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EU must stop trying to dictate Africa’s clean energy future

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Strong-arm tactics by the European Commission and France to bypass African leadership are unacceptable, writes Mohamed Adow



Africans want control over their clean energy future (Pic: Patrick Bentley/SolarAid)

By Mohamed Adow

The vision for an African-led clean energy revolution is in danger of being thrown off course because of interference by the European Commission and France.

The Africa Renewable Energy Initiative ★¹ (AREI) was one of the greatest achievements to emerge from the COP 21 climate summit in Paris in 2015. As an African and a climate activist, it was my proudest moment. It made headlines around the world.

Attracting pledges totalling \$10 billion of support from the G7, Netherlands and Sweden, the scheme heralded an exciting era of African leadership on climate change.

That vision is now at risk after attempts to control and divert Africa’s renewable energy initiative to European ends.

As reported by Climate Home, the European Commission and France have forced through approval of 19 energy projects, bypassing the AREI’s transparent procedures.

In doing so, they are simply recycling old financial commitments to meet their new obligations. Worse, they have co-opted what was previously an African-led process to legitimise this double counting, to the detriment of Africans.

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The AREI goal is to install 10GW of “new and additional” clean power capacity across the continent by 2020. If donors are allowed to pass off existing finance as new, it undermines that goal.

After dragging its feet on international climate diplomacy in recent years, the EU is using its former colonies in Africa to cover up its low carbon failures and greenwash its credentials on climate change.

The strong-arm tactics used undermine both the Africa-led values of this initiative and the principle of bottom-up, nationally determined contributions enshrined in the Paris climate agreement.

In the face of these events, the brilliant Youba Sokona, who has been at the core of conceiving, developing and leading the initiative, has felt forced to declare his resignation. Sokona, from Mali, is the perfect person to pioneer this work. The fact that he felt he could not continue under current conditions shows the scale of the crisis.

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Questions also arise as to why the former and incoming Presidents of the African Union championed the interests of France and the EU over the concerns of the African countries they are appointed to represent. If other African countries have just lost the opportunity (God forbid) for billions in genuinely new and additional finance and projects that would deliver the 10GW of clean energy, we need to ask what have these leaders gained?

African politics has historically been tainted with accusations of corruption. The last thing it needs is its flagship energy initiative to be mired in scandal and outside interference. To avoid this, it’s crucial that transparent processes are followed and good governance is upheld. What we’ve seen with this debacle is the opposite of that.

It’s vital that EU attempts to control and divert Africa’s renewable energy initiative to its own ends be stopped. It is now up to African countries to rescue the initiative, restoring its original vision and integrity. Sokona should resume his leadership on these terms.

Africa’s future requires it to build transparent and accountable institutions capable of addressing the needs of its people. Developed countries should be assisting this, while meeting their own obligations.

Each of the 55 African heads of state who endorsed AREI must now defend and advance it. Strong, bold action is needed to save the initiative, revert the sad recent course of events, and regain the African-led spirit to enable AREI to achieve its goal of bringing clean and renewable energy to all Africans.

Mohamed Adow is international climate lead at Christian Aid ★¹

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