



SHAPING FUTURES

African-European Network on
Development and Sustainability

SHAPING FUTURES ACADEMY 2026





Shaping Futures: why now?

One of the key ways we contribute to building a sustainable future is through initiatives like the Shaping Futures Academy. This professional development programme brings together peers from selected African partner countries and Europe to exchange knowledge and interdisciplinary expertise on governance and sustainable development.

Each year, selected participants engage in both online and in-person dialogue, focusing on preselected topics related to global sustainability challenges. The Academy is rooted in the frameworks of the 2030 Agenda and the African Union's Agenda 2063, which emphasize sustainable socio-economic development.

We need 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 “Shaping Futures: African-European Network on Development and Sustainability Academy” (Shaping Futures Academy) is a dialogue and training programme targeted at early to mid-career professionals from selected African and European (EU+) countries. The Academy aims to empower future 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 centered around advancing sustainability goals in both present and future contexts.

With diversity at its core, the Shaping Futures Academy welcomes participants from various sectors (e.g., civil society, academia and think tanks, public administration, business, and media) to encourage transdisciplinarity and to promote networking and knowledge exchange. By creating a space where diverse perspectives and expertise converge, the Shaping Futures Academy presents a unique opportunity for participants to learn from each other, identify good practices and principles, jointly develop insights on global sustainability change, and share common but differing values and rich experiences. At the same time, they will enhance their leadership abilities through peer-driven learning to achieve development and sustainability principles.

Furthermore, the Shaping Futures Academy is a space for the collaborative creation of new knowledge, fosters mutual understanding, and establishes trustful cooperation. It thus lays the foundation for a thriving network 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.



Three key pillars

The Shaping Futures Academy is grounded on three essential elements that contribute to capacity development:

KNOWLEDGE

Under this pillar, participants share and acquire knowledge on topics discussed in the Academy. Participants strengthen their analytical capabilities as part of the academic modules by engaging with concepts including systems thinking and multidimensional inequalities, as well as by interacting with diverse scientific and practice-oriented stakeholders.

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 challenges that combine and expand their skills using tools and methods learned in the respective modules.

LEADERSHIP

The leadership pillar focuses on developing individual and collective competence, including strengthening dialogue skills, problem-solving, exchanging perspectives, teamwork, reflecting on one's values, and building strong and trustful relationships. The new and enhanced competences support the participants' professional development journey, which is individually rewarding and directly beneficial to their home institutions.



Format, content and schedule

The Shaping Futures Academy 2026 is scheduled between April and October and organised into three connected learning blocks: three part-time online and one full-time in-person module.

The in-person phase takes place at IDOS in Bonn, Germany, jointly organised with our African partner, Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD Ghana). This phase runs from May to July 2026. It includes two leadership modules that are alternated with two academic modules, one of which is designed and facilitated by CDD Ghana. The phase will end with study trips to Berlin and Brussels.

The online phases (April, September and October 2026) are planned as a part-time programme with an estimated workload of three (3) hours of peer learning per day, utilising a variety of learning formats, combining elements of plenary and group calls, as well as self-paced learning and offline discussions.

The programme, delivered in a block format, utilizes a range of training methods used to cultivate learning, including but not limited to facilitated sessions, workshops, open space and bar camp formats, presentations, discussions, excursions, expert interviews, and role-play. The Shaping Futures Academy works under the premise that knowledge acquisition is not passive but requires open and active engagement. Through collaborative peer learning, participants benefit from an exchange of different perspectives, hone their critical thinking skills, and develop shared values.



"The programme has challenged my perspective on leadership, and I'm excited to put my new skills to use."

João Canossa Dias, Academy alumni



Schedule of the 2026 Academy

13 - 24 April	In-between	20 - 22 May	26 - 29 May
Online Opening and Introductory Module Welcome and introduction to the Academy as well as to the theme of sustainable development.	The in-between phases are designed to prompt participants to reflect on the previous module's content, including identifying their individual key takeaways. In addition, participants receive individual coaching sessions and apply the new or enhanced competences to the unique contexts of their home countries.	Welcome to IDOS Participants will be welcomed by the institute and IDOS colleagues.	Leadership I Participants will discuss different leadership models and theories. They will explore their values, attitudes, goals and visions for the future and systematically reflect on how their actions are determined by certain thought patterns.
1 - 12 June	15 - 19 June	22 June - 3 July	5 - 10 July
Just Transition Management Sustainability should be a reality in every community. This module introduces „Just Sustainability Transitions,“ a governance approach for societal transformation. Participants will learn practical tools to create meaningful change.	Leadership II Participants will reflect on their personal leadership journey and discuss what kind of leadership is needed to address today's complex challenges.	Citizenship and Democracy The public is increasingly frustrated with governments and democracies. This may lead people to consider anti-democratic governance. But democracy is about the people's power. This module explores ways citizens can reclaim their sovereign role and improve democracy for everyone.	Study Trips The study trips provide participants with opportunities to explore how policies, governance, and cooperation between Africa and Europe shape pathways toward just transitions and sustainability.
In-between	14 September - 2 October	14 - 16 October	
Participants receive individual coaching sessions and apply the new or enhanced knowledge, methods, and skills they've gained to the unique contexts of their home countries. This includes preparing for the next online module on Multidimensional Inequalities.	Tackling Multidimensional Inequalities Inequality impacts all areas of life and is at the heart of today's challenges. As part of the module, we will explore the complexity, multidimensionality, and intersectional nature of inequalities. It offers room to discuss key drivers, new pathways, and potential policy solutions. This module takes place online.	Harvesting and Programme Closing As the Academy journey nears the end, the third and final online module invites participants to further reflect on their learning journey during the past months. After completing the Academy, participants become new members of the Shaping Futures Network and join the existing alumni pool.	

LEGEND

ONLINE
GERMANY
HOME COUNTRIES

**this schedule is tentative and is subject to change.*

Who is the programme for?

The Shaping Futures Academy targets early to mid-career professionals from selected African and European countries. For the Academy in 2026, applicants from the following African countries can apply: Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, Tunisia and Zambia. From Europe, applicants from the EU countries, plus EEA and UK, are eligible.

POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS OF THE SHAPING FUTURES ACADEMY SHOULD:

- be a national or permanent resident of one of the selected countries
- be 25-40 years of age at time of application*
- work on issues relevant for sustainable development and governance
- have a university degree (minimum Bachelor's degree)
- have at least three years' work experience (non-remunerated experience is also recognised)
- have the support of their employer (as part of the application, written support and attendance in an online pre-engagement briefing on 14th January 2026 will be required)
- have a very good command of the English language (minimum: equivalent to B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)
- be respectful of other cultures
- be open to teamwork, reflection and a wide variety of working methods
- be available and committed to attend and participate fully in both the online and in-person modules of the Academy (see the Academy schedule above for exact dates)
- 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)

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



„The key takeaway was the moment when I understood that a leader first has to work on himself in order to socially transform their communities and make a positive change and impact in their society.“

Amina Maalim, Academy alumni

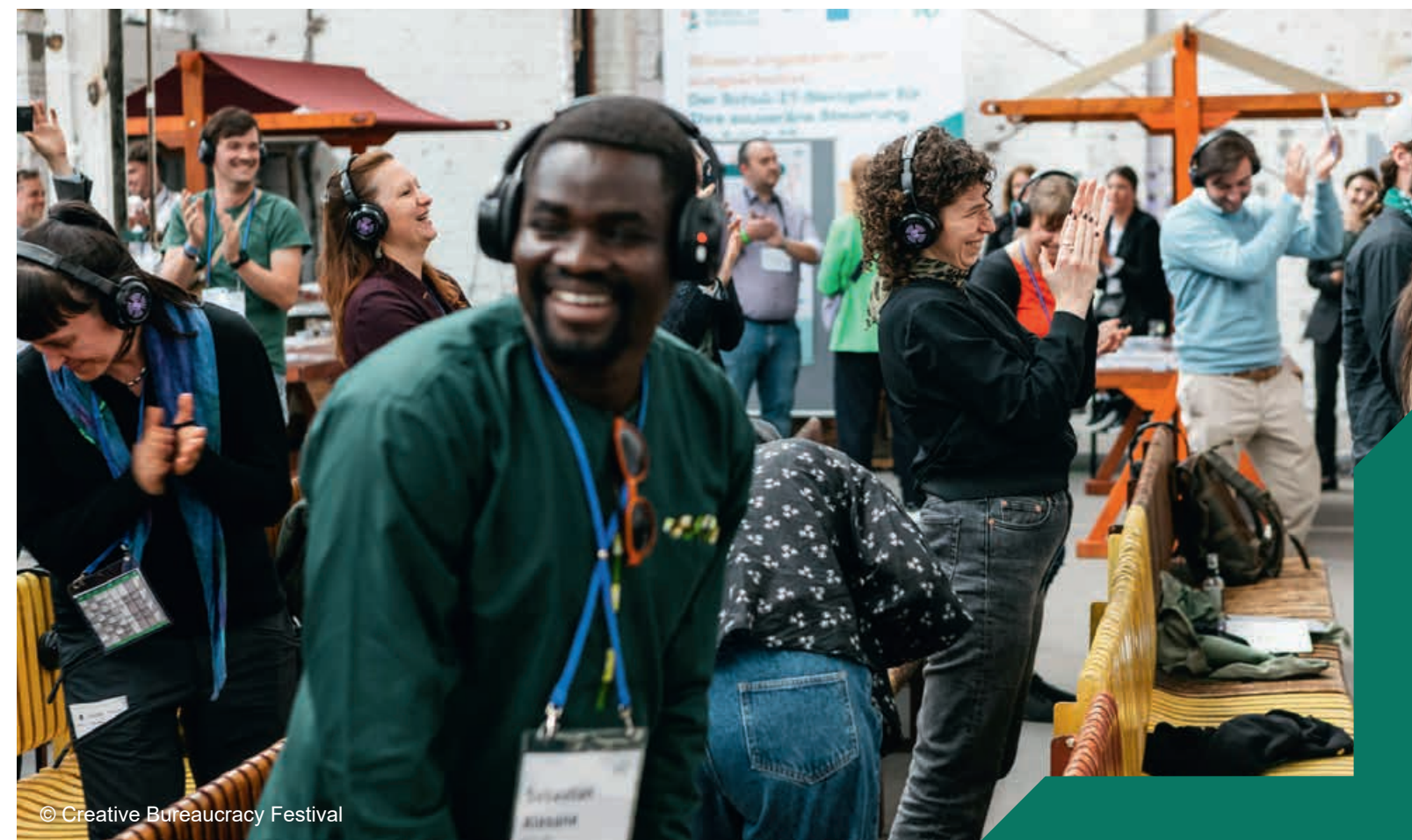
Financial assistance

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

- Travel to and from Germany
- Accommodation for the duration of the in-person phase
- A monthly 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
- Subsidy to help meet the technical requirements of the online phases of the programme

**Exceptions may apply to participants from the host country (Germany)*

**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 the themes of governance and sustainable development
- Strengthened leadership skills through collective peer learning, complemented by individual coaching
- 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
- Enhanced cultural exchange in the form of trips to Germany (Bonn & Berlin) and Brussels, and interaction and exchange with participants and speakers from various African and European cultures.



"Participating in the 2023 Academy was transformative. I gained valuable leadership skills, learned from peers, and developed a team spirit. Key modules focused on design thinking, governance, and climate change. I'm inspired to be a changemaker, thinking globally and acting locally."

Mildred Neema Okwako, 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, governance and sustainable development. The knowledge and skills acquired can be directly applied within the participant's home institutions
- Become part of a growing cross-sectoral network of institutions working towards sustainable development in the seven partner countries in Africa and Germany/ 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 Agenda 2063



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 and jointly engage in knowledge cooperation. The network members themselves drive network activities to encourage ownership and shared responsibility. Network activities can include joint organisation and hosting of high-level policy dialogues, joint publications, conference participation, or any other engagements consistent with the programme of work of a research institute.



How to apply



[Link to application site](#)

1. Make sure you fulfil the application criteria (see page 9)
2. Read the [Conditions for Participation](#)
3. Complete & compile your application documents:
 - **Application Form Part I:** Applicant's statement – to be completed and signed by you.
 - **Application Form Part II:** Employer's statement of support – to be completed, signed and stamped by your employer.
 - **Diploma/Certificates and supporting documents** in English, French or German, or as a translation of the highest professional qualification and/or university degree.
4. Submit your application via the application portal (one application per applicant). Incomplete applications will not be considered.

Deadline for applications: 9 November 2025

For more information about the Shaping Futures Academy, and information about previous editions, visit the [Academy website](#).

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



„On the one hand I have learned a lot from the programme and on the other hand I have learned a lot from the participants and their enormous pool of expertises.“

Mamadou Djigo, Academy alumni





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

Financially supported by the



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development