



## Education, Research, and Innovation as Pillars of the EU's Global Gateway Strategy: Insights from Agrinatura

The Global Gateway Strategy is the European Union's flagship framework for investment in infrastructure and connectivity. It aims to catalyze private sector competitiveness while upholding rigorous environmental and labor standards, strengthening human capital, reinforcing knowledge systems, and protecting global commons. Education, research, and innovation (ER&I) are not merely peripheral components; they are central pillars that drive sustainable, inclusive, and values-based global partnerships.

This position paper explores how the ER&I sphere—with a specific focus on the agrifood sector—contributes to the Global Gateway. It reflects the perspectives of **Agrinatura**, the European Alliance on Agricultural Knowledge for Development.

### Rationale

The Global Gateway responds to a rising demand for trusted, sustainable investments. Recent strategic frameworks, such as the **Draghi Competitiveness Report** and the **Niinistö Report**, underscore that Research and Innovation (R&I) must sit at the heart of Europe's international partnerships. This aligns with the "360-degree" and "triptych" approaches adopted by DG INTPA, which integrate Higher Education, R&I, and vocational skills to power the Green and Digital transitions.

In the agrifood sector, the Global Gateway prioritizes private sector investments to build productive, sustainable value chains connecting farmers and processors to global markets. While the initiative is global, **Africa** remains a primary priority due to its rapid demographic growth, the central role of small-scale family farming, and existing gaps in connectivity and processing infrastructure.

The African Union, through the **Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP)** and the **Kampala Declaration**, shares this vision. The 2022 EU-AU Summit further solidified this by acknowledging equitable ER&I collaboration as a vital vehicle for transformation. Similar synergies are emerging globally, such as the **EU-CELAC Strategic Roadmap (2025)** and the **ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership (2023–2027)**.

To optimize ER&I investments, Agrinatura draws on lessons from the 2025 "Boosting Agrifood Research and Innovation" conference, recommending four priority actions:

1. **Strengthen international dialogue** to align agendas (e.g., the AU-EU FNSSA Roadmap) with long-term frameworks like the Global Gateway.
2. **Foster innovation ecosystems** (Living Labs, incubators, and accelerators) to scale interventions.

3. **Improve governance and coordination** between EU instruments (e.g., Horizon Europe and NDICI).
  4. **Build coherent funding mechanisms** that blend public, private, and partner-country resources across all stages of innovation.
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## Recommendations

### 1. Education: Empowering Human Capital and Local Ownership

Education and vocational training are essential for local actors to drive their own development. Agrinatura recommends that Global Gateway infrastructure investments be systematically linked to "skills ecosystems" through:

- **Capacity Development:** With 20 million young people entering the African labor market annually, investment must focus on employability in food processing, the bioeconomy, and natural resource management. EU interventions should align more closely with private sector needs to bridge the gap between education and the job market.
- **Knowledge Exchange:** Programs like **Erasmus+** should be leveraged to connect academic research with entrepreneurship, translating scientific outputs into marketable solutions.
- **Gender and Intersectionality:** Since women are the backbone of agrifood processing and production, initiatives must intentionally dismantle structural inequalities.

**Agrinatura recommends:** Systematically embedding capacity development into all agrifood and bioeconomy investments, supporting modernized curricula, and linking students to incubators to transform skills into sustainable enterprises.

### 2. Research: Co-designing Credible and Relevant Solutions

Research must be **credible** (methodologically sound), **relevant** (addressing societal needs), and **legitimate** (co-owned by partners).

- **Scientific Collaboration:** Partnerships should reinforce national sovereignty in research across the Global South.
- **New Research Paradigms:** Moving beyond traditional models toward participatory "Innovation Platforms" that involve value-chain actors and industry from the outset.
- **Strategic Research Areas:** Priority should be given to value-chain performance, agroecology, labor productivity, and de-risking financial instruments for smallholders.

**Agrinatura recommends:** Placing multi-actor research at the core of the Global Gateway. Better articulation between **Horizon Europe** (knowledge production) and **NDICI** (territorial development) is required to ensure food-system transitions are both socially legitimate and economically viable.

### 3. Innovation at Scale: Connecting Knowledge to Impact

Scaling is not just about "more"—it is about **scaling out** (geographic), **scaling up** (institutional), and **scaling deep** (cultural/normative).

- **Contextual Innovation:** Recognizing territories and value chains as the primary sites of change.
- **Synergetic Funding:** Innovation requires "financial engineering"—blending equity, grants, and private investment across different phases of development.
- **Impact Pathways:** Interventions must embed **Theories of Change** and monitoring frameworks from day one to ensure scalability.

**Agrinatura recommends:** Embedding innovation as a cross-cutting priority. The participation of private actors (SMEs and start-ups) should be based on long-term partnerships with ER&I institutions to ensure that investments align with both profitability and EU sustainability values.

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### Conclusion

ER&I are the foundational pillars of agrifood transformation. By moving beyond "infrastructure-only" models and placing human and institutional development at the center, the EU ensures that the Global Gateway delivers long-term, resilient impact. Agrinatura stands ready to operationalize this human-centered approach, leveraging its global networks to turn research and education into the engines of a sustainable future.

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### Examples: ER&I Projects as Global Gateway Strategy Enablers

- **VCA4D (Value Chain Analysis for Development):** Provides standardized, evidence-based sustainability analyses for over 65 value chains (to date), informing EU investment decisions.
  - **SASI-SPI:** Delivers sectoral studies focusing onto investments needs towards agrifood systems' sustainable transformations.
  - **DeSIRA LIFT & LIFT+:** Supports 70+ projects in co-designing climate-smart innovations and fostering policy dialogue for scaling agroecological transitions.
  - **GENE-LINK (2026–2029):** Strengthens the link between African research labs and the private sector to valorize nature-derived products (bioeconomy).
  - **Coffee Value Chain Support:** A holistic model integrating vocational training for agroforestry, participatory research on bio-solutions, and innovation hubs to support SMEs in meeting EU deforestation and safety standards.
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