

# Side Event at AU-EU Senior Officials Meeting of the High-Level Policy Dialogue on Science, Technology and Innovation

## **The role of EU-AU R&I strategies in contributing to Africa's food future:** Insights from the CEA-FIRST and AfriFOODlinks projects

Joint Concept Note and Programme

Date & Time: 21 October 2025 9:00-17:00 CET

Venue: University Foundation, Room Félicien Cattier (Rue d'Egmont 11 - 1000 Brussel)

Format: Hybrid

Organisers: CEA-FIRST & AfriFOODlinks Projects

Registration: [\[link\]](#)\*

\*Please note that registration for in-person participation ends on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2025.

### Overview

During the AU–EU Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) week, the **CEA-FIRST** and **AfriFOODlinks** projects will co-host a one-day event exploring how AU-EU cooperation can strengthen evidence-based policymaking. The event will build on the joint AU–EU commitment to advancing food and nutrition security, sustainable agriculture, and the transition toward a renewed **FNSSA Roadmap (2027-2036)**.

The **AfriFOODlinks Policy Dialogue** will shift the focus to **urban innovation**, showcasing how African-led, context-specific research and co-creation processes - such as Living Labs and multi-stakeholder platforms - can drive food systems transformation. By highlighting African cities as hotspots for innovation and governance reform, the dialogue will explore how EU-AU R&I policies can better support cities as engines of inclusive, citizen-centered change.

The **IRC Functional Working Groups (FWG) Co-Creation Session** will bring together IRC members, AU–EU policy actors, and funders to validate and refine the **IRC FWG Strategy and Operational Plan** as a delivery mechanism for the FNSSA Roadmap. This strategic discussion will ensure the AU-EU International Research Consortium on Food Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture responds to stakeholder needs, aligns with AU and EU priorities (Agenda 2063, EU Green Deal, CAADP Kampala Strategy, STISA 2034, and SDGs), and secures commitments for the IRC pilot phase under CEA-FIRST.

The day will conclude with the **2nd CEA-FIRST Policy Forum**, a high-level discussion bridging **research evidence and policymaking** to enhance coordination, visibility, and investment impact across AU–EU FNSSA collaboration. Through panels and open dialogue, it will explore opportunities for reducing fragmentation, improving funding coordination, and strengthening the AU–EU International Research Consortium (IRC) as a sustainable platform for food system transformation.

The three sessions will collectively demonstrate the **breadth and depth** of AU-EU cooperation: from **strategic governance design to city-level innovation**, to **evidence-based policymaking**, reinforcing the message that **Africa and Europe share the vision of mutually benefitting, long-term R&I cooperation**. The sessions are deliberately organised as a joint programme to demonstrate the breadth of AU–EU cooperation on FNSSA. Taken together, they illustrate the complementary dimensions needed for long-term transformation.



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### Draft Programme

Time (CET)	Agenda item	Host
08:30 – 9:00	<b>Arrival and Registration</b>	—
09:00 – 9:30	<b>Joint Opening &amp; Keynote Remarks</b> Welcome by CEA-FIRST & AfriFOODlinks coordinators AUC & EC Representatives: The context of the AU-EU FNSSA Roadmap	<b>Joint</b> Irene Annor-Frempong, FARA Luke Metelerkamp, ICLEI Africa Anna Mlynarczyk, EC DG-AGRI
09:30 – 11:15	<b>Session 1: AfriFOODlinks 2025 Policy Dialogue—From Policy to Practice: Integrating Urban Innovation into EU–AU R&amp;I Strategies</b>	<b>AfriFOODLinks</b>
09:30 – 09:35	<b>Introduction</b>	Peter Defranceschi, Head of ICLEI Brussels Office & Global CityFood Programme Coordinator
09:35 – 09:45	<b>Developing context-specific solutions through African-led R&amp;I</b>	Luke Metelerkamp, Portfolio Lead: Urban Food Systems, ICLEI Africa & coordinator of AfriFOODlinks project
09:45 – 10:05	<b>Cities at hotspots of innovation</b>	Rene van Veenhuizen, Hivos
10:05 – 10:15	<b>Living Labs as spaces for policy-oriented co-creation and innovation</b>	Bianca Minotti, Està Association
10:15 – 10:25	<b>Co-creation processes in practice: presentation from an AfriFOODlinks city</b>	Evelyn Musonda, City of Lusaka, Zambia
10:25 – 10:45	<b>Q&amp;A session (20min)</b>	All participants, facilitated by the moderators



10:45 – 11:15	<b>Coffee Break</b>	
11:15 – 13:30	<b>Session 2: Stakeholder Co-Creation for the IRC FWG Strategy and Operational Plan</b>	<b>CEA-FIRST</b>
11:15 – 11:30	<b>Scene Setting Presentation IRC FWG operations and linkage to FNSSA Roadmap</b>	Irene Annor-Frempong, FARA
11:30 – 12:15	<b>Moderated Panel Discussion</b>	Panelists from AUC, EC, Funder, Member State, Private Sector. Youth
12:15 – 12:55	<b>Breakout Sessions: Facilitators CEA-FIRST WP leaders</b>	Group 1: Refining FWG Strategy. Group 2: Co-designing Joint Work Programmes.
12:55 – 13:10	<b>Plenary Feedback</b>	Rapporteurs present highlights and proposed actions from each group
13:10 – 13:30	<b>Closing and Next Steps</b>	IRC Co-chairs summarize commitments and outline follow-up actions

13:30 – 14:30      **Lunch**

14:30 – 16:00	<b>Sessions 3: 2<sup>nd</sup> CEA-FIRST Policy Forum—Bridging Research and Policy through the AU–EU IRC on FNSSA</b>	<b>CEA-FIRST</b>
14:30 – 14:40	<b>Welcome remarks</b>	Ioannis Dimitriou, Agrinatura
14:40 – 15:40	<b>Panel discussion: Enhancing uptake of research evidence to influence policy-making processes</b>  <i>Moderators:</i> <i>Sithembile Mwamakamba, FANRPAN</i> <i>Antti Autio, UH/UniPID</i>	Luis Vivas-Alegre, EC DG-AGRI Sylvie Lewicki, CIRAD Nokuthula Mchunu, NRF Luke Metelerkamp, ICLEI Africa Representative AUC DESTI (tbc) Representative DG-RTD (tbc)
15:40 – 16:00	<b>Open discussion, summary and closing remarks</b>	All Participants, facilitated by the moderators

16:00 – 16:20      **Coffee Break**

16:20 – 17:00	<b>Joint Closing Plenary</b> Summary of insights from all three events. Reflections on next steps for FNSSA Roadmap 2027–2036	<b>Joint</b>
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# Session 1: AfriFOODlinks 2025 Policy Dialogue—From Policy to Practice: Integrating Urban Innovation into EU–AU R&I Strategies

**Target audience:** AU-EU R&I Senior Officials, National Research Ministries from EU and AU Member States, National Research Agencies from EU and AU Member States, Development agencies, and other R&I investors and funders

## Background and Rationale

The EU-funded AfriFOODlinks project is delighted to invite you to a policy dialogue on **how EU and AU actors can support African cities in driving innovation** that is **both grounded in local needs** and **inclusive of stakeholders and citizens**.

The dialogue will begin by exploring the **importance of African-led research and innovation projects** in addressing local needs across the continent. Using concrete examples, AfriFOODlinks will demonstrate how involving local stakeholders and organisations in each participating country is key to delivering context-specific solutions – which, beyond new technologies, can be used to rethink governance and collaboration models in the long-term and thereby serve as real engines of transformation.

The event will then examine the **unique role of cities as drivers of innovation**. Cities are not just administrative units – they are powerful conveners with the capacity to create enabling policy and institutional environments that support experimentation and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Through shared risk-taking, mutual trust, and co-design processes, cities can foster ecosystems where innovative solutions are tested, scaled, and aligned with community needs. Concrete examples from AfriFOODlinks cities (potentially Lusaka and Cape Town) will be presented.

Finally, it will highlight the potential of **co-creation processes** (e.g. Living Labs, multi-stakeholder platforms, food dialogues) in **driving innovation**. Successful experiences from AfriFOODlinks will show how cities can use co-creation processes as incubators of innovation, co-developing solutions with local stakeholders and placing citizens/end users at the centre of the innovation process. They will also show how embedding such processes in city governance structures can increase legitimacy and amplify impact.

As a follow-up to these presentations, an **open discussion** will be organised with the dialogue participants. Stakeholders will be invited to reflect on the **main opportunities and barriers in driving meaningful innovation in and with African cities**.

Insights from the open discussion will be summarised in a short outcome report on *Integrating Urban Innovation into EU–AU R&I Strategies*.



# Session 2: Stakeholder Co-Creation for the IRC FWG Strategy and Operational Plan

**Participants:** All IRC members and signatories, SOM participants from AU-EU Member states

**Invitees:** European Commission Project Officer and Policy Officer; AUC DESTI, DARBE, FAO, Funders

## Background and Rationale

The AU–EU Research and Innovation Partnership on Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture (FNSSA), established under the AU–EU High-Level Policy Dialogue on Science, Technology and Innovation (HLPD-STI), has been central to advancing food systems transformation. The first FNSSA Roadmap (2016–2026) mobilised over €1 billion across more than 600 projects. A new FNSSA Roadmap (2027–2037) is under development to align with Agenda 2063, the EU Green Deal, EU Vision 2024, CAADP Kampala Strategy, STISA 2034, and the SDGs.

The International Research Consortium (IRC) has been created to operationalize the FNSSA Roadmap and overcome fragmentation by acting as a “network of networks” that facilitates/coordinates research, education, advisory services, policy, industry, and funding. Its Strategy and Operational Plan (2025–2035) defines six Functional Working Groups (FWGs) as the engines of action, and its Statutes formalize the IRC governance, membership, and services. The pilot phase of the IRC operations starts from December 2025 under the CEA-FIRST project.

The 9th AU–EU STI SOM (October 2025) will review progress on all partnerships and feed into the AU–EU Summit. FNSSA is one of the core STI partnerships under discussion. This side event provides an essential platform to align the IRC FWG Strategy and Operational Plan with stakeholder needs, validate operational contributions to the FNSSA Roadmap, and secure political and institutional inputs.

## Objectives

1. Gather stakeholder needs to ensure that the IRC FWG Strategy and Operational Plan responds to stakeholder priorities.
2. Link IRC activities to the FNSSA Roadmap (2027–2037), aligning FWG joint work programmes with its emerging priority themes.
3. Validate alignment with the IRC Strategy (2025–2035) and Statutes.
4. Encourage stakeholder commitments and broaden IRC membership.
5. Co-design IRC FWG joint actions through breakout sessions to inform the IRC’s operational plan and provide structured input into SOM outcomes.

## Expected Outcomes

- Consolidated stakeholder input to refine the FWG Strategy and Operational Plan obtained.
- Agreements on the IRC FWGs as delivery mechanisms for the FNSSA Roadmap (2027–2037) obtained.
- New IRC membership signatories and expressions of commitment obtained.
- A co-created set of priority actions for 2026–2027, ready for integration into Joint Work Programmes during the IRC Pilot phase developed.
- A strengthened AU–EU FNSSA partnership narrative for the SOM conclusions provided.

## Justification

This side event ensures coherence between the emerging FNSSA Roadmap (2027–2037), the IRC Strategy, and the SOM agenda. It anchors the IRC firmly within the AU–EU STI framework as a strategic delivery mechanism of the FNSSA Partnership. It also contributes to the SOM’s overarching theme of “Together, we have proven that we are more than the sum of our parts” by demonstrating inclusivity, co-creation, and joint ownership.



## Session 3: 2<sup>nd</sup> CEA-FIRST Policy Forum—Bridging Research and Policy through the AU–EU IRC on FNSSA

**Target audience:** AU–EU Senior Officials’ Meeting participants, regional and national policymakers (including AU–EU officials, agriculture ministries, and scientific advisory councils), as well as R&I funders, research and higher education institutions, private-sector actors, and civil society organisations engaged in FNSSA.

### Background and Rationale

Africa and Europe share a profound, historically rooted connection marked by diverse cultures, geographical proximity, and a shared commitment to a common future. This commitment is grounded in mutual values—respect for human rights, freedom, equality, solidarity, justice, the rule of law, and democracy—principles enshrined in the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) foundational texts. Their partnership has been strengthened through Africa-EU Summits, including key meetings in Cairo (2000), Lisbon (2007), Tripoli (2010), and Brussels (2014 & 2022). Notably, the Lisbon Summit set collaboration priorities in Science, Information Society, and Space under the “Joint Africa-EU Strategy and Action Plan” (JAES). In 2014, Senior Officials refined these priorities, identifying Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture (FNSSA) as a top focus within the AU-EU High-Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD) on science, technology, and innovation.

The Consortium Europe-Africa on Research and Innovation for Food Systems Transformation (CEA-FIRST) is a pioneering initiative operationalizing the AU-EU International Research Consortium (IRC-FNSSA) on FNSSA. The IRC-FNSSA provides robust AU-EU governance and an innovative funding mechanism. Addressing fragmented research and innovation efforts in the FNSSA partnership, CEA-FIRST enhances coordination among actors, increases investment impact, and drives food system transformation across Africa and Europe. This will be achieved through a public knowledge platform, a learning environment, and coordinated operational working groups. The ultimate goal is to establish the IRC as a functional, sustainable platform aligned with key EU and AU priorities—while tackling global challenges like climate change and food security.

Supporting evidence-based policymaking is vital for effective, sustainable agricultural policies grounded in scientific research and real-world challenges. Evidence-based approaches also enable monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement, ensuring alignment with global and regional goals like the European Green Deal and CAADP. Furthermore, the AU-EU Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) adopted a ten-year (2016–2026) roadmap for establishing an FNSSA Research and Innovation (R&I) partnership, shaped by the EU strategy and CAADP, which outlines common R&I priorities for the AU and EU. This First CEA-FIRST Policy Forum was organised as a side event alongside the 20th CAADP Partnership Platform in October 2024, with a dedicated focus on building towards the CAADP Kampala Declaration in January 2025.

The Second CEA-FIRST Policy Forum will also bring together policymakers, funders, and higher education institutions to strengthen the AU-EU IRC on FNSSA. Through structured dialogue and interactive sessions, participants will explore ways to reduce fragmentation in AU-EU collaboration, enhance evidence-based policymaking, and improve coordination of FNSSA-related funding. Keynote speakers and experts will highlight the IRC’s role in FNSSA collaborations, while interactive discussions will shape its strategic direction, encouraging stakeholder dialogue and innovation for Africa’s agricultural systems.

The forum’s collaborative format will support the EU Green Deal and AU-EU Innovation Agenda, creating robust, evidence-based policy environments that drive innovation and inclusivity across bi-continental agricultural systems. This forum directly advances AU-EU R&I frameworks and the FNSSA Roadmap by addressing research gaps, fostering strategic coordination, and promoting policies for sustainable agricultural transformation. Special attention within the dialogue will be given to the renewal of the AU-EU FNSSA Roadmap for the 2026-2036 period.

