agenda.

Priorities for the AU-EU summit's climate and energy agenda

The AU–EU summit is expected to build on priorities already emphasised in recent ministerial discussions, with multilateralism as the overarching theme. The agenda is likely to revolve around four pillars:

1. **P**rosperity (with a focus on investment and connectivity under the Global Gateway);
2. **P**eace (with a focus on peace, security and governance);
3. **P**eople (with a focus on human development, culture and education); and,
4. **P**lanet (with a focus on climate change and other environmental issues).

While the final declaration will be under negotiation until the final moment, early drafts suggest that both sides will reaffirm existing commitments on climate action and energy cooperation, but with limited new ambition compared to previous summits. Alongside the formal agenda, a civil society and youth event, as well as a business forum, may serve to bring in new voices with concrete climate concerns and innovative ideas.

Yet, an underwhelming outcome is a distinct possibility. So far, the African side has remained largely silent, while the EU seems poised to repeat familiar talking points despite a profoundly changed geopolitical landscape. Partners must avoid turning the AU–EU summit into a formal, box-ticking exercise that would only erode credibility further. To prevent this and ensure meaningful progress, we outline five priorities for advancing the climate and energy agendas.

Five recommendations for the AU-EU summit

1. GOVERNANCE AND PROCESS: Embed co-creation in Global Gateway at the country level. As the Global Gateway expands, its success will depend on how effectively it mobilises private finance while responding to partner-country priorities. To avoid a top-down approach, the EU should embed genuine co-creation in the programming and implementation of the Global Europe instrument under the next MFF. The upcoming programming cycle offers a key opportunity to make Global Gateway more inclusive, transparent, and country-driven. Tools such as Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships (CTIPs) and CRM partnerships should be used to co-design investments that prioritise local value addition, equitable benefit-sharing, and community resilience, helping the partnership redress rather than reproduce historical imbalances.

2. STRATEGIC INITIATIVE: Inaugurate a flagship pact on green value chains. The AU and EU should launch a flagship partnership on value-chain development under the Global Gateway, aligning Africa's industrialisation goals with Europe's green transition needs. The pact would promote competitive interdependence in strategic sectors such as green iron and steel, ammonia, batteries, and e-mobility. It should de-risk private investment in local green manufacturing and set co-developed targets for value addition. By linking industrial, trade, and climate objectives, such a pact could transform shared commercial interests into a driver of equitable and climate-aligned industrialisation.

3. METHODOLOGY: Finance 'co-benefits' projects linking industry and adaptation. The AU and EU should jointly identify and finance projects that deliver both industrial and adaptation outcomes. This would help prevent the EU's 35% climate spending target from being met mainly through large-scale energy projects that overlook local adaptation needs. Co-creation at the country level is key to identifying these dual-benefit investments. African food systems offer a clear entry point: investments in climate-resilient agriculture, sustainable water management, and low-carbon inputs such as green fertilisers can strengthen food security, build resilience to climate shocks, and create green jobs. This approach reframes adaptation as a catalyst for sustainable economic transformation rather than a cost.

4. ENABLING ENVIRONMENT: Jointly tackle the debt-climate-investment nexus. Rising debt burdens and limited fiscal space in African countries risk constraining climate action and the rollout of the Global Gateway. The EU and AU must link debt, climate, and investment agendas, while jointly influencing MDB strategies, particularly amid shifting US positions that threaten climate-related investments. The summit should make debt and investment reform a core priority, building on the momentum of the FFD4 Sevilla Commitment. Concrete measures could include advancing Climate Resilient Debt Clauses (CRDCs), debt-for-development swaps, and local currency financing, while supporting reforms through the G20 (Common Framework) and IMF (debt sustainability assessments). Critically, the AU and EU should coordinate within MDBs to defend and strengthen global climate commitments.

5. ACCOUNTABILITY AND COHERENCE: Create a joint task force for accountability and policy coherence. To ensure measurable progress and coherent policymaking, the AU and EU should establish a Joint Task Force on Climate, Energy, and Industrial Policy Coherence. Its role would be to align policies, prevent green protectionism, and ensure that industrial and trade measures do not undermine partner countries' adaptation or development priorities. Initially, the Task Force should ensure that EU measures such as CBAM and CRM partnerships deliver mutual benefit and foster competitive interdependence. To strengthen transparency, it could also oversee an annual AU–EU Partnership Index tracking progress on climate finance (especially adaptation), energy cooperation, industrial policy, and trade integration. By linking political dialogue to measurable outcomes, this mechanism would place evidence-based decision-making and mutual accountability at the heart of the partnership.

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The views expressed in this note are those of the authors and do not represent those of ECDPM or any other institution. Any errors or omissions remain the responsibility of the authors. For comments and feedback, please contact hk@ecdpm.org.

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Endnotes

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