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A win-win for Europe and Africa

As Africa helps with Europe's energy crisis so too Europe must lend a helping hand to fight the food crisis in Africa

It must not come as news that Africa lags in implementing projects to mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts, while people on the continent are also among those living in 'global hotspots of high human vulnerability' to climate change. Meanwhile the environmental crisis seems to be progressing along with an energy crisis in Europe as a consequence of Russia's war on Ukraine. As Europe is facing the possibility of a gas shortage this winter, Brussels needs a quick solution. Ironically, the continent that goes dark at sunset because few have access to electricity has a solution. But while Africa may deliver, so too must Europe for Africans.

Calling on Africa with its REPowerEU plan, Europe expects the continent to help compensate for reduced Russian gas by importing LNG from some 14 countries. And there is plenty in Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Guinea-Conakry, together constituting a so-called MSGBC Basin now fuelling a 'gas rush.' Nigeria had been exporting gas from its Bonny Island to Europe. Perhaps to mitigate risks associated with doing business in Africa and boost industry confidence, the Commission backs its plan with 'financial and legal measures.'

Vulnerable Africa as well needs a 'safety net.'

As yet the strongest political development since the European Commission announced the plan was German Chancellor's Olaf Scholz trip to Africa. On arriving he impressed on his host that, he 'quite deliberately chose Senegal as the first stop.' Germany consumes more gas than any other European country and since activating its gas emergency plan, reports the 'situation is tense and a further worsening of the situation cannot be ruled out.'

As 'severe difficulties arise in the supply of certain products, notably in the area of energy,' the EC has called into force Article 122 of the

European Union Treaty. Its 'save gas for safe winter' package, along with its REPowerEU plan, are to compensate for some 155 billion cubic metres of natural gas imported from Russia last year, by reducing demand by 15 per cent until March and diversifying energy suppliers, among other objectives. The basis for the reduction is solidarity.

As Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen puts it, 'energy solidarity is a core principle of our Treaty.' As with climate change between developed and developing regions, von der Leyen recognises inequities between EU member states' capacity to deal with energy disruptions, arguing that 'there are some Member States that are more directly exposed than others to Russian gas, and they are, of course, more vulnerable than others to disruption.' So on the principle of solidarity, the Commission provides a 'safety net.'

A safety net for Africa

Vulnerable Africa as well needs a 'safety net.' As Europe takes with one hand, it must give a helping hand with the other. Such is in keeping with moral responsibility, demonstration of much needed international leadership on climate change and expression of solidarity. At the height of Europe's energy crisis, there seems a willingness, as Chancellor Scholz's trip demonstrates, to set aside vintage concerns, imagined or real, about political, economic, and governance risks long associated with doing business in Africa. By extending solidarity beyond European borders, unity on solving climate change can serve a guiding principle. Here's how Europe can exercise universal fraternity in these trying times.

Europe's expression of solidarity with Africans could include addressing trade imbalance between Europe and Africa. In a decade, trade between the two was not even 2 per cent of 'total extra EU exports and imports,' despite an exhaustive list of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements.

Europe should loosen the purse strings on climate finance by ensuring more grants not loans for African countries for climate mitigation and adaptation projects. Adapting to climate change means investments on crops and agriculture techniques to coax an unyielding parched earth to continue feeding the fastest growing world population. Most African economies depend on agriculture and in February the IPCC tells us that 'flood and drought-related acute food insecurity and malnutrition have increased in Africa.'

Africa has vast arable lands but governments'

In exchange for gas exports, the EU can lend a hand to help with inflation that has caused challenges in South Africa, Sierra Leone and

foreign currency funds are drained annually by some $35bn to import staples, such as rice, wheat, and maize.

Ghana, among others. Compared to European countries where inflation price increases average about 5 per cent, those in Africa will be paying almost 9 per cent more for food this year. At present, 10 of 18 countries where food prices are 'at abnormal high levels' are on the continent. Africa has vast arable lands but governments' foreign currency funds are drained annually by some $35bn to import staples, such as rice, wheat, and maize. This is an old problem made worse by climate change impacts. European solidarity with Africans should take short-term and long-term approaches.

Europe's responsibility

Europe must lead in solving the food emergency by providing the $418 million the WFP needs to save millions in Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya from simply starving to death. The IMF says food prices will continue to rise until 2023, which will contribute to making people food insecure. In the midst of this life-wasting starvation in Africa, there is a 'food waste index' and the European Commission has pitched in on the absurdity with 'a common definition for food waste' and 'legally binding targets to reduce food waste' in Europe, where '88 million tonnes of food waste [is] generated annually.' Clearly, there is enough food in Europe to put on ships to provide emergency life-saving food supplies for Africans today.

Long-term solutions from the EU must focus on increasing Africa's agricultural production to ensure the continent, first and foremost, feeds itself, before exporting food, such as cocoa, in demand in developed countries. With the EU supporting agricultural production of indigenous African grains, such as millet, teff, and sorghum, African countries could reduce wheat imports and the continent's agricultural sector will focus on producing foods for local consumption.

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After the energy and economic crisis, the Commission must pursue renewable energy in Africa with the same political and legal support being given industry to secure gas supplies from the continent. If doubts about technology and solar radiation are no longer relevant, then precisely what is holding back climate mitigation projects in Africa? Money. The hour is long past for politicians to accept that climate change is not an economic problem. It is a new

> reality of environmental catastrophe that is certain to create humanitarian crisis and at a scope and scale perhaps never before seen.

Since the Commission now supports industry securing gas from Africa, it must, in the spirit of solidarity, do the same in capitalising on the continent's profound natural renewable resource from the sun.With 180,000 Terawatt hours (TWh) per annum of wind energy potential, '27 countries on their own could satisfy the entire continental electricity demand.'

A lot has gone into developing democratic governance across the continent, which is being threatened because the cost for a meal a day keeps rising. As the Covid-19 pandemic has impeded all manner of development, so too economic hardship will derail progress on climate actions if they turn into civil strife. Europe must size this unique chance, as an economically wealthy continent seeking help from the poorest, to assume moral responsibility and political leadership by expressing solidarity, fraternity, and humanity with Africans.
