



MEA Institute Policy Program

Africa's Transformation Crossroads: Youth as Policy Drivers

25-28 August 2026

Kollegienhaus, University of Basel

Emerging Leaders Forum & MEA Institute Dialogue Sessions

Africa stands at a defining inflexion point: a convergence of demographic momentum, technological possibility, and shifting geopolitical tides that will shape the continent's trajectory for generations to come. With more than 60 per cent of its population under the age of 25, the people who will live longest with the consequences of today's decisions are, overwhelmingly, young Africans.

Yet multilateral architecture, from trade and debt governance to the emerging rules of artificial intelligence, continues to be negotiated within institutional cultures that privilege seniority and legacy networks. This Forum challenges the framing of youth as beneficiaries of policy and treats them instead as its architects: structural partners with genuine authority over outcomes that will define their lives.

The Basel Forum 2026 brings together emerging African and European policy professionals, researchers, diplomats and practitioners alongside established institutional voices, across four thematic pillars: trade and integration; resource politics and Middle East–Africa investment; reparations and restitution; and technology and digital governance. Each pillar opens on Tuesday and is deepened across the MEA Dialogue Sessions on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, before formal handover of all policy outputs to the conference leadership.

Program

Unless otherwise indicated, each panel session opens with a short introduction by the moderator, who presents the panelists and the issues for discussion. Panelists are then invited to give a brief opening statement, followed by moderated discussion addressing one or several of the issues outlined below. The moderator then opens the floor for interaction with the audience. Dialogue Sessions on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday follow an in-conversation format without opening statements. All panels are followed by a 15min Q&A session. (Program details are subject to change)

TUESDAY, 25 AUGUST 2026 - EMERGING LEADERS FORUM	
09:00–10:00	Registration and Welcome Coffee <i>Arrival, accreditation, and informal networking. MEA Institute team available for introductions. Reception Hall, Kollegienhaus, University of Basel.</i>
10:00–10:15	Opening Session Formal welcome by MEA Institute leadership. Frames the week around Africa's Transformation Crossroads and introduces the four-pillar architecture and its link to the SGAS/VAD conference. • Introductory Remarks: Abdel-illah Boukhezer, Founder and President, MEA Institute for Strategic Studies

10:15–11:00	High-Level Opening Panel <i>Africa’s Priorities in a Shifting Global Order: Integration, Sovereignty, and the Next Generation</i> Opening panel setting the agenda for the week: what Africa’s strategic priorities are in trade, governance and narrative, and who will carry them forward. <i>Issues for discussion:</i> • Africa’s top priorities in trade and global governance over the next decade, and how they differ from the agendas set by legacy institutions • How AfCFTA is reshaping Africa’s economic sovereignty, and where it risks reproducing old dependencies • Who holds the authority to tell Africa’s story, and how that shapes what is politically possible • How the continent’s demographic weight can translate into real influence rather than untapped potential <i>Panel discussion (45 minutes):</i> <i>Panelists:</i> • Abdel-illah Boukhezer, Founder and President, MEA Institute for Strategic Studies • Helina Bischoff, Founding Partner & Deputy Managing Director, Africa Collective • Sara Yassi, Senior Strategist, Unitas Global Advisory • Rania Achouche, Content Creator <i>Moderator: Daniele Tjek</i>
11:00–11:25	Lightning Panel <i>Extraction or Transformation? Critical Minerals, Gulf Capital, and Africa’s Sovereign Stake in the Energy Transition</i> Africa holds an estimated 30 per cent of the world’s critical mineral reserves. This session examines the consolidating Middle East-Africa resource axis and the terms on which it is being negotiated. <i>Issues for discussion:</i> • On whose terms critical mineral partnerships are being structured • How Gulf sovereign capital reshapes Africa’s bargaining position outside the US–China binary • Partnership frameworks that reproduce raw material export without meaningful beneficiation • Continental, regional and bilateral frameworks needed to prevent extraction without transformation <i>Speakers:</i> • Dr Ali Mansoor, Former Financial Secretary of Mauritius - Assistant Director, International Monetary Fund (remote) • Muhanna Al Lawati, Research Fellow, MEA Institute <i>Moderator: Daniele Tjek</i>
11:25–12:15	Africa’s Health Ecosystem in 2040: Four Shifts That Will Define the Decade With external health aid down nearly 70 per cent since 2021 and outbreaks up more than 40 per cent between 2022 and 2024, the aid-dependent era is closing. Four speakers each plant one forward-looking provocation and deliberately leave it unresolved. <i>The four threads:</i> 1. Financing the post-aid era: from external grants to domestic resource mobilisation, health levies and blended finance. 2. Made in Africa by 2040: the path to producing 60 per cent of essential vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics on the continent. 3. The intelligence layer: genomic surveillance, interoperable data and AI-enabled early warning.

	4. Rewriting the partnership: Africa-Europe and global cooperation built on co-investment and shared governance, on African terms. <i>Speakers:</i> • Ahmed Berramdane, Chevening Scholar • Nadja Schawan, Lead Biodiversity and Sustainability, Roche • Dr. Kobina Assan Ampah, Swiss TPH <i>Moderator: Daniele Tjek</i>
12:15–12:30	<i>Transition and Networking Break</i>
12:30–13:45	<i>Lunch</i>
13:45–14:30	Afternoon Panel <i>Building or Being Built? Young Africans on Technology, AI, and Who Controls the Digital Future</i> Artificial intelligence is projected to add between 2.9 and 4.8 trillion US dollars to Africa’s economy by 2030, yet the continent holds approximately 1 per cent of global compute capacity. This panel centres young African technologists, policy professionals and researchers contesting that asymmetry from within. <i>Issues for discussion:</i> • What meaningful African AI sovereignty requires beyond strategy documents, in compute infrastructure, data governance and foundational model development • Navigating the tension between participating in global AI ecosystems and building alternatives rooted in African institutional priorities • Implications of the AU Peace and Security Council’s engagement with AI governance for dual-use technologies • Labour conditions in Africa’s data annotation and content moderation economies, and emerging policy responses • How intellectual property regimes, venture capital structures and platform governance constrain or enable African technological agency <i>Panel discussion:</i> <i>Panelists:</i> • Jane Munga, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace / International Peace Institute • Yahia Fazani, Roche • Haïkel Drine, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Afrikanda (remote) • Sophian Zebair, Strategic GTM Edge EMEA, Armada (remote) <i>Moderator: Daniele Tjek</i>
14:30–14:55	<i>Networking Break</i>
15:00–16:30	Policy Workshop - World Café Format Three policy development groups, each aligned to a Forum pillar. Capped at 10 participants per group. • Group 1: Sovereign Debt, Industrial Policy and Trade Architecture • Group 2: Critical Minerals, Climate Finance and the \$2.8 Trillion Gap • Group 3: Digital Governance, AI and the African Policy Stack All speakers are invited to participate in the workshop.
16:30–17:30	Workshop – Policy Synthesis and Pledge Adoption Spokespersons from each workshop round present their top three recommendations, followed by collective adoption of a joint statement. Preview and explicit handover of outputs to the Wednesday to Friday Dialogue Sessions.

18:00–19:00	MEA Talks: Career in Policy Three speakers at distinct career stages, each having taken a non-linear path into policy work. Student and emerging professional audience. Closes the formal day and bridges into the academic conference opening on Wednesday.
WEDNESDAY, 26 AUGUST 2026 – MEA POLICY DIALOGUE	
12:45–13:45	MEA Dialogue <i>The \$2.8 Trillion Question: Understanding the New Middle East–Africa Capital Map</i> Moves the conversation from who is investing to how the money actually moves: sovereign debt, blended finance, green bonds, and whether new GCC deal structures set precedents that work for African states. <i>Issues for discussion:</i> • What current Middle East–Africa investment structures look like in practice, in debt terms, equity arrangements and conditionality frameworks • How Gulf creditors are reshaping sovereign debt dynamics and what this means for African fiscal sovereignty • Whether blended finance vehicles and green bonds deliver on stated development and climate objectives • What precedents are being set in current deal-making, and who is tracking whether they work over time • What institutional capacity is needed in finance ministries, central banks, regional bodies and civil society <i>Speakers:</i> • Dr Ali Mansoor, Former Financial Secretary of Mauritius - Assistant Director, International Monetary Fund (remote) • Muhanna Al Lawati, Research Fellow, MEA Institute <i>Moderators: Daniele Tjek</i>
THURSDAY, 27 AUGUST 2026 – BREAKFAST BRIEFING AND MEA POLICY DIALOGUE	
08:00–09:00	Breakfast Briefing <i>Emerging Leaders Forum Outcomes: A Youth Policy Agenda for Global Transformations</i> Synthesis of Tuesday’s workshop outputs across all four pillars, followed by open discussion on pathways to implementation. <i>Chair: MEA Institute leadership. With the three Tuesday workshop round leads and one SGAS/VAD academic commentator (to be confirmed).</i> <i>By invitation; capped at 10 participants.</i>

12:45–13:45	MEA Dialogue <i>Bandwidth Was Not Enough: An Intergenerational Dialogue on Compute, Control, and African Technological Self-Determination</i> Africa’s broadband revolution delivered connectivity without control. This dialogue asks whether the AU Continental AI Strategy escapes that dependency pattern, pairing the infrastructure-builder generation with the AI-deployment generation. <i>Issues for discussion:</i> • Structural parallels between broadband-era dependency and Africa’s position in the global AI infrastructure landscape, and where the analogy breaks down • Whether the AU Continental AI Strategy represents a genuine departure or reproduces the same institutional logic under new technological conditions • What the infrastructure-builder generation learned about ownership, standards-setting and regulatory capture • Where the AI-deployment generation’s understanding of algorithmic governance and data sovereignty exposes earlier blind spots • What compute investment, data governance architecture and institutional capacity would actually require <i>In conversation:</i> • Yahia Fazani, Roche • Haïkel Drine, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Afrikanda (remote). • Sophian Zebair, Strategic GTM Edge EMEA, Armada (remote) <i>Moderator: Jane Munga, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace / International Peace Institute.</i>
FRIDAY, 28 AUGUST 2026 – BREAKFAST BRIEFING, MEA POLICY DIALOGUE AND CLOSING SYNTHESIS	
08:00–09:00	Breakfast Briefing <i>Sustaining Youth-Led Policy Innovation</i> Reflections on the week and concrete next steps, with announcement of post-conference follow-up mechanisms tied to the Tuesday workshop pledge. <i>Chaired by MEA Institute leadership. No external panel.</i> <i>By invitation; capped at 10 participants.</i>
12:45–13:45	MEA Policy Dialogue <i>Who Owes What to Whom? After the Resolution: Youth, Reparations, and the Architecture of Restitution</i> On 25 March 2026 the United Nations General Assembly declared the transatlantic slave trade the gravest crime against humanity. The question is no longer whether reparations are owed, but how they are delivered. Pillar 3 continuation. <i>Issues for discussion:</i> • What governance structures, funding and accountability systems move the AU Decade for Reparations 2026–2036 from announcement to action • What reparations claims look like before the International Court of Justice and the Permanent Court of Arbitration, and the practical barriers young legal professionals must be ready for • How cultural restitution and financial redress should be handled together rather than as parallel tracks

	• How a new generation ensures the resolution marks the start of real change rather than the end of the conversation Panel discussion (40 minutes): <i>Panelists:</i> • H.E (Prof) Esi Awuah, Ambassador of Ghana to Switzerland • Dr Reginold Royston, author and senior academic, Pan-Africanism and colonialism expert • Dr Maxine Royston, Dean Erikson Institute <i>Moderators: Daniele Tjek</i> <i>Interaction with the audience (20 minutes). The moderator opens with the specific March 2026 UNGA resolution rather than general reparations framing.</i>
16:00–17:00	Closing Synthesis Session <i>Bridging Academic Research and Youth Policy Practice</i> Formal handover of all MEA policy outputs, the workshop pledge, breakfast briefing summaries and dialogue session outputs to the \conference leadership. Co-chaired by the MEA Institute and SGAS/VAD. <i>Speakers: MEA Institute Vice-President; SGAS/VAD Leadership.</i> <i>Format: 60 minutes. First 20 minutes, formal handover of policy outputs and closing address. Remaining 40 minutes, co-chaired discussion on the inclusion of youth in policy processes and strategic research environments.</i>

MEA Institute for Strategic Studies, Geneva - in cooperation with the ZASB Research Network and the SGAS/VAD conference, University of Basel. Visit www.meainstitute.org for more information.