

Conference Report

Policy Lunch 2024

sef:

Just transition, just in time? Europe and Africa's shared path to climate-neutral energy

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At this year's sef: Policy Lunch in Brussels, our panellists discussed Europe and Africa's shared path to climate-neutral energy production. Julien Desmedt, Hanne Knaepen, and Chigozie Nweke-Eze explored in-depth how the neighbouring continents can cooperate to foster energy security and sustainability. The session took place at the representation of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia at the European Union and was chaired by Dr Grace Mbungu, Senior Fellow and Head of the Climate Change Program at the Africa Policy Research Institute (APRI) in Berlin.

An essential shared project between Africa and Europe is the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) with South Africa, an international agreement aimed at helping the country with transitioning to clean energy. Through JETP, the EU, along with the governments of France, Germany, the UK, and the



Welcoming words by sef: Executive Director Dr Marcus Kaplan



US, supports South Africa's decarbonization while attempting to ensure social equity. This is particularly relevant in South Africa, as the country remains one of the world's highest per-capita emitters due to its dependence on coal.

As Julien Desmedt, Policy Officer for Sub-Saharan Africa at the European Commission, noted, this transition poses a risk of deepening the country's significant inequality, as fossil-sector jobs are lost. To mitigate this, the EU collaborates with coal-

mining regions and small and medium enterprises to create economic alternatives. According to Desmedt, opportunities in green sectors, such as hydrogen production and electric vehicle manufacturing, offer pathways to a more sustainable and inclusive economy.



f.l.t.r. Dr Grace Mbungu (chair), Hanne Knaepen (European Centre for Development Policy Management), Julien Desmedt (European Commission), Chigozie Nweke-Eze (Integrated Africa Power; European Council on Foreign Relations)

Including local populations in the decision-making process

Chigozie Nweke-Eze, CEO of Integrated Africa Power and Visiting Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, emphasized the potential of green hydrogen to benefit both Africa and Europe by improving energy access in Africa and creating jobs for the local population. However, he cautioned that resources allocated to these projects must not detract from local populations' needs, urging that local communities be included early in decision-making processes, as they experience the direct impact of environmental policies.

Nweke-Eze added that for many African governments, the key question concerning energy future is whether to focus on renewables or continue relying on oil and gas. Many tend to take pragmatic decisions: Some governments promise a shift to renewables, but when the necessary funding is delayed (and access to low-interest credit is impossible), they are forced to rely on traditional, fossil energy sources.

Reconciling energy needs and climate ambition

Hanne Knaepen, Head of Climate Action and Green Transition at the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) stressed that the energy transition must address both climate mitigation and adaptation. At this year's UN Climate Change Conference in Baku, the Just Transition Work Programme reflects this by integrating climate action, energy systems, and social justice into a systemic approach.

Addressing these issues, Knaepen added, requires greater support from countries in the Global North, particularly in the form of adaptation finance. Special attention must be given to vulnerable parts of populations. For example, farmers in remote, informal settings are not usually in the focus areas of investors and financial aid. It must be ensured that these communities are not left behind in the transition to sustainable development.

All panellists shared the hope that a potential EU-AU Summit in 2025 might advance these priorities. They agreed that a robust EU-Africa alliance in climate action, ongoing dialogue, and improved access to finance are essential. Chair Dr Grace Mbungu concluded that successful partnerships depend on good governance, an enabling environment, as well as strong political participation and ownership from both sides.