SHAPING FUTURES

African-European Network on Development and Sustainability

SHAPING FUTURES ACADEMY 2027







IDOS | German Institute of Development and Sustainability


Welcome to
Storytelling for social change


1:37 PM
Kathleen Van Hove (Presenting, annotating)
Shaping Futures cohort 2026




FÖRDERFLANKE.
TOOOR.








Questions, comments, discussions

Shaping Futures: why now?

Africa and Europe face many shared challenges in development and sustainability, from energy and food security to critical minerals, water and land. Central to these challenges is the need for transformation towards more sustainable and just relations and practices. Shaping such transformations together requires trust and mutual understanding of their different entry points, shaped by colonial legacies and by distinct responses to global pressures.

The Shaping Futures Academy offers emerging leaders exactly that: a space to shape these transformations together, by engaging in sustained dialogue, in a non-hierarchical setting. This professional development programme brings together peers from selected African partner countries (for 2027, these are: Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Morocco, Togo and Zambia) and Europe to exchange knowledge and interdisciplinary expertise on sustainability transformations.

Selected participants engage in four weeks of intensive in-person training and dialogue, focusing on transformation in the fields of food, energy, minerals, water and land. In doing so, the Academy helps develop a new generation of leaders capable of driving transformative change to meet today's and tomorrow's challenges. Through investing in the empowerment of future leaders, the Academy aims to develop and enhance their skills and insights necessary to navigate and lead in an era of profound uncertainty and complexity.



What is the Shaping Futures Academy?

The Academy is the annual dialogue and training programme, which is part of the *Shaping Futures: African–European Network on Development and Sustainability* programme. It targets mid-career professionals and researchers from selected African and European (EU+) countries and brings together 18 participants each year. The Academy aims to empower emerging leaders on both continents by bringing together like-minded peers to reflect on their roles as change makers. This includes developing strategies to drive or support transformative processes centred on advancing sustainability goals in both present and future contexts.

The Academy fulfils three interrelated functions:

- **Foster dialogue and mutual understanding:** an intensive platform for exchange among people with diverse professional, institutional and societal backgrounds, who encounter different perspectives on shared, intercontinental challenges, and possible responses.

- **Build the foundations for cooperation:** a "lab of cooperation" where participants develop relationships and begin to build trust across differences, laying the groundwork for future cooperation within the Shaping Futures Network and beyond.

- **Strengthen transformative competences:** knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable participants to contribute to sustainability transformations and act as leaders and agents of change in their own contexts.

With diversity at its core, the Shaping Futures Academy welcomes participants from academia and research and from the public, private and non-profit sectors. Together, they encourage transdisciplinarity and promote networking and knowledge exchange.

The Shaping Futures Academy also serves as an entry point into and lays the foundation for the Shaping Futures Network. The Network functions as a space for co-creating knowledge, and is characterised by long-term collaboration and partnership between institutions and champions of sustainability across sectors, countries, and continents.

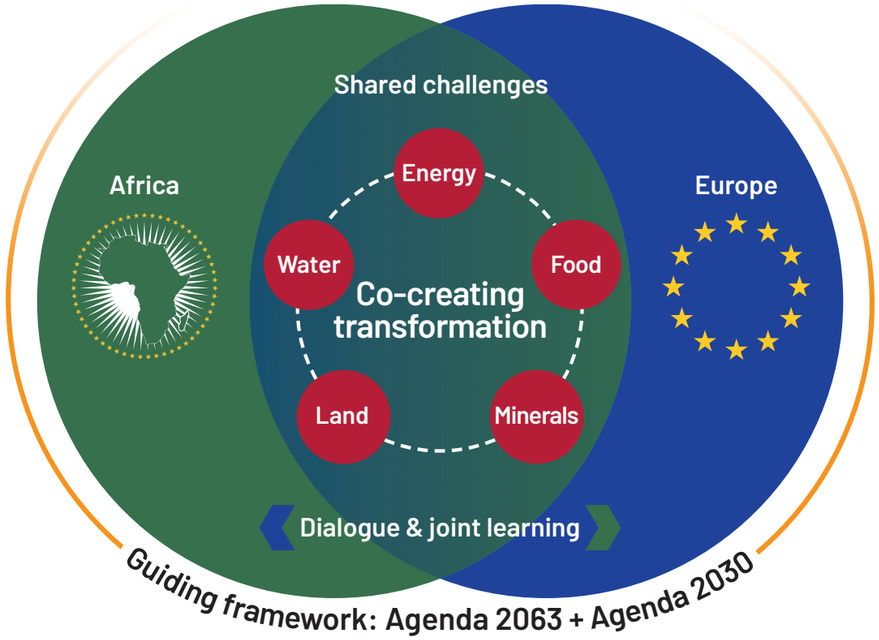
The Shaping Futures Academy is hosted by the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) and funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The programme is conducted in English.

Thematic focus 2027: The energy–minerals–land nexus

In 2027, the academic module and the study trip to Brussels will focus on the energy–minerals–land nexus. The global energy transition is driving fast-growing demand for minerals such as lithium, nickel, cobalt, and graphite. Africa and Europe both have a stake in these minerals, but from different starting points: African countries aim to drive value addition at source and regional industrialisation, while the European Union seeks to diversify its imports of critical raw materials. Both continents also suffer from a high dependency on fossil energy and look for alternative sources, such as hydrogen.

Mining affects land and the communities who depend on it. The UN Secretary-General's Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals has called for human rights to be at the core of all mineral value chains, and for producing countries and local communities to benefit much more than they currently do. In the Academy, participants explore how energy, minerals, and land shape one another; who gains and who bears the costs; and how transformation in these fields can become more sustainable and just.

Shaping Futures through Sustainability Transformations



Three key pillars

The Shaping Futures Academy is grounded in three essential elements that together enable participants to contribute to sustainability transformations:

KNOWLEDGE

Under this pillar, participants share and acquire knowledge on transformation processes and the dynamics that shape them. They will strengthen their analytical capabilities by developing three distinct but connected competences, namely systems thinking, critical thinking and futures thinking. New knowledge is also acquired by interacting with diverse scientific and practice-oriented stakeholders in expert dialogues and site visits.

ACTION

In the action pillar, which is integrated into the knowledge pillar, participants apply the new knowledge gained. In small-group constellations, they work on specific transformation challenges, thereby developing and applying the competences mentioned above.

LEADERSHIP

This pillar focuses on developing individual and collective leadership skills. Participants reflect on their own position and agency in sustainability transformations. The new and enhanced competences support the participants' professional development journey, which is individually rewarding and directly beneficial to their home institutions.

The programme follows a holistic, systemic and constructivist approach to learning, drawing on transformative and problem-oriented learning. It uses a range of interactive, application-oriented training methods, including site visits, dialogues with international experts, workshops, group work, and sessions moderated by participants themselves. The Shaping Futures Academy operates on the premise that knowledge acquisition is not passive but requires open, active engagement. Through collaborative peer learning, participants exchange different perspectives, hone their critical thinking skills, and develop shared values.

Format, content and schedule

The Shaping Futures Academy 2027 consists of a full-time in-person phase of about four weeks, from 31 May (arrival) to 1 July 2027 (departure). This core phase of the academy is preceded by a digital onboarding comprising four online meetings.

The in-person phase takes place at IDOS in Bonn, Germany. It starts with an onboarding in Bonn that includes an exchange with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). This is followed by an academic module on sustainability transformation focused on the energy–minerals–land nexus, and a study trip to Brussels with the same thematic focus. Throughout, participants develop competences related to systems, critical and futures thinking in a variety of formats. The phase ends with a leadership module and closing days before participants transition into the Shaping Futures Network.

The digital onboarding consists of four online meetings before the in-person phase. They combine organisational and logistical calls with content sessions that prepare participants for their stay in Germany and introduce the Academy's objectives and key topics. After the in-person phase, the network offers space to reflect on ongoing transformation, discuss challenges and explore possible ways forward with other Shaping Futures Alumni.



"The Academy brings together experts and peers to co-create solutions for urgent challenges — equipping you with the transformative skills and tools to drive real change."

Buumba Siamalube, Academy alumni

Schedule of the 2027 Academy

Application Phase

1 Dec 2026
13:00–14:00 UTC

Online Q&A session
Live online session on the Academy and the application process.

14 Dec 2026

Application deadline
Complete applications are submitted via the application portal.

End of Jan 2027

Selection results
All selected participants are informed of the outcome of the selection.

1 Feb 2027

Pre-engagement call
Online call for selected participants and their supervisors on what to expect and the next steps.

Preparation Phase

9 Feb – 11 May 2027

Digital onboarding
Four online meetings on 9 February, 16 March, 13 April and 11 May combine organisational and logistical calls with content sessions to prepare participants for their stay in Germany.

In-person Phase

31 May 2027

Arrival and onboarding in Bonn
Welcome at IDOS, orientation, team building and an exchange with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

June 2027

Four weeks in Bonn and Brussels
An academic module on sustainability transformation, focusing on the energy–minerals–land nexus, developing competences including systems, critical and futures thinking, a study trip to Brussels, a leadership module, and plenty of room for peer exchange.

1 July 2027

Departure

After the Academy

2nd half of 2027

Shaping Futures Network
As alumni, participants join the Shaping Futures Network of about 135 alumni and 70 partner organisations from Africa and Europe, and are invited to network activities, including the annual network event.

**The timeline is tentative and subject to change.*

Who is the programme for?

The Shaping Futures Academy targets mid-career professionals and researchers from selected African and European countries. For the Academy in 2027, applicants from the following African countries can apply: Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Morocco, Togo and Zambia.** From Europe, applicants from EU countries, plus the EEA, the UK, and Switzerland are eligible.

POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS OF THE SHAPING FUTURES ACADEMY SHOULD:

- be a national or permanent resident of one of the selected countries
- be 28 – 40 years of age at the time of application***
- work on issues related to at least one of the Academy's fields: food, energy, minerals, water and land.
- preferably have been involved in or have investigated a specific transformation that aims to improve sustainability
- have a university degree (minimum Bachelor's degree)
- have at least five years of relevant and verifiable professional or academic work experience after the first university degree
- have the support of their employer (as part of the application, written support and attendance in an online pre-engagement briefing on 1 February 2027 will be required). Self-employed applicants or business owners require a reference letter from an external actor who knows their work.
- have a very good command of the English language (minimum: equivalent to B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and provide proof of it: the EF SET certificate (4 skills, free of charge), or evidence of schooling in an English-speaking school system or of university studies in English
- be respectful of other cultures as well as open to teamwork, reflection and a wide variety of working methods be available and committed to attend and participate fully in all elements of the Academy, including the online meetings of the digital onboarding and the entire in-person phase from 31 May to 1 July 2027
- adhere to the principles of timeliness and respectful conduct during interactions
- have a valid passport (at the time of travel and for the entire duration of the Academy)

***The Shaping Futures programme has a total of nine participating African countries, but they are not all eligible for the academy each year. Instead, they rotate on an annual basis. Ethiopia, Ghana, Senegal and Tunisia are not part of this year's eligible countries.*

****Older applicants, who have taken parental leave, may be considered*

Financial assistance

In order to facilitate participation, successful applicants to the Shaping Futures Academy will be provided with financial assistance covering the following:

- Travel to and from Germany
- Accommodation for the duration of the in-person phase
- A living allowance to cover living costs in Germany for the duration of the in-person phase****
- Health, accident, and personal liability insurance for the duration of their stay in Germany

*****Exceptions may apply to participants from the host country (Germany), and please note that the financial assistance provided is not sufficient to support participants' families.*



Benefits for...

... PARTICIPANTS

- Participation in an innovative academic and practice-oriented international dialogue format
- Build new or augment existing knowledge on sustainability transformations in the fields of food, energy, minerals, water and land
- Strengthened transformative competences: systems and critical thinking, futures thinking and strategic action
- Strengthened leadership skills through collective peer learning
- Opportunity to become part of an international network of like-minded professionals
- Exchange and development of new ideas with peers from partner countries
- Engagement in different learning formats, including site visits and expert dialogues
- Enhanced cultural exchange in the form of a four-week stay in Bonn, Germany, a study trip to Brussels, and interaction and exchange with participants and speakers from various African and European cultures.



“Our community at the Academy has been deeply interconnected and interdependent. Addressing our shared challenges required collective action and mutual cooperation.”

Kabaso Kabwe, Academy alumni

... SENDING INSTITUTIONS

The Shaping Futures Academy offers a broad range of benefits for sending institutions:

- Enhancing the participant’s knowledge and expertise in leadership and sustainability transformation. The knowledge, skills and relationships acquired can be directly applied within the participant’s home institutions, helping them become stronger players in the transformations taking place in their sectors
- Become part of a growing cross-sectoral network of about 70 institutions working towards sustainable development in partner countries in Africa and Europe, opening up new and continued opportunities for cooperation in the future
- Space for the collaborative creation of new knowledge and partnerships across sectors, countries, and continents
- Opportunity to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the African Union Agenda 2063, and the envisioning of the beyond 2030 Agenda



Become part of a transnational network

Following the successful participation in the Academy, alumni and their home institutions will become part of the Shaping Futures Network. This Network brings together about 135 alumni and 70 partner organisations from across Africa and Europe, who jointly engage in knowledge cooperation. The network members themselves drive network activities to encourage ownership and shared responsibility. Network activities can include high-level policy dialogues, joint publications and other creative knowledge products, and conference participation.



How to apply

Application page

1. Make sure you fulfil the application criteria (See “Who is the programme for?”)
2. Read the **Conditions for Participation**
3. Complete & compile your application documents:

- **Employer’s statement of support** – to be completed, signed and stamped by your employer. Self-employed candidates should include a Professional Reference instead (i.e. from a client or partner organisation).
- **Diploma/Certificates** in English, French or German, or as a translation into one of these 3 languages of the highest professional qualification and/or university degree.
- **Proof of English proficiency**: the EF SET certificate, or evidence of schooling in an English-speaking school system or of university studies in English.

4. Fill out the **online application form** and submit your application via the portal. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

Deadline for applications: 14 December 2026

We expect to inform all selected participants of the outcome by early February 2027.

Join our online Q&A session on 1 December 2026 - 14:00 - 15:00 CET (UTC+1)
Shaping Futures Academy 2027 - Online Q&A Session
to learn more about the Academy and the application process.

For more information about the Shaping Futures Academy, and information about previous editions, visit the **Academy website** and see our **FAQs**.

If you have any questions about the Shaping Futures Academy or the application process, contact the team at **shapingfutures@idos-research.de**

Shaping Futures Academy

shapingfutures@idos-research.de

www.idos-research.de/en/training/shaping-futures-academy/

German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)

#ShapingFuturesAcademy #ShapingFuturesNetwork

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