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WORKING PAPER

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WORKING DOCUMENT

From:	SFIC Secretariat
To:	ERAC (SFIC)
Subject:	European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) - Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC) informal videoconference on 9 December 2021

Delegations will find in annex the agenda item 4 (2 documents) with view to the virtual SFIC plenary meeting on 9 December 2021.

Strategic Forum for International Cooperation (SFIC) **Africa Working Group** Activity Report

DECEMBER 2021

SFIC Africa WG



Executive Summary

Being the relations with [Africa at the forefront of the international cooperation priorities of the European Union](#), the SFIC Africa Task Force (October 2019 -September 2020) and the SFIC Africa Working Group (October 2020 – now) dedicates its work on enhancing the collaborations in research, innovation and higher education policy between Europe and Africa.

Through its [monthly meetings](#) the group has energised the collaboration among European countries and the European Commission, and with African partners. It has supported the work of the High-Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD) in Science Technology and Innovation between the European Union and the African Union, and it has contributed to the Innovation Agenda preparations for the EU-AU Summit in 2022.

SFIC Africa WG has created joint opinion and analysis on topics of interest that can boost understanding of multilateral cooperation between the two continents. Its [Strategic Report](#) on joint priorities and [Innovation Report](#) on recent developments are the two public documents that encompass the contribution of most of European countries and consultation with stakeholders.

The SFIC Africa WG has hosted several [workshops on prioritisation](#) (March 2020), on [science diplomacy in Africa](#) (March 2021) and on [the power of the networks COST actions](#) (November 2021). It has liaised with distinguished stakeholders e.g.: The Guild-ARUA Network, the Union for the Mediterranean, the Missions Unit of DGR&I, and ESFRI. It has contributed to the EU HLPD Bureau and the China Core Group.

More specifically...

The Strategic Forum for International Cooperation (**SFIC**) **Africa Working Group (WG)**, composed by delegations of Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, Finland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and the European Commission (DG R&I and DG EAC), operates with the mandate WK 11317/2020 INIT adopted at SFIC Plenary in October 2020. The group was created as a legacy of SFIC Africa Task Force operating in 2019-2020.

The SFIC Africa WG group was **mandated to work for 18 months**, starting in October 2020 and to finalise in March 2022. Due to the European Research Area recent developments, at the SFIC Plenary of October 2021, the Working Group was advised to conclude its work to-date by December 2021 and to produce an Activity Report by the later date.

The **activities remain to be continued and defined** whilst the new Governance of the European Research Area comes to light. The **Working Group representatives are willing to contribute in the new configuration** to support the work on the Africa-related initiatives and make their contribution complementary and synergetic in support of the EU-AU HLPD STI political agenda, whenever needed.

Reaching the Objectives

The **five objectives** as for in the SFIC Africa Working Group are:

Fluid Dialogue among members and stakeholders

Develop an effective outreach strategy

To reach the “Horizon Europe” main stakeholders

To contribute in understanding innovation activities with Africa and their support

In the context of science diplomacy efforts, to monitor and analyse the position of EU R&I in Africa vis-à-vis other global powers.

Below the activities carried out whilst implementing every objective:

Fluid Dialogue among members and stakeholders

The Working Group met monthly, making 12 meetings in total, from November 2020 till December 2021.

Five special invited guests in the meetings, being them representatives from the 1) Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat, 2) the Unit for Missions and Partnerships at the European Commission, 3) the Alliance of the Guild-ARUA research universities, 4) the COST Association, and 5) the ESFRI & SKA representatives.

Frequent summaries carried out at the SFIC Plenary meetings every three months.

Two interventions of our work at the EU-AU High Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD) in Science, Technology and Innovation Bureau, in April and September 2021.

Presentation at the China Core Group official meeting with the countries representatives discussing trilateral relations, in May 2021

Develop an effective outreach strategy	The document of "Outreach Strategy" was designed, in December 2020
	Workshop on science diplomacy and Africa with distinguished of the Science Councillors was held, in March 2021
	The Event ""The Power of Networks on the European African collaborations in research and innovation" jointly organised with the COST Association, in November 2021
To reach the "Horizon Europe" main stakeholders	Invited Guest: Minna Wikki, Head of Unit for Missions and Partnerships contributed
	Input on the "Global Approach to R&I" Communication - Enfasis on the Africa contribution.
	Weekly participation at the EU-AU Innovation Agenda meetings. Information on the EU-AU developments.
	COST Mapping exercise developed jointly with the COST Association. (COST receives the European Funding from the WIDERA Part of the Horizon Europe Programme)

To contribute in understanding innovation activities with Africa and their support	Design and Launch of the Innovation Survey in November 2020
	Presentation and Discussion of the Innovation Survey Results in February 2021. 15 European countries contributed!
	Publishing the "Innovation Report" in April 2021 https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-1353-2021-INIT/en/pdf
	Presentation of the "Innovation Report" at the HLPD Bureau in April 2021
	Supporting and contributing to the EU-AU Innovation Agenda weekly working group.

In the context of science diplomacy efforts, to monitor and analyse the position of EU R&I in Africa vis-à-vis other global powers.	Input on the "Global Approach to R&I" Communication - Enfasis on the Africa contribution.
	Workshop dedicated to Science Diplomacy and Africa with the participation of the Science Counsellors. March 2021.
	Discussion on Africa and China relations in May 2021
	Intervetion at the China Core Group discussing trilateral relations in May 2021
	Design Survey EU-Africa-China relations
	Launch of the Survey on trilateral relations on EU Survey tool with limited use in October 2021
	Presentation of the Report on trilateral relations in December 2021.



Report on the Survey Results Europe-Africa-China Relations in Research and Innovation

2021

Drafted by Strategic Forum for International Scientific and Technological Cooperation
(SFIC) Africa Working Group

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Introduction

This is a **confidential and internal report intrinsic** to the Strategic Forum for International Scientific and Technological Cooperation (SFIC). It has been conveyed by the SFIC Africa Working Group (WG)¹ that operates with Mandate WK 11317/2020 INIT to enhance the relations in science, innovation and higher education between Europe and Africa.

One of the objectives of SFIC Africa WG is to understand the European position in our sector vis-à-vis other global powers in Africa, and more specifically, **to analyse the triangular relations between the Europe, Africa and China**, whenever possible. Following the 4th Core China Group on China's Science Technology and Innovation activities in the global world (focusing on Africa/BRI, USA) in May 2021, the SFIC Africa WG discussed the opportunity to carry out a confidential survey dedicated to the relations with China in Africa.

The exercise entitled “**Survey about relations with China in Africa in the field of R&I**” was launched in October 2021 as an EU Survey with limited access. Its goal was two-fold: on one hand, it aimed to understand the ongoing trilateral collaborations between Europe-Africa-China (Part A), and on the other hand, it was designed to have the SFIC delegates' opinions on possible future trilateral collaborations (Part B). The SFIC delegates were asked to answer both parts, but in case they had not identified any trilateral relations under Part A, they could directly answer Part B.

This report is **structured** as follows:

- Section 1 “**Awareness on trilateral (Europe-Africa-China) activities in R&I in Africa**” that includes a summary of the responses under Part A of the survey.
- Section 2 “**Exploring trilateral (Europe-China-Africa) relations in the field of R&I in Africa**” that includes a summary of the responses under Part B of the survey.
- Section 3 that gives **a briefing of the results**.
- Annex that includes **the Survey** such as it was uploaded under EU Survey tool.

In a snapshot, the **Survey was answered** by 17 European countries' delegates representatives of Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland. The representatives of Greece contacted via email indicating that at this moment in time there was no identified ongoing significant action or future priority. This makes **a total of 18 countries having an opinion on the exercise**. When revising the details on the answers one realises that several delegations (FR², IE, NO) have preferred to answer very consisely, i.e.: a “No” at the beginning of the survey, and add no more information thereafter.

¹ The SFIC Africa WG is composed by delegates of Norway, Finland, France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Italy, Portugal, Spain (coordinator) and the European Commission.

² With an exception, FR has included a contribution for the last question “B6. How do you consider the EU approach in R&I cooperation with Africa unique, compared to for example China, or other major players?”

The results were processed during the month of November 2021. They were discussed in the SFIC Africa Working Group meeting on 3 December 2021. Finally, the report was presented in the last SFIC meeting held on 9 December 2021.

Awareness on trilateral (Europe-Africa-China) activities in R&I in Africa

COUNTRIES WHERE THERE IS AWARENESS ON TRILATERAL ACTIVITIES: BE, PT, AND NL AND MT³

When asked “**Are you aware of trilateral (Europe-Africa-China) activities** in R&I in Africa by your country?”, only the delegates of **BE and PT respond affirmatively**. Two more answers have been received in this section from NL and MT, but they are not directly linked to research and innovation activities (in the case of NL), and they are identified as Horizon 2020 (in the case of MT).

PT includes the **actors involved**, being these: policy-makers, researchers, research and innovation centres, higher education institutions, and SMEs.

The activities are:

- For BE:
 - o Joint projects for R&I: South Africa and China.
 - o BELSPO trilateral Research Call 2021 in South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo.
- For PT:
 - o Joint facilities.
 - o Joint projects for R&I (these are Horizon 2020 ones)

The **African countries** where the trilateral activities are hold are:

- For BE:
 - o South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo (for the trilateral call *)
- For PT:
 - o South Africa in case of SKA.
 - o In case of Horizon 2020 projects were PT and other MS/AC participate jointly with China and African following countries: Burkina Faso, Egypt; Ivory Coast, Senegal, Mozambique, South Africa, Uganda.

PT responds that the **priority setting** is considered as “easy” because “the common challenges were identified”.

As for the joint implementation:

- BE responds “The BELSPO trilateral Research Call 2021 organisation went smoothly. It is too early to comment on the effective implementation of the collaborative research projects. The data sharing and protection may be considered risky.”
- PT responds that “There is not enough data yet”.

³ NL and MT do not respond with a “yes”, but under the “no” section give some information on joint activities non-directly linked with the research and innovation sector (in the case of NL) and only a Horizon2020 project (in the case of MT).

As for the joint **monitoring and evaluation**:

- BE responds: “No difference from the usual monitoring and evaluation of the collaborative projects. The point may be taken up for further consideration in the future. At least, a joint workshop may be organised.”
- PT responds that “there is not enough data yet”.

The delegate of **NL** responds that there is awareness on “trilateral NL-CHN-AFR cooperation at governmental level, but that is focused on SDGs and sustainability, for example: sustainability in infrastructure. There is, as well, academic cooperation, but not so much in R&I”

The delegate of **MT** indicates:

The Malta Council for Science and Technology (MCST), the governmental entity responsible for research and innovation at the national level, is aware of only ONE Horizon 2020 project that involves stakeholders (mostly public bodies and academia) from Europe, Africa and China. The project is entitled ‘NUCLEUS –New Understanding of Communication, Learning and Engagement in Universities and Scientific Institutions’. The African country involved is South Africa (National Research Foundation – NRF). Although MCST implements a bilateral S&T cooperation programme with China, there are no plans to engage with any African country in pursuit of trilateral cooperation. (MT delegate)

COUNTRIES WHERE THIS IS NO AWARENESS ON TRILATERAL ACTIVITIES: AT, CZ, CH, DE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, MT, NL, NO, SK, AND SI

14 countries’ delegates indicate there is no awareness on trilateral activities.

When asked about the **reasons**, these are: the lack of framework conditions (CZ), lack of need to do so (DE).

When asked if there are any **barriers** for trilateral activities Europe-Africa-China to happen, the delegates respond: budgetary and administrative barriers (CZ), problems of freedom of research (DE) and of different nature and scale (MT).

Barriers might be different, based on the level at which the cooperation is being implemented, including the availability of budgets, resources and capacity to conduct such trilateral cooperation; VISA requirements; and establishing commonly accepted values and principles for R&I, amongst others. (MT delegate)

When asked if there are any cases where there have been any **lessons learnt**, the delegate of BE responds affirmatively, more specifically:

Create a platform for partner matching. Discuss and agree well (before launching the joint activity) on data sharing and protection. Enhanced joint reflection on monitoring and evaluation of the R&I cooperation (BE delegate)

Exploring trilateral (Europe-China-Africa) relations in the field of R&I in Africa

COUNTRIES IN FAVOUR OF EXPLORING TRILATERAL RELATIONS: BE, CH, CZ, DE, ES, FI, IT, MT, NL, AND SI

The **areas** to base this collaboration are:

- The Sustainable Development Goals (BE, CZ, DE, ES, IT, MT, NL, PT and SI)
- Areas that we jointly agree (CH, CZ, DE, ES, IT, MT, NL, PT and SI)
 - o Agrofood sciences, fisheries and aquaculture, water management and water-energy-food nexus (CZ, BE, ES, NL, PT)
 - o Biodiversity, climate change, renewable energy (BE, CZ, NL, PT)
 - o Transport, urban resilience, sustainable cities, (ES, NL, CZ)
 - o Space (PT, NL, IT)
 - o Marine science, (BE, PT)
 - o Art and creativity (BE)
 - o Health (PT)
 - o Social Sciences and Humanities (PT)
- Research facilities and infrastructures (BE, CZ, IT, PT)
- Digital ecosystems (BE, SI, PT)
- Innovation ecosystems (BE, PT)

COUNTRIES EXPLICITLY NOT IN FAVOUR OF EXPLORING TRILATERAL RELATIONS: AT, HU, PT AND SK.

The delegates were asked about their **recommendations** that are as follows:

- To engage at EU level (AT, DE⁴, PT)
- To engage, but not too closely (DE, HU)
- Not to engage at all in trilateral endeavours in Africa (SK)

The delegates were asked what where their most favourite **instruments** to use for the triangular collaborations to happen.

- Projects (AT, BE, CH, CZ, ES, HU, MT, NL, PT and SI)
- Research Infrastructures (AT, BE, CH, CZ, HU, IT, NL, PT and SK)
- Institutions (BE, CH, DE, ES, IT, NL, PT and SI)
- People incentives (AT, BE, CH, DE and SI)

The delegates were asked if they would place **conditions** for trilateral cooperation and which ones?

- Freedom of Scientific Research, Bonn Declaration (AT, CH, DE, MT)
- Principles and values (AT, CZ, MT, SI)

⁴ Although DE had answered affirmatively in engaging, it has as well answered this question, therefore the opinion is included.

- Safeguard (joint) interest and reward, co-ownership (BE, PT, HU, CZ, BE)
- A framework of collaboration, incl. IPR rules (BE, IT, PT)
- Reciprocity (PT, SI)
- Sustainable Development (AT)
- Excellence (CH)
- Avoid security related areas (HU)
- Gender equality, ethics (MT)

The delegates were asked about the **indispensable criteria** that they would consider indispensable for the trilateral cooperation.

- Reciprocity, equal opportunities (BE, CZ, DE, HU, MT, NL, SI)
- IPR and data protection (DE, MT, PT, SI)
- Freedom of scientific research (CH, NL, SI)
- Equal sharing of rewards (NL, IT)
- Gender Equality (MT, SI)
- Transparency (HU, IT)
- Ethics (PT)
- Excellence (SI)

The delegates were asked about **the mechanisms that the EU should use to raise its visibility in Africa** in the field of Research and Innovation.

- Stable long-term simplified flagship initiatives coordinated at EU level – “Team Europe Approach” - that supports the African science and innovation system (AT, BE, CH, DE, ES, HU and PT)
- Researcher-centred mechanisms that invest in people and the research careers in Africa (CZ, IT, MT, SI)
- Dissemination efforts (IT, BE)
- Support of private companies, incl. SMEs (CZ)
- Networking effort like COST (MT)

Finally, the delegates were asked how do they consider **the EU approach in R&I cooperation with Africa unique**, compared to China, or any other major players?

- A European - African approach (CZ, ES, HU, IT, MT and SL)
- Capacity building (AT, DE, FR, SL)
- Based on mutual benefit (AT, FR, PT)
- Investing in people (BE, DE)
- Joint priority setting, discussion on priorities (BE, HU)
- Ethical sound base of cooperation, linking R&I to societal benefits (BE)
- Science diplomacy (PT)
- Part of a global strategy (FR)

A brief summary of the results

This is a brief confidential report that responds to the SFIC Africa Working Group (WG)⁵ mandate and the China Core Group legacy to **better understand the triangular relations** between Europe, Africa and China. The data was gathered through an EU Survey sent to the SFIC delegates. 17 European countries expressed an opinion on the exercise.

Regarding the ongoing activities, **there exists little awareness on trilateral activities** between the European Countries – African ones and China. **Belgium** is the only country that has a trilateral call for projects involving Belgium, China, South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo. **Portugal** and **Malta** mention Horizon 2020 projects. Portugal mentions the SKA infrastructure. The **Netherlands** indicates that there exists trilateral relations, but not specifically focused in research and innovation. **Belgium** responds that a learnt lesson is the good discussion previous to the launch of the trilateral call for proposals.

The rest of the countries do not show any awareness on trilateral activities and the **reasons** may be the lack of framework conditions or the need to have these activities. The **barriers** are mentioned as administrative, budgetary, issues with freedom of research, etc.

The rest of the report focused **exploring trilateral relations in the field of Research and Innovation in Africa**. Most of the countries are in favour of exploring trilateral relations especially in areas of the **Sustainable Development Goals** and **specific areas to jointly agree**. Some of the most mentioned areas are agro-food, fisheries, aquaculture, water research, biodiversity, climate change, renewable energy, transport and urban related research.

The most favourite **instruments** for trilateral collaboration are in this order: projects, research infrastructures, institutions and people-related incentives.

Countries that are not explicitly in favour express that the engagement should be done at EU level. Among the **conditions** for trilateral cooperation are the freedom of scientific research, sharing core principles and values and safeguarding joint interests and rewards, among others. The most **essential criteria** for collaboration was reciprocity and equal opportunities.

The most mentioned **mechanism** for the EU to raise its visibility in Africa is the establishment of long-term flagship initiatives coordinated at EU level that support the African science and innovation system. The EU approach was considered unique because it offers a European-African perspective.

⁵ The SFIC Africa WG is composed by delegates of Norway, Finland, France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Italy, Portugal, Spain (coordinator) and the European Commission.

Annex

QUESTIONNAIRE TO SFIC COUNTRIES' DELEGATES FOLLOWING SFIC PLENARY OF OCTOBER 2021

Disclaimer

The European Commission is not responsible for the content of questionnaires created using the EU-Survey service - it remains the sole responsibility of the form creator and manager. The use of EU-Survey service does not imply a recommendation or endorsement, by the European Commission, of the views expressed within them.

Question Title: Survey about relations with China in Africa in the field of R&I.
Goal: The objective of this questionnaire is two-fold. On one hand, it aims to understand the ongoing trilateral collaborations between Europe-Africa-China, and on the other hand, and most importantly, it is aimed to have the SFIC delegates' opinions on possible future trilateral collaborations. Therefore, the questionnaire is divided in two parts. If you have not identified any trilateral relations under Part A, please answer accordingly and pass to Part B. Your contributions will allow better understanding at policy level.

Identification

Question Please add the country you are representing

Part A: Ongoing trilateral collaborations

Question A1. Are you aware of trilateral (Europe-Africa-China) activities in R&I in Africa by your country?

- ☐ Answer
Yes
- ☐ Answer
No

Question If "Yes", please specify the actors involved, and how


Question If "Yes", what kind of activities are they, and in which African countries?

- ☐ Answer
Joint facilities
- ☐ Answer
Joint projects for R&I
- ☐ Answer
Joint networks
- ☐ Answer
Other

QuestionIf “Other”, please specify.

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QuestionPlease add the African countries.

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QuestionIf “Yes”, how would you consider the joint priority setting?

- ☐ Answer
Easy
- ☐ Answer
Hard

QuestionWhy? [Please add your reply.]

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QuestionIf “Yes”, how would you consider the joint implementation?

- ☐ Answer
Easy
- ☐ Answer
Hard

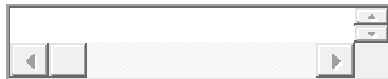
QuestionWhy? [Please add your reply.]

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QuestionIf “Yes”, how would you consider the joint monitoring & evaluation, if any?

- ☐ Answer
Easy
- ☐ Answer
Hard

QuestionWhy? [Please add your reply.]

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QuestionIf “No”, why do you think this has happened?

[Please add your reply.]

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QuestionIf “No”, would you identify any barriers for trilateral Europe-Africa-China to happen?

[Please add your reply.]

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QuestionA2. Would you have specific cases where you would say that you have learnt from the Europe-Africa-China collaboration?

- ☐ Answer
Yes
- ☐ Answer
No

QuestionIf “Yes”, what have you learnt?
[Please add your reply.]



QuestionIf “Yes”, are you willing to share it for further studies?

- ☐ Answer
Yes
- ☐ Answer
No

QuestionWould you explain your answer?
[Please add your reply.]



Part B: Your opinion on possible future trilateral collaborations

QuestionB1. Are you in favour of (exploring) trilateral (Europe-China-Africa) relations in the field of R&I, in Africa?

- ☐ Answer
Yes
- ☐ Answer
No

QuestionIf “Yes”, in which areas?

- ☐ Answer
The SDGs
- ☐ Answer
Areas that we commonly agree
- ☐ Answer
Specific areas
- ☐ Answer
We should collaborate in research facilities and infrastructure
- ☐ Answer
We should collaborate in innovation ecosystems
- ☐ Answer
We should collaborate in digital ecosystems

QuestionIf you ticked “Areas that we commonly agree”, please specify



QuestionIf you ticked “Specific areas”, please specify.



QuestionIf “No”, what would you recommend?

- ☐ Answer
Not to engage at all in trilateral endeavours in Africa
- ☐ Answer
To engage if we agree at EU level
- ☐ Answer
To engage, but not too closely

QuestionB2. At what level would you prefer the triangular collaborations to happen?

- ☐ Answer
People
- ☐ Answer
Projects
- ☐ Answer
Institutions
- ☐ Answer
Research Infrastructures
- ☐ Answer
Other

QuestionIf “Other”, please specify.



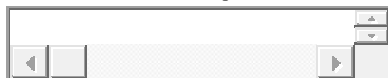
QuestionB3. Would you place conditions for trilateral cooperation? Which ones?

[Please add here your answer]



QuestionB4. What kind of criteria would you consider indispensable for the trilateral cooperation?

[Please add here your answer]



QuestionB5. Through what mechanisms do you think that the EU should raise its visibility in Africa in the field of R&I?

[Please add here your answer]



QuestionB6. How do you consider the EU approach in R&I cooperation with Africa unique, compared to for example China, or other major players?

[Please add here your answer]



If you're human, leave this field blank

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