

Emerging analysis

# The future of France-Africa relations

Lessons from France's engagement with Africa under Macron and recommendations for the incoming President of France

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April 2022

## Key messages

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French President Emmanuel Macron's significant efforts to reshape the France–Africa relationship have yielded limited results.

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France should make more effort to base its partnership with African countries on issues of mutual interest. To facilitate this, French policy would benefit from having a clearer overarching Africa strategy framing its engagement on the continent, and in the European Union (EU) and other international fora.

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France should direct more of its investment towards projects that enhance climate and energy resilience in African countries, and that benefit Europe's energy security. France should become a larger partner in the development of Africa's digital and physical infrastructure.

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France should play a leading role in international fora to ensure that public financial resources are optimised and new additional resources are mobilised. At the EU level, France should seek to ensure that the EU delivers on its Africa agenda. The crisis in Ukraine must not divert attention and funds away from this important partnership.

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How to cite: Faure, R. (2022) The future of France-Africa relations: Lessons from France's engagement with Africa under Macron and recommendations for the incoming President of France. ODI Emerging Analysis. London: ODI (<https://odi.org/en/publications/the-future-of-france-africa-relations-lessons-from-frances-engagement-with-africa-under-macron-and-recommendations-for-the-incoming-president-of-france>)

### Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Mark Miller, Marta Foresti and Kathryn Nwajiaku-Dahou for reviewing and providing suggestions on earlier drafts, and Tegan Rogers and Nilima Gulrajani for their support throughout the process. I would also like to thank informal sources who provided useful insights as this paper was being developed and Matthew Foley for editing the text.

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# Acronyms

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ACT-A	Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AFD	Agence Française de Développement
AU	African Union
CAR	Central African Republic
CIAN	Council of French Investors in Africa
DSSI	Debt Service Suspension Initiative
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EIB	European Investment Bank
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
G20	Group of 20
G7	Group of 7
GNI	Gross National Income
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IDA	International Development Association
Multilateral Development Bank	
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDR	Special Drawing Rights
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise

# Executive summary

Between the conflict in Ukraine and the ongoing recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, the French presidential elections in April are taking place in an entirely different context to the poll held five years ago which brought President Emmanuel Macron to power. In the months leading up to the election, the context appeared to favour Macron's bid for re-election, and gives unusual prominence to international affairs in the campaign.

This paper looks back at Macron's external action on the African continent and assesses the progress made towards his ambition of creating a new relationship with African states. It then turns to the future and considers lessons from past efforts as well as how Macron could lead a more effective engagement in Africa if he is re-elected in this rapidly evolving world context.

## **Macron's engagement in Africa 2017–2022: actions and results**

Africa has been a central part of Macron's foreign policy from the start of his tenure. This was motivated by Macron's perception that a large number of global challenges with implications for France are concentrated in Africa (climate change, demography, terrorism, economic development, health). Macron has put a good deal of energy into reshaping the France–Africa relationship and building a new narrative. He drew on France's foreign policy levers and made many positive announcements, but it remains difficult to point to concrete achievements.

***Macron tried to renew France's diplomacy with African states*** through speeches, public apologies for France's past actions, visits, declarations and summits. By these means, he reaffirmed France's changed relationship with African states, from that of a former colonial power to equal partners. This change of narrative was received with some scepticism, especially in former colonies, made worse by gaffes, a tone that was perceived as condescending and unpopular policies at home (e.g. increasing university fees for foreign students).

***Macron initiated a reform of France's bilateral development cooperation.*** A new aid strategy adopted in August 2021 marked a turn in French aid, with a greater focus on African countries, in particular low-income countries, and an increase of the aid budget, putting it on track to reach 0.7% ODA/GNI by 2025. This reform was

largely welcomed at home and abroad, but its implementation and impact will be the true test of its success.

***Macron engaged on many fronts at the multilateral level to make sure financing was available for African states in need.*** Those efforts have led to progress in some areas (debt suspension during Covid, replenishments of health and education global funds), but have also been limited in other areas for lack of international consensus (e.g. reform of the EU development finance architecture) or because France did not deliver on its commitments (e.g. level of financial contribution to ACT-A).

***In response to France's declining share of trade and investment on the African continent, Macron has deepened his economic diplomacy*** with anglophone and lusophone countries and dedicated French resources to support entrepreneurs and SMEs in Africa. Such measures take time to yield results and require significant funding to have a sizeable and visible impact.

***In the area of security and governance, Macron largely followed the policies of his predecessors.*** France's stated non-interference in African domestic politics is inconsistent with its active support for less than democratic leaders when it suits its needs. This ambivalence has contributed to a growing anti-French feeling in parts of Africa, and the erosion of France's influence in countries such as Mali and the Central African Republic.

***France has actively sought to get the EU to focus more on Africa and to adopt the narrative of equal partnership*** but with limited results. Covid-19 and now the Russian invasion of Ukraine have been considerable obstacles to this effort.

Macron's efforts over the past five years to reshape the France–Africa relationship and build a new narrative have yielded limited results. External factors have not helped, and Macron's tenure coincided with a period of unprecedented crises. His ambition was also limited by the fact that France is a mid-sized power acting alone in a fragmented geopolitical landscape.

### **Looking ahead: how can France engage more effectively in Africa?**

#### ***Lessons for the future***

A number of lessons emerge from France's engagement with Africa under Macron.

To succeed in establishing a partnership that is truly targeted at the entire continent, there needs to be a clearer strategy that breaks down the different levels of engagement (continent-wide, regional, bilateral), the different categories of partners, the types of cooperation and the different instruments available.

As the geopolitical context makes it more difficult for a country like France to have major influence on its own, France needs a clear vision of what should be done bilaterally, when partnering with like-minded countries would make sense and when working through regional (especially the EU) and multilateral organisations would have the most impact.

Words and a different style are not sufficient to lead to change and convince concerned parties that the stated change is genuine. Words need to be followed by actions with tangible results for partners. This takes time.

There needs to be coherence between messages communicated abroad through foreign policy and domestic policies.

### ***For a more effective partnership driven by mutual interest***

A more effective partnership with Africa should focus on issues of mutual interest. French priorities will help guide this, but African priorities set by African citizens and their institutions should also inform where mutual benefits lie, and where France can add value. This paper highlights four areas where this could be done.

#### ***i. Investing in climate and energy resilience***

- France should invest heavily in renewable energy and natural gas in line with commitments made at COP26 to increase energy production in Africa.
- Through its contribution to South Africa's International Just Energy Transition Partnership, France should evaluate the success and potential replicability of such an initiative in other African countries and other sectors.

#### ***ii. Investing in infrastructure fit for the future***

- France should set a target for its investments in African infrastructure, and should find new ways to catalyse responsible private investment.
- France should develop a clear digital strategy for its action in Africa.

#### ***iii. Giving IFIs the means to work more effectively***

- France should lead the push at the multilateral level for a more efficient use of development banks' capital and the introduction of new options to help expand the resources available. It should use the MDB capital adequacy review as an opportunity for this.
- France should also explore with its partners how to maximise the financing capacity of domestic public banks.

#### ***iv. Pushing the EU to deliver on its Africa agenda***

- France should play a leading role at the EU level to ensure that the EU's African agenda moves forward, and that the crisis in Ukraine does not divert attention and funds away. France should lead by example by engaging more through Team Europe in Africa.
- France should push for internal EU reforms in policy areas that have an impact on Africa (e.g. migration and asylum).

# 1 Introduction

The world is at a juncture unique in recent history. As the global pandemic recedes, the West finds itself drawn into a confrontation with Russia following the invasion of Ukraine and threats to NATO members. This is in addition to tensions between the United States and China.

In this context of growing uncertainty, France is holding presidential elections while also holding the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU). Instead of focusing the debate on domestic issues, as is usually the case, this period of crisis and EU leadership is fuelling discussion on how France's next president should navigate new geopolitical developments and avoid the erosion of the country's weight and influence on the international stage.

Macron's chances of winning a new term are high; his poll ratings have improved since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, suggesting he is the most likely to win. Nonetheless, these are just predictions.

Over his term in office, Macron has given significant prominence to Africa and pushed for a new and equal partnership between France and Africa. However, results have not met his ambitions. This paper looks back at Macron's tenure, assessing his actions and achievements in reshaping the France–Africa relationship (Section 2). Turning to the future, the paper asks what lessons can be learned from past efforts, and how Macron could lead more effective engagement in Africa if he is re-elected. The analysis identifies shared challenges and opportunities, as well as new ways to engage that would move the relationship towards a more balanced and mutually beneficial partnership (Section 3).

## 2 France's engagement in Africa 2017–2022: a stocktake of actions and results

Like many of his predecessors, Macron tried to instil a sense of renewal in the France–Africa relationship. In certain respects, his actions have gone beyond those of past Presidents.

Macron's belief that France and Africa have much to gain through a closer relationship appears to be genuine. This is motivated by Macron's perception that a number of global challenges with implications for France are concentrated in Africa (climate change, demography, terrorism, development, health) (Duclos, 2021). His mastery of issues around development cooperation and economic opportunities has impressed during interviews and events. He also has personal experience of Africa, having been posted to Nigeria for a six-month internship while a student at the École Nationale d'Administration.

### 2.1 France's diplomacy with African states

From the start of his term, Macron made clear that Africa was a key element of his foreign policy. In his first months as president in 2017, seven of the 22 countries he visited were in Africa. His second presidential visit, after Germany, was to Mali. Macron also sought to engage with countries where France was traditionally less present, such as Angola, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa.

Six months into his presidency, Macron gave a speech at the University of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso launching a new narrative for the relationship and framing his policy for the next five years. The choice of venue as well as the content of the speech marked a change in style as he addressed African citizens, and young people in particular, directly. This interaction has continued throughout his presidency, the latest example being the France–Africa summit in October 2021, which brought together civil society representatives and diasporas in place of the usual heads of state and diplomats. While the Ouagadougou speech touched on predictable topics, such as education, culture, entrepreneurship, security, good governance, aid, migration and demography, Macron's

tone sought to cast African partners as equals, breaking from past practice of France as the former colonial power meddling in African countries' internal affairs. With statements such as 'I am from a generation that doesn't come to tell Africans what to do', Macron unambiguously recognised past practices and presented himself as incarnating change.

As part of building this new narrative, Macron has apologised for France's actions and colonial past to help 'normalise' and improve relations with African countries. In Rwanda, he recognised France's failure to prevent the genocide and asked for forgiveness at a memorial in Kigali following the release of a report by a French inquiry panel – commissioned by the President – which blamed France for not foreseeing the slaughter and considered that the government bore a 'serious and overwhelming' responsibility (Duclert, 2021). Another report (Stora, 2021) on France's actions during the independence war in Algeria led to official apologies and a recognition of crimes committed by French forces. In 2021, France returned artworks to Benin looted during the colonial period. These actions have gone far beyond what other French presidents have done in the past.

In francophone Africa, Macron has expressed support for the creation of a new common currency. The Eco is due to replace the much-criticised CFA Franc, seen by many as a relic of the colonial era and an instrument for France to influence the economic and monetary decisions of former colonies. Covid-19 got in the way and the Eco has yet to be created, but there is agreement on key changes, including French withdrawal from governance bodies and the end of the obligation for the Central Bank of West African States to deposit half of its foreign exchange reserves at the Banque de France. Other aspects remain unchanged; France will, for instance, remain the financial guarantor of the Eco, and parity between the Eco and the Euro is maintained.

Alongside positive gestures there have been some gaffes. Macron's tone and style, which have also been criticised in France, come across as arrogant and superior and have been perceived by some in Africa as post-colonial and condescending. For instance, responding to a journalist at a G20 summit in 2017, Macron justified why there was no Marshall Plan for Africa by explaining that its 'civilisational' problems ('failed states, complex democratic transitions, demographic transitions') were different from the challenges facing Europe after the Second World War. While some welcomed his frank response, many found his choice of words offensive, and his vision of Africa outdated.

The change in narrative pushed by Macron externally has at times been dampened by domestic policy choices. For example, a decision to increase university fees for non-EU students was criticised by African students – who represent over 40% of the students

concerned – as well as student unions (Bour, 2018). The impact is expected to be felt most acutely by students from poorer backgrounds with no access to scholarships, a group where francophone students from sub-Saharan Africa tend to be over-represented (Bebe Epale, 2020). Legislation on immigration and asylum (JORF, 2018) introduced under Macron's presidency has been strongly criticised, especially the extended period during which individuals can be detained before being deported. A reduction in the number of visas issued to Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians, in retaliation for those countries refusing to take back their citizens when they are illegally present on French territory, has affected relations.

Macron's new narrative was received with some scepticism in Africa, especially in former colonies where the French presence is still felt by some as neo-colonial. The presence of large French multinationals, which have quasi monopolies and are sometimes awarded public contracts in opaque circumstances, has sparked tensions in countries like Senegal, and fed frustration among citizens who feel their country has achieved political independence, but has yet to emancipate from France economically. France's significant military presence in West Africa is also unwelcome to many. While this resentment is not new, it seems to have worsened under Macron's presidency. In anglophone and lusophone countries, where France has no colonial history, the perception is more neutral. Relations appear to be based on mutual economic interests, and as such are more in line with Macron's vision of the future partnership between France and Africa.

## 2.2 Bilateral development cooperation

At home, Macron has sought to change policies towards Africa, starting with the commissioning of a parliamentary report on modernising French aid. The report set out the foundations for a new aid strategy, which passed into law in August 2021.<sup>1</sup> The law marks a turn in French aid, putting more focus on African countries, in particular low-income countries, and committing to increasing the amount of aid going to those countries, including in the form of grants. The law sets a path towards reaching the 0.7% ODA/GNI objective by 2025, and is on track to meet its intermediary target of 0.55% by 2022.

The report and legislation were largely welcomed by civil society and development professionals. The law was passed unanimously, reflecting wide consensus in parliament on the direction of French aid policy. The reform was also welcomed outside France, especially in the context of economic difficulties due to Covid, and when other major donors like the UK were scaling back their aid. Time will tell

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<sup>1</sup> More detail on the new strategy is provided in this ODI blog: <https://odi.org/en/insights/is-france-the-new-development-leader-on-the-european-block/>

whether the objectives set in the law are met and lead to practical change.

Macron has also tried to move away from the vocabulary of aid and development, speaking instead of investment and solidarity. As a first step, he announced that the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) would change its name in the near future. It is unclear whether this symbolic change will make a significant difference but this change in vocabulary is in direct response to criticisms from African partners.

## 2.3 The multilateral financing infrastructure

At the international level, Macron has pushed for more financial support to developing countries during the Covid crisis and to enable an equitable recovery, whether through debt cancellation via the Paris Club or debt suspension through the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI). However, despite efforts by France and others to develop a Common Framework for Debt Treatments under the G20, major debt-holders such as China – the largest public external debt-holder in LICs – have not fully engaged in the process (IMF, 2021; Ahmed and Brown, 2022). Macron has tried to lead the move towards recycling \$100 billion in IMF Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) from richer to poorer countries. Progress has been slow, with some major players not fully backing the initiative. For instance, Germany cannot recycle SDRs due to domestic legislation, and the US surprised partners when the US Treasury did not make the expected request to Congress in March 2022 asking for authorisation to reallocate US SDRs.

France has hosted a number of summits targeted at increasing finance for developing countries. The Finance in Common Summits brought together Public Development Banks in support of common actions for climate and sustainable development. The Summit on Financing African Economies convened African institutions and leaders and their key international partners in Paris to boost the African private sector, foster prosperity and accelerate the green and digital transition. The recent AU–EU summit was held under the French EU Presidency. France also hosted the replenishment conference of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and co-hosted the replenishment conference for the Global Partnership for Education.

There are other areas where France could have done more to help address wider shortcomings in the development finance system. Development finance institutions could be further streamlined to improve efficiency. In the EU context, an experts' panel recommended creating a European Development Bank (either within the EBRD or EIB). France alongside European partners struggled to marshal support behind this recommendation. Instead, the decision was taken to continue more or less with the status quo (Council of the EU, 2021). In response to the pandemic, France backed ACT-A

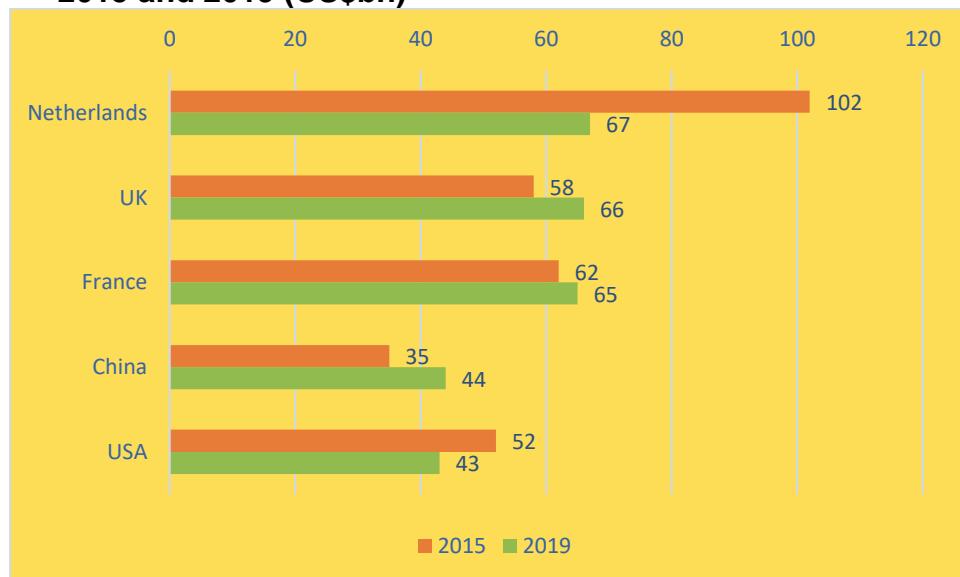
(Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator) from the start, co-hosting the launch event and making financial pledges early on. Yet France disbursed less than half of its pledge to ACT-A and only contributed 22% of its ‘fair-share’,<sup>2</sup> lower than any other G7 member (Collectif Santé Mondiale, 2022; WHO, 2022).

## 2.4 Economic diplomacy

Conscious of France’s declining share of trade and investment on the African continent, largely the result of increased competition and a growing number of foreign powers in Africa, Macron has deepened economic diplomacy with anglophone and lusophone countries.

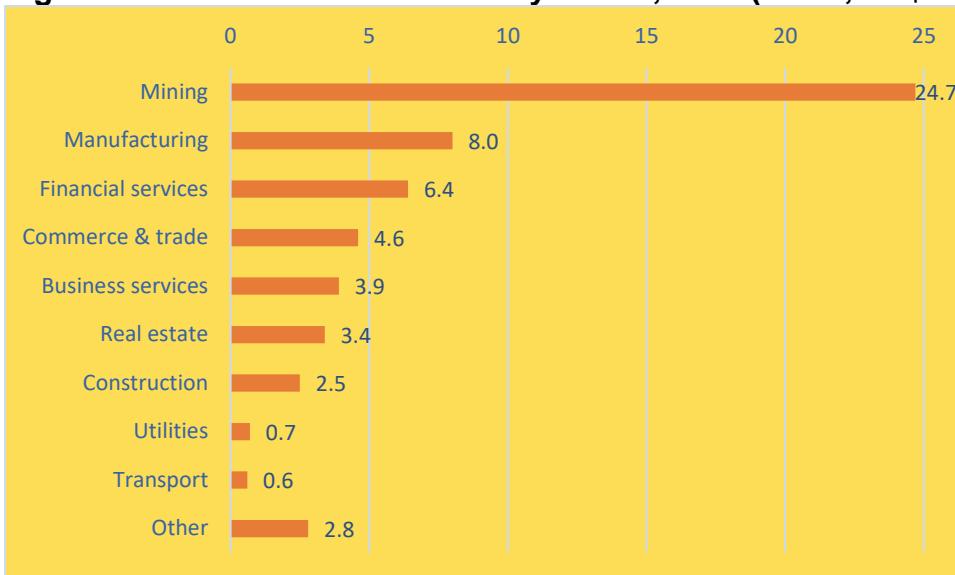
Since 2000, French exports to Africa have doubled in volume, while the overall market multiplied by four, effectively halving France’s share of exports. French FDI on the continent also increased, and diversified away from extractive sectors, which now represent a little under half of the total stock (Gaymard, 2019). But France lost its largest investor status in Africa, and 2019 data shows it in third place after the Netherlands and the UK (see Figure 1) (UNCTAD, 2021).

**Figure 1 Top five investor economies by FDI stock in Africa, 2015 and 2019 (US\$bn)**



Source: UNCTAD (2021)

<sup>2</sup> ‘Fair shares’ are calculated based on the size of a country’s economy and what they would gain from a faster recovery in the global economy and trade.

**Figure 2 French FDI in Africa by sector, 2019 (stock, US\$bn)**

Source: EIU (2020)

A survey of African opinion leaders commissioned by the Council of French Investors in Africa (CIAN) reveals that France's image as a partner has lost ground since 2019. When asked to cite non-African countries with the best image, France ranked fifth and was cited by 21% of interviewees in 2019; in 2020 it was sixth with 20%; in 2021 it was seventh with 17%. In 2022 France regained sixth position, with 18% (Marbot and Toulemonde, 2021; CIAN, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). Respondents in the 2022 edition valued France as a partner whose companies invest in their economy, compared with China, which was valued for building infrastructure, Germany for creating jobs and Russia for combatting terrorism (CIAN, 2022). Data disaggregated at the regional level in the latest edition of the survey shows that France's image is better in Central and Southern Africa, perhaps a sign that Macron's economic diplomacy in these regions is starting to pay off.

France's economic diplomacy in Africa under Macron has focused on entrepreneurship, with a particular emphasis on SMEs. Two main initiatives reorienting private sector instruments were launched for that purpose. Choose Africa, led by AFD and its private sector arm Proparco, will provide technical support and €2.5 billion in financing over 2018–2022 (equity investment, loans and guarantees) to African start-ups and SMEs, as well as local financial institutions looking to develop their activities targeted at those actors. Digital Africa will deploy €130 million by 2025 in support of African digital start-ups. Other initiatives support diaspora entrepreneurs. This focus on entrepreneurs is consistent with Macron's more direct engagement with people in Africa rather than their leaders, but will take time and require significant funding to have a sizeable and visible impact.

## 2.5 Security and governance

The recent announcement of the withdrawal of French and European forces from Mali after a breakdown in the relationship with the military government is a blow to Macron's efforts in the Sahel region.

Although the circumstances leading to the withdrawal were not entirely in the hands of the French, it does highlight flaws in the 3D approach (defence, development, diplomacy) that France has taken in the Sahel. Military operations had some success in countering terrorist groups, but were not accompanied by significant political reforms and development outcomes on the ground, suggesting that the diplomacy and development pillars could have been used more effectively. This is symptomatic of a broader ambivalence in France's new engagement with Africa under Macron.

There are inconsistencies between France's stance of non-interference in African domestic politics and its active support for less than democratic leaders when it suits its needs (Chutel, 2021). The example that best illustrates this is France's relationship with Chad, a close ally in the fight against insurgents in the Sahel. As an article published by the magazine *Foreign Policy* put it: 'Paris's uncritical embrace of late dictator Idriss Déby prioritized regional security over human rights' (Tubiana, 2021). After Déby's death, Macron travelled to Chad to pay tribute to him at his funeral, and to back Déby's son as his successor despite the lack of any democratic process. This prompted criticism from the opposition and civil society in Chad, in neighbouring countries and beyond the African continent. While this position may make sense from a pragmatic and realpolitik point of view, it does not sit well with Macron's calls for fair and legitimate elections in Mali, or his public condemnation of the military coup in Burkina Faso.

These inconsistencies have contributed to anti-French feeling, and have eroded France's sphere of influence in Africa over the past five years. This decline has been made worse by the arrival of new actors, including Russian mercenaries in the Central African Republic (CAR), Libya, Sudan and Mali. These same actors have allegedly exploited France's double standards to engage in French bashing through disinformation campaigns and propaganda (Briand, 2022) as a way to discredit France and gain influence in those countries.

## 2.6 EU engagement with Africa

Macron was elected president after a pro-EU campaign. He has engaged actively in EU affairs, and has advocated for a greater focus on Africa at the EU level. The UK's departure from the EU has made this more difficult as Britain was a close ally on this front.

During the Covid crisis, Macron pressed the EU to share more vaccines with Africa and to waive patents for vaccines, with limited success. Under France's Presidency, the EU–AU summit in February 2022 was described as 'one-sided – it focused solely on Africa,

omitting discussions on Europe's internal issues that matter for Africa' and as adding 'little in terms of substance to what was originally envisaged by the EU' (Bilal, 2022).

France's efforts have not led to a significant change in the AU–EU dynamic towards one of equal partnership, in which Africans and their interests are genuinely heard. It should be recognised that Covid-19 and now the Russian invasion of Ukraine have been considerable obstacles to these efforts.

This overview of the past five years shows that Macron has brought a lot of energy to reshaping the France–Africa relationship and building a new narrative. France has made many positive announcements, but it remains difficult to point to concrete achievements as a result.

External factors have hindered these ambitions. Macron's presidency coincided with a period of unprecedented crises, with the Covid-19 pandemic and the growing security threat posed by Russia. Macron's policy towards Africa was also limited by the fact that France is a mid-sized power acting alone in a fragmented geopolitical landscape.

Lessons can be learned from the past five years to inform the next French president's term. The next section reflects on those lessons and identifies areas and ways to engage more effectively with Africa. It also takes into account the added complexity in the geopolitical landscape triggered by the war in Ukraine.

# 3 Looking ahead: how France can engage more effectively in Africa

## 3.1 Lessons that should inform the future France–Africa partnership

When turning to the future, French actors should bear in mind a number of lessons that have emerged from the past five years. These should inform the approach and actions taken to progress towards a partnership of equals with Africa.

The first lesson is that words and a different style are not sufficient to lead to change and to convince concerned parties that the stated change is genuine. The Cameroonian intellectual Achille Mbembe has warned that well-intentioned speeches cannot erase France's colonial past, and that a French president cannot (and should not) impose a new narrative that will be accepted by all in France and Africa.

A second lesson is that words need to be followed by actions with tangible results for partners. There needs to be a recognition that this takes time. Words and actions also need to be consistent with one another, and require changes in practice at all levels in order to be truly transformative. This includes different ways of engaging for French government officials, military personnel, private sector actors and citizens themselves.

A third lesson is that Macron, in the tradition of French presidents, has been very focused on representing France on the international stage, but more attention could have been given to the coherence between his messages abroad and domestic policies. The France–Africa relationship takes place on the African continent but also at home, and more should be done through domestic policy to align with the overall vision, in particular around migration policy.

A fourth lesson is that, as Macron tried to broaden relationships with the African continent at large, much of his engagement ended up focused on francophone Africa. To succeed in establishing a partnership that is truly targeted at the entire continent, there needs to be a clearer strategy that breaks down the different levels of

engagement (e.g. continent-wide, regional, bilateral), the different categories of partners, the types of cooperation and the different instruments available. This would also help coordinate the many actors within France with their own African agendas, whether government, public agencies, subnational authorities or private actors. Such a recommendation was made in a report prepared by Senators in 2013 (Sénat, 2013).

Finally, as the geopolitical context makes it more difficult for a country like France to exert major influence on its own, France should reflect on the channels through which it works. In other words, there needs to be a clear vision of what should be done bilaterally, when partnering with like-minded countries would make sense and when working through regional (especially the EU) and multilateral organisations would have the most impact.

### 3.2 A more effective partnership driven by mutual interest

The African continent is rich with natural resources and experiencing rapid economic and population growth, presenting both challenges and opportunities, as well as enormous potential for the future. Foreign powers are well aware of this, and there has been fierce competition for influence and markets on the continent.

In this competitive landscape, France can work towards a more effective partnership with Africa by focusing on issues of mutual interest. French priorities will help guide this, but African priorities set by African citizens and their institutions should also inform where mutual benefits lie, and where France can add value. In a recent Afrobarometer survey, Africans prioritised jobs and health (both mentioned by 34% of respondents), followed by infrastructure, education and access to clean water when asked about the ‘most important problems that government should address to make their lives better’ (EUISS, 2021). This gives a sense of short-term priorities for individuals. Longer-term objectives for the continent are captured in the AU Agenda 2063 and its list of flagship projects (see Box 1), where infrastructure, transport, digital economy and services, trade and economic integration feature heavily. For the implementation of the first 10-year plan of this agenda, the AU estimated that 10–30% of the financing would come from external sources, giving a sense of the type of investment and the scale of financing the AU expects from external partners (AU Financing Agenda 2063).

## **Box 1 Flagship projects of Agenda 2063**

- 1 Integrated High Speed Train Network
- 2 Formulation of an African Commodities Strategy
- 3 Establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)
- 4 The African Passport and Free Movement of People
- 5 Silencing The Guns By 2020
- 6 Implementation of the Grand Inga Dam Project
- 7 Establishment of a Single African Air-Transport Market (Saatm)
- 8 Establishment of an Annual African Economic Forum
- 9 Establishment of the African Financial Institutions
- 10 The Pan-African E-Network
- 11 Africa Outer Space Strategy
- 12 An African Virtual and E-University
- 13 Cyber Security
- 14 Great African Museum
- 15 Encyclopedia Africana

Source: <https://au.int/agenda2063/flagship-projects>

Changes in the geopolitical context should also inform future engagement. For example, there is scope to work more closely on issues of energy and food security, which are of concern to both Africa and Europe, and made more obvious by the war in Ukraine.

Based on the above, we highlight four areas of mutual interest for both partners where France could engage more effectively: two on the African continent directly, and two through international engagement.

### **3.2.1 Investing in climate and energy resilience**

With a growing population and expanding economy, Africa's need for energy is rising. This need is even greater when accounting for the fact that 600 million people do not have access to electricity and around 900 million lack access to clean cooking. Major investments in renewable energy and gas together with improved energy efficiency are expected to help fill this need, and put Africa on a much less carbon-intensive development path (IEA, 2019).

Following major discoveries of gas reserves across Africa, the continent could even become a major exporter, which in the current

context would offer an alternative for countries that want to rely less on Russian gas.

**France should invest heavily in renewable energy and natural gas in line with commitments made at COP26<sup>3</sup> to increase energy production in Africa.** This would benefit Africa by helping to meet internal demand and potentially leading to further exports in the energy market, and could be a win for European energy security. French companies are at an advantage as they can draw on their long track record in the African extractive sector, which represents close to half of France's FDI stock on the continent.

**Through its contribution to South Africa's International Just Energy Transition Partnership, France should evaluate the success and potential replicability of such an initiative in other African countries and other sectors.** The initiative builds on South Africa's domestic strategy for moving away from coal-fired power stations and towards greener energy generation. It is being piloted as a new model<sup>4</sup> with measures to protect vulnerable workers and communities affected by the move away from coal; to restructure the debt of South Africa's state power utility Eskom; to reform the electricity sector; and to develop employment opportunities in a low-carbon economy (European Commission, 2021). The partnership, which currently brings together South Africa with France, Germany, the UK, the US and the EU, was announced at COP26 and should bring domestic and international private actors to the table to join in the financial effort. Other partnerships are under consideration in Senegal, Egypt, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya and Morocco (Elysée, 2022), as well as in Asia. France should participate in these processes and encourage French companies in the energy sector to contribute. France should also explore the potential of using such partnerships in other sectors.

### 3.2.2 Investing in infrastructure fit for the future

As identified in the AU Agenda 2063, investing in physical and digital infrastructure will be key for Africa's future.

The African continent is moving towards closer economic integration with the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in January 2021. AfCFTA's success will require major investment in key sectors including infrastructure, climate mitigation, skills development and digitalisation. If the challenge is met, Africa's market offers new opportunities for growth and development for its people and for economic partners.

**France should set a target for its investment in African infrastructure and should find new ways to catalyse responsible**

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<sup>3</sup> France signed the Statement on International Public Support for the Clean Energy Transition at COP26. Signatories commit to ending foreign financing of fossil fuel projects by the end of 2022, with exceptions if projects are accompanied by carbon capture techniques (<https://ukcop26.org/statement-on-international-public-support-for-the-clean-energy-transition/>).

<sup>4</sup> This is also referred to as a country platform.

**private investment.** French companies and public actors have a comparative advantage that could respond to some of Africa's investment needs (e.g. transport infrastructure and urban planning). Incentives should be introduced for them to factor AfCFTA in their African investment strategies. Public finance should enhance the tools available to support the private sector, e.g. through guarantees or other risk-sharing mechanisms. In exchange, France should push for more transparency around procurement processes and contracts, knowledge transfer or taxes paid in-country, breaking away from past practices that have harmed France's reputation in Africa.

The Covid-19 crisis has revealed the importance of and potential offered by digital technologies to work, access services or learn remotely. The pandemic has also shone a light on the digital divide between developed and developing countries. According to International Telecommunication Union estimates, 33% of individuals used the internet in Africa in 2021 compared with a world average of 63% (ITU, 2021). Evidence suggests that internet and mobile access can lead to development. Research found a direct relationship between the digital economy and development in Africa generating increases in income per capita and GDP per capita (ITU, 2019). But there remains a large financing gap to build the necessary infrastructure in Africa, and crucial challenges around regulation and user protection.

As the digital sector becomes more important in everyday life and the economy, France and Africa have a common interest in contributing to building a global digital sector that is innovative but also protective of user rights and guarantees wider cyber security.

**France should develop a clear digital strategy for its actions in Africa.** There is obviously great interest as well as expertise in the digital sector in France, but actions appear to be scattered with many actors involved and no clear objective guiding the overall effort. France has made Europe's digital sovereignty a key pillar of its EU Presidency, and public investment has increased domestically to ensure France stays in the digital race and attracts talent. French legislation regulating the digital sector is among the most advanced and inspired EU regulations. The AFD prides itself as being one of the first development agencies to have adopted a digital strategy. France co-founded the EU's Digital for Development Hub, which aims to facilitate global digital cooperation including with African partners. Macron launched the Digital Africa initiative to provide seed funding for potential African unicorns. Furthermore, with private sector giants like Orange well established in Africa, France has extensive private expertise in the sector. All of these elements could be better coordinated and built on to carve out a niche for France's action in the digital space that builds on existing expertise and avoids duplication with what is being done at the EU level, for example. It could focus on the use of digital technology in specific sectors such as health or education.

### 3.2.3 Giving IFIs the means to work more effectively

There have been repeated calls in international fora for more MDB engagement to achieve the SDGs and support a green and equitable recovery from the pandemic. The G20 has commissioned a panel to review MDBs' capital adequacy, which is expected to consider potential adaptations to current frameworks to maximise MDBs' financing capacity.

**France should lead the push at the multilateral level for more efficient use of development banks' capital and the introduction of new options to help increase the resources available. The MDBs' capital adequacy review provides an opportunity for this that should not be missed.** There are many options being touted among development finance experts, including the merging of the World Bank's IDA and IBRD windows, as was done at the ADB and IADB, which would enable the provision of more loans. But there is also a growing consensus around the need for more financial resources, in addition to optimising existing ones. This can take various forms, including general capital increases, allowing external non-voting capital from non-sovereign actors (Humphrey, 2021), issuing MDB loan guarantees to free up capital or a proposal put forward by the Education Commission and gaining traction in the education and climate sectors for sovereign donors to provide guarantees to MDBs covering their overall portfolio of loans. These guarantees would in effect provide a capital increase to MDBs and enable them to leverage this increase in equity to make more loans. The innovation highlighted by the Education Commission is that donor guarantees would be leveraged by MDBs in the same way they leverage shareholder capital, which would result in expanding the pot of money available (Education Commission, 2022 and forthcoming).

**France should also explore with its partners how to maximise the financing capacity of domestic public banks.** It can use platforms such as the International Development Finance Club currently chaired by the AFD Executive Director and the Finance in Common Summit, whose secretariat is headquartered at the AFD, to engage in practical reflections.

### 3.2.4 Pushing the EU to deliver on its Africa agenda

Recent crises have harmed the EU's relations with Africa. The Covid-19 pandemic damaged the EU's image in partner countries. Now, with the war in Ukraine and the likely long-lasting consequences it will have, the EU's attention has shifted east. African partners have expressed frustration with the treatment of African individuals fleeing Ukraine, who have been refused the right to cross into the EU safely (AU, 2022).

The world is less certain than it was, and the accumulation of crises makes EU policy-making more complex. But long-term objectives

should not be traded for short-term crisis response. The recent EU–AU summit reaffirmed the importance of the partnership with Africa and made a number of announcements around future cooperation. France together with other member states will need to make sure that the EU delivers on its commitments to remain a valued and trusted partner in Africa.

**France should play a leading role at the EU level to ensure that the EU's African agenda moves forward, and that the crisis in Ukraine does not divert attention and funds. France should lead by example by engaging more through Team Europe in Africa.**

This offers some advantages from a French perspective. First, it contributes to Macron's efforts to build a sovereign EU that can play a larger role in international affairs. Second, working through Team Europe helps circumvent France's contested presence in countries where this is an issue. The Takuba Task Force in Mali was an attempt at this with the creation of a European military task force under French command, which was to eventually replace the French operation Barkhane (Vircoulon, 2022; Lory, 2022). Although things did not work out well in Mali for French and EU forces, other contexts may prove more sympathetic. A further advantage of working under the EU banner for France is to exploit established EU relations in countries where French actors are not traditional partners. For effective engagement at the EU level, France should set clear delineation in terms of what actions are pursued bilaterally, and what should be done through the EU.

**France should push for internal EU reforms in policy areas that have an impact on Africa.** An obvious area is asylum and migration policy, a subject that has been at the heart of heated discussions among EU member states for years. A wave of solidarity for Ukrainian refugees has swept the EU and led to rapid changes in asylum rules to allow Ukrainians to enter, settle for up to three years and work without having to formally apply for asylum. The exceptional measures put in place prove that progress can be made even on such a divisive agenda. France should work with European partners to avoid double standards between European refugees and refugees from further afield.

## 4 Conclusion

Macron has put a great deal of energy into opening a new chapter in the relationship between France and Africa, but the results have been below expectations. If Macron is re-elected and truly plans to pursue the trajectory set out during his first term, he will need to look at what worked and did not, and consider what changes need to be introduced in the next five years. This becomes even more important as the world moves into new, uncertain times. France, and Europe more broadly, has much to gain from being close and on good terms with Africa. This can be done in a way that benefits all sides if the focus is on priorities that are of mutual benefit, and finding ways of engaging more effectively.

In the event Macron loses the election, there are still useful lessons to be drawn from his presidency for a successor. However, depending on who the winner is, there is little doubt that his efforts would come undone if Marine Le Pen or Eric Zemmour entered the Elysée Palace – the candidates were respectively in second and fourth position in polls in late March 2022. This is a useful reminder that Macron's narrative on the future relationship between France and Africa has not achieved consensus, either in Africa or in France.

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