From Fresco to Presto: Assessing the Complementarity of EU Development Cooperation with Africa

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Abstract

The European project's development policy was prompted by the declaration of independence by its founding member states' overseas countries and territories in Africa. From the onset, the Community's development cooperation with African states sought to complement the member states' effort, in no small part motivated by its initial limited financial scope. This complementarity was found in (1) the contractual approach to cooperation that sought to ensure co-decision in determining development projects and (2) the focus on specific themes, notably the direct link between development and trade policy. This 'European value added' in development cooperation with Africa changed fundamentally since the turn of the century, following the expanding volume of the Commission's development finance budget, institutional changes introduced by successive Treaty changes, as well as a recent shift towards prioritising short-term objectives. The EU's policy efforts today seek to match and serve that of the member states' at the expense of its earlier complementarity, while the effectiveness of this new strategy remains to be confirmed.

Keywords: Development Policy; European Commission; European Union; Complementarity; Ownership; Foreign Aid

Introduction

The roots of the European Union's development policy reach all the way down to its founding Rome Treaty, while its evolution over time can be considered gradual and organic – in no small part influenced by the Union's own enlargement and growing competencies.[2] In the beginning, the interest in and commitment to relations with Africa strongly differed between the six founding members of the Community, with the more sceptical members considering its inclusion in the Rome Treaty a necessary price to ensure the European project (Dimier 2014). Fast forward to 2019, and Africa is perhaps more prominent on the EU's political agenda – including in the European Council – than ever before. Yet what has happened to the EU's development policy towards Africa during these past six decades?

Prompted by the rapid wave of African independence, and shortly after the United Kingdom's accession to the European Economic Community, the European Commission published a Communication titled 'Development Aid – 'Fresco' of Community action tomorrow' (EC 1974). The emergence of the EU's development from its association policy towards its Overseas Countries Territories (OCTs) resulted in a somewhat awkward categorisation of its partner countries in the global south: the associated, the associables and the non-associated. Though taking a World Bank President speech as a discursive starting point, the Fresco sought to carve out a specific niche for the EU's

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[2] The EU's development policy evolved from its association policy towards the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs), as described in detail in Dimier (2014) and Grilli (1993).

development policy. Notably, it considered that in order to support the 'have-nots', *"it is financial aid that has the greatest meaning today in the short term"* (EC 1974: 7). By setting out new themes and future directions for the EU's development policy, the Fresco could be seen as fulfilling a similar role as the European Consensus would play three decades later. Towards the end of the 1970s, development policy had gained considerable profile in the European Commission, availing over the second largest budget component after agriculture and led by 'Directorate-General VIII', at that time perceived as an attractive workplace both for substantive and career-oriented reasons (Stochetti 2013: 84).

This is not to say that the policy was uncontested. In its formative years, the association policy towards the OCTs was viewed by its proponents as means to engage the more sceptical founding members into the cooperation with Africa (Dimier 2014). In view of the original objective of the association policy, namely the gradual integration of the OCTs into the internal market, the development policy towards the newly independent associates remained a key area for EU integration. In contrast, the cooperation towards countries outside the group of *"Our ACP and Maghreb Associates"* (EC 1974: 10) required a more selective approach. Here, the Community's financial aid would be *"selective and complementary to other kinds of action, whether of the Member States of the Community"* (Ibid.: 11).

Since the start of the Juncker's 'last chance Commission' in 2014, cooperation with Africa has become increasingly prominent, and the EU's development policy changed considerably in the process. A first shift is from a Commission that stressed its difference from the member states' bilateral development policies towards a European Commission that considers that it is an actor in its own right. A second related shift concerns a shift from 'demand-driven' cooperation with Africa towards a more assertive policy that specifies the EU's interests and objectives as regards Africa, in large part driven by commercial interests as well as migration concerns. Both shifts add to a changing role for the EU in development cooperation with Africa, from a supranational actor formally stressing its independence from the member states' bilateral policy interests to one that pursues European interests amidst increased calls for speed of delivery and flexibility.

This paper analyses the recent shifts in EU development cooperation towards Africa from a historical perspective, with particular attention to the principle of complementarity that featured in formative EU development policy and was introduced in the EU Treaties as a key principle driving EU integration in this area. It considers specific institutional/legal, political as well as contextual changes as explaining the observed shift in EU development policy from 'Fresco to Presto'. In view of this purpose, the main ambition of this paper is to feed into ongoing reflections on the future of the EU's development policy, as well as inform future academic research inquiry. The analysis presented draws on an analysis of selected literature, EU policy documents as well as direct observations and reflections of the author in his capacity as a think tank based researcher.

The paper starts off with a section distinguishing three understandings of complementarity in EU development policy: (1) geographic focus, (2) specific topics and themes, (3) approach to development cooperation. It subsequently further examines the third dimension in relation to cooperation with Africa and detects a shift from demand-driven contractual approaches to more assertive and EU interest-driven approaches. The paper continues by analysing the three contextual changes that provide partial explanations for this shift, and in closing draws some preliminary conclusions and presents ideas for further inquiry.

Complementarity (re)defined

The OCT-based distinction between associates and non-associates forged a binary EU development policy during its first formative decades, based on a distinction between ACP and non-ACP states with the political and financial emphasis on the former. The approach to governing cooperation with ACP states through international agreements moreover compensated for the absence of a legal basis for EU development policy in the Treaties, which was first introduced in 1992 after being proposed by the Netherlands. The country had previously unsuccessfully proposed the same during the negotiation of the Single European Act during the 1980s, and their second attempt resulted in the adoption of the proposed text following minimal discussion and minor amendments (Hoebink 2004: 2). In addition to formalising the objectives of the EU's development policy, the interrelation with other policy areas and the development policies of the member states were defined by three principles commonly referred to as the 'Three Cs': complementarity, coordination and coherence.[3] Dacosta et al (2004) noted that the term complementarity was not freshly 'invented' for the Treaty but in fact had been subject to political debate among EU development ministers during the 1970s and 80s, and as noted in the introduction to this paper the term indeed already appeared in the 1974 Fresco statement.

The Maastricht Treaty's complementarity stated that the Community's development policy *"shall be complementary to the policies pursued by the member states"* (Maastricht Treaty, Art 177). Towards the end of the 1990s, when the EU's development policy played an unfortunate role in the corruption scandals that brought the fall of the Santer Commission, the Commission sought to further specify its complementarity towards the member states. In 1999 the Commission proposed to concentrate on specific areas of added value, and in 2000 it suggested to refocus on a limited number of areas, of which it proposed a total of six. Both proposal informed the Council and Commission's Declaration on the Community's Development Policy, commonly referred to as the Development Policy Statement. The statement reaffirmed the importance of the three Cs to ensure the Union's collective impact and considered that complementarity should be promoted both within the Union as well as with non-EU donors (Dacosta et al 2004: 100). The declaration however proved to be of low influence, in part because it was adopted a few months before the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, but also because internal reforms to the Commission were introduced afterwards with little to no reference to the Development Policy Statement.

Building on these policy discussions at a time that the EU's development policy faced serious legitimacy challenges, the Convention preparing a European Constitution emphasised that EU development policy complemented the development policy of the member states. It considered various changes and reforms to improve the effectiveness of the Union's development policy, as means to harness that complementarity towards the member states. It however shied away from efforts in this context to strengthen the collective effectiveness of the EU and its member states in this context: *"the Group took note of the comment by Commissioner Nielson that in order for the EU to be more efficient in development policy, policy making at the EU level should to a greater extent commit the Member States in what they did at the national level"* (The European Convention 2002: 28).

The discussions on the reform of EU development policy sacrificed direction for inclusivity. The Convention considered poverty eradication to be the central aim of the EU's development policy and that the EU's engagement should be focused on low-income countries. At the same time, it considered the importance of using development policy more instrumentally as part of the EU's wider engagement with third countries: *"The Working Group, while recognising that development policy has its specific purposes, which are reflected among the principles and objectives of EU external action, underlines the need for ensuring coherence between development cooperation and other aspects of EU external action*

[3] It should be noted that out of these three, the term 'coherence' was not literally used in the Treaty text.

as well as external aspects of internal policies, since development assistance should be considered as an element of the global strategy of the Union vis-à-vis third countries" (The European Convention 2002: 8)

The Working Group further emphasised the need to improve the efficiency of total EU aid, nationally financed by the member states as well as through the EU's budget. With reference to a felt need to reduce overlaps between their different engagement and the realisation that current arrangement and division of competencies placed the EU into the role of a '16th donor', the Working Group called for close collaboration and complementarity between all involved (The European Convention 2002: 27). These considerations informed a subsequent change in the EU's legal basis for EU development policy: while the Maastricht Treaty emphasised that the Community's development policy should complement the development policies of its member states, the Lisbon Treaty called for the development policy engagements of the EU and its member states to complement one another.

In the EU's development policy, the complementarity was sought by means of its geographic reach as well as by the priority areas of cooperation. Another dimension of complementarity, one that was deemed crucial for the EU's identity and added value as a development cooperation actor, was the process through which such priorities were determined.

Complementarity through ownership

Although the EU unilaterally decided on the policy with limited to no consultation of their overseas counterparts, the association policy and subsequent nascent development policy strongly emphasised the importance of ownership by means of co-decision. As the Fresco document stated: *"(…) our Associates and ourselves sit round the same table; in this club, priorities and programmes are set by our Associates and not by ourselves; mutual aid is de rigeur"* (EC 1974: 9). Former Development Commissioner Cheysson put this even more strongly: *"It is your money! You should use it to meet your priorities in the best possible way. We are here to provide technical assistance if you need it"* (Frisch 2008: 13). In 1982 the Commission published a memorandum on the Community's development policy, which no longer used the unfortunate distinction between associated and non-associated states, yet maintained the established differentiation between the Lomé policy, the Mediterranean policy, relations with 'other developing countries' and action at the multilateral level. The memorandum stated that the Lomé cooperation framework serves the ACP states, and that secure market access as well as predictable development finance allows them to plan and realise long-term development priorities (EC 1981).

As per these policy principles, the EU's cooperation approach towards Africa was characterised by a key focus on ownership, both in terms of process and substance of cooperation. In principle, such an approach is commendable by its acknowledgement that development cooperation is essentially a relationship, and where external support is limited to what it may do to facilitate domestic action (see Keijzer et al 2018). Throughout the decades, this policy focus has remained a defining feature of the EU's development policy towards Africa, at least at the discursive level. In reality though, the EU did and could not refrain from pushing its own cooperation priorities (see Hewitt 1981), and the implied 'non-interference' principle underlying the initial development policy was put under pressure by human rights violations such as Uganda under Idi Amin, after which conditionality gradually crept in (Bartels 2007). Building on the Lomé 'aquis', Article 4 of the Cotonou Agreement defined the principle of 'co-decision' as follows: *"The ACP States shall determine the development principles, strategies and models of their economies and societies in all sovereignty. They shall establish, with the Community, the cooperation programmes provided for under this Agreement"* (Cotonou Agreement 2010: 19).

Whereas in the first decades there were in theory no limits to what areas and themes could be supported by the Commission, the 2000 Development Policy Statement sought to promote further selectivity in the EU's cooperation portfolio so as to strengthen its added value and complementarity. The following years saw a dedicated push towards further specialising the EU's development policy, in part due to the upcoming 'big bang enlargement' but also both in response and support to the international aid effectiveness agenda which emerged after the 2002 UN Financing for Development Conference in Monterrey and peaked in the period 2005-2008 (Keijzer et al 2018).

Towards the end of 2005, under the United Kingdom's EU Council Presidency, this resulted in the adoption of the European Consensus on Development, a tripartite political statement by the Council, European Parliament and the Commission (EU 2006). After the UK Presidency had assumed its influence over the drafting process, it replaced the Commission's draft with a new proposed text which featured a stronger focus on poverty reduction as well as a two component statement, consisting of a first part that presented common EU values followed by a second part that further specified the Commission's development policy (Stochetti 2013: 143-144). Reflecting the increased financial weight of the EU's financial means following its recent enlargement, the second part considered that the EU's added value was found especially in those areas *"where size and critical mass are of special importance"* (EU 2006: 9). The policy statement further set out a number of comparative advantages associated to the EU's development cooperation, including the link to the EU's common policies such as trade and agriculture, as well as its own experiences in enabling regional integration. All in all, the EU's development policy strength was expressed by being fundamentally different from the engagement of the member states.

In recent years, the EU's discursive approach has moved from the philosophy of the Fresco to Presto. (2011 Agenda for Change emphasised need to pursue EU own interests). The 2015 'migration crisis' instilled an acute sense to 'do something', if not only to compensate for a failing approach to redistribute refugees between EU member states. Helped by the considerable reserves accumulated in the EDF – to which the co-decision principle appeared not to apply at all – the EU fairly rapidly created two new prominent initiatives to Africa. The first was the EU's Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, launched at a special EU Summit with limited African representation in Valletta. Brussels-based diplomatic representatives of African states were not involved in the design of the Trust Fund and criticised the Valletta EU Summit for having 'cherry-picked' some African invitees to legitimise the initiatives (Hauck et al 2015; International Crisis Group 2017). Representatives of Africa's Regional Economic Communities moreover perceived that the projects funded under the Trust Fund were not managed well, *"with contracts being awarded to EU member states' aid agencies, some of which lack the requisite expertise or local knowledge"* (International Crisis Group 2017: 9). The EU did not engage directly with these concerns, but instead motivated the 'new approach' represented by the Trust Fund, which the Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development characterised as an *"(…) essential dedicated tool contributing to very targeted, flexible, speedy and efficient delivery of EU support"* (Mimica 2015).[4]

The Trust Fund was followed soon after by the external spinoff to Juncker's investment plan for Europe, who introduced the initiative as follows in his 2016 State of the European Union address:

> *"Today we are launching an ambitious investment plan for Africa and the neighbourhood which has the potential to raise €44 billion in investments. It can go up to €88 billion if Member States pitch in. The logic is the same that worked well for the internal investment plan: we will*

[4] It should be noted that a special report of the EU's Court of Auditors found the Trust Fund to be more or less the opposite of 'well-targeted' and was moreover faced the same efficiency and delivery challenges of the 'traditional' instruments that it positioned itself against (ECA 2018).

be using public funding as a guarantee to attract public and private investment to create real jobs. This will complement our development aid and help address one of the root causes of migration. With economic growth in developing countries at its lowest level since 2003, this is crucial. The new plan will offer lifelines for those who would otherwise be pushed to take dangerous journeys in search of a better life" (Juncker 2016: 15).

While a broad policy speech is not the place to enter into details, the introduction of the initiative was noteworthy in that it implied that additional EU investment represented a crucial missing link in Africa's job market.

It is noteworthy that only *after* these new initiatives had been proposed and were in the process of materialising, the European Commission set out to revise the EU Consensus on Development in September 2016. The statement was further prepared by means of an 'informal trilogue' between the EC, Presidency and European Parliament and subsequently formally adopted at the June 2017 European Development Days, showing only minor differences to the Commission's proposal. In contrast to the 2005 statement, the new European Consensus neither determined specific comparative advantages for the EU, nor presented any clear prioritisation whatsoever. Instead, the statement embraced the broad and inclusive 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and for instance refrained from identifying those SDG targets that could be best promoted at the European level. In fact, a marked difference to its predecessor was the absence of a two-part structure, which was replaced by a wordier statement that continuously referred to the EU and its member states. The statement in effect prioritised flexibility over focus (EU 2017).

Following the successful set up of the external investment plan and the unresolved discussion on division of labour in blended finance between the European Commission and the European Investment Bank (see OECD 2018), Juncker's final state of the Union address saw the introduction of the EU-Africa Alliance. In contrast to the Trust Fund and External Investment Plan, this initiative that did not entail a substantial increase in funds but similarly emphasised the need for fast results in terms of jobs and growth. Moreover, Juncker more or less acknowledged limited consultation of African partners upfront, by stating that he had consulted some of his African 'friends', 'including' the Rwandan President Kagame (Juncker 2018).

The nature of the initiatives strongly contrasted with the EU's political discourse on Africa-EU relations, with the EU's High-Representative for Foreign and Security Policy more than once emphasising *"Beyond the donor-recipient relation, we went from the idea of having projects for Africa, which is something good and that we continue to do, to the idea of working with Africa, as I was saying, towards our common interests"* (Mogherini 2018a). In another speech made only a few weeks earlier, the High-Representative considered that the 2017 AU-EU Summit initiated the building of a partnership of equals between the two continents, *"We are no longer only focused on humanitarian aid, development cooperation and our common work for peace and security, which are still extremely relevant in a continent that is the closest one to Europe. But today we work together as equal partners on our shared interests – and this is a new approach"* (Mogherini 2018b). Such expressions needed to be taken with a few grains of salt, in view of the HRVP's 2016 Global Strategy that stresses the need for the EU's development policy to be reformed to become more flexible and aligned with the EU's interests (EUGS 2016).

Two main observations can be drawn from this analysis of recent policy initiatives and discursive shifts. First of all, there is a clear shift from a European Commission that – initially faced with limited resources – stressed its difference from (and complementarity to) member state development policies towards a European Commission that considers that it is an actor in its own right that directly pursues and promotes the member states' collective bilateral interests. Second, the approach to cooperation has encompassed a rather strong discrepancy between discourse and practice as regards the type of cooperation relationship that is promoted. The following sections will consider a number of 'drivers' that provide partial explanations of the considerable transformation of EU development cooperation towards Africa.

Three drivers transforming the EU's cooperation with Africa

A: Institutional/legal changes

The institutional changes to the European Union following the entering into force of the Lisbon Treaty and their implications for the Union's development policy have attracted considerable attention in the academic literature (e.g. Furness, 2013; Tannous 2013). Research inquiry has looked into the implications for the programming process, including the joint role of the HRVP and the Development Cooperation in setting out long-term strategies, European Parliament scrutiny and more recently the proposals for reforming the EU's external financing instruments (Castillejo et al. 2018). Analysis of the programming of cooperation under the 11th European Development Fund observed that the institutional changes and the involvement of the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAs) in the programming process had the unintended effects of increased centralisation of decision-making in Brussels, to the detriment of developing country ownership (Herrero et al 2016).

While the post-Lisbon changes have contributed to key shifts in the EU's approach to development cooperation with Africa, it should be noted that several reforms within the Commission after the turn of the century were equally important. In stark contrast to the previous dominant DG VIII, the gradual growth of the EU's development during subsequent decades had created a situation by the mid-1990s where several DGs were in charge of parts of the EU's development policy and competed for attention of overseas colleagues in the Delegation by means of a multitude of budget lines. In 2000, the trade commissioner was put in charge of trade with all third countries, taking over trade with ACP states that was previously managed by DG VIII. DG VIII was renamed DG Development and its implementation responsibilities were moved to a new common service (Holland 2000; Hoebink, 2004). In retrospect, struggles for control over the common service (later renamed EuropeAid Cooperation Office) between DG Development and DG External Relations in the early 2000s were not dissimilar to the DEVCO/EEAS struggles today (see also Stochetti 2013). These dynamics are likely to emerge again in the preparation of the programming of cooperation with Africa for the period 2021-2027 that is due to start in the summer of 2019.

B: Political exchanges: a missing middle

In 2002, the EU responded to recent developments and the upcoming enlargement of the Union by means of a reform of strategic and operational planning within the Council and the reduction of tis formations from 16 down to 9. As part of this reform, the General Affairs Council's mandate was expanded to the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC), yet in the same process the separate Council formation on development policy, which used to meet twice a year, was scrapped. This decision was taken at the level of heads of states and government, with a common perception been that there had been little to no consultation with the Council formations concerned (Simon, 2003).

Annual meeting Frequency of selected Council formations:[5]					
Environment	**Competitiveness**	**Agri / fish**	**General affairs**	**Foreign affairs**	**Development[6]**
Four times per year	At least four times per year	Usually once per month	Every month	At least once per month	Twice per year

No attendance records have been published for the two 2018 Foreign Affairs Council (Development) meetings, yet the perception is that these are not well attended by EU development ministers, which instead frequently delegated attendance to secretaries of state, directors general or ambassadors. This is however only part of the story, since recent years – especially since the start of the 'migration crisis' in 2015 – saw an increased interest of the European Council in 2015. Where it had previously limited itself to the adoption of a yearly and rather ritualistic report on European Official Development Assistance levels against the international 0.7% of Gross National Income target, in recent years development policy became a genuine topic for discussion in the European Council. As one example, the June 2018 European Council featured a discussion on migration in which the Council called for *"a partnership with Africa aiming at a substantial socio-economic transformation of the African continent"*, which provided the basis for Juncker's Africa Alliance proposal presented in September that same year (European Council 2018: paragraph 8).

C: Contextual changes: geopolitical pressures

From its very onset, and notwithstanding frequent acknowledgement that the European Community is *"neither a nation nor a state"* (EC 1982: 20), it was emphasised that the EU's development policy was not multilateral either: *"although it is a manifestation of solidarity with certain developing countries, it also reflects the Community's economic interests in the organization of its relations with countries on which it depends for the security of its supplies and its markets"* (Ibid.: 14). The EU's interests towards Africa have definitely moved far beyond the supplies of raw materials and securing market access, though it still struggles to translate its equal partnership discourse into genuinely new approaches to cooperation. In fact, Juncker's 2018 State of the EU reference to Africa as 'Europe's twin continent' harks back to Robert Schuman's ideas from the 1950s as opposed to the equal partnership the EU now claims to seek. In fact, in 2017 Juncker called for showing 'solidarity' towards Africa, which he depicted as *"a noble and young continent, the cradle of humanity"* (Juncker 2017).

What is different today, is that the EU perceives an increase in competition in its relations with African states, their regional organisations as well as the African Union. The non-EU competitors notably include China and India, but also countries such as Turkey, Russia, as well as countries from the Middle East. The frequent reference to delivery speed and flexibility in the EU's policy discourse suggests it is increasingly doubting the attractiveness of its own established cooperation 'business model' in a changing continent. Yet the question remains whether 'if you can't beat them, join them' will earn the appreciation of the African counterparts that are often as familiar with Europe's cooperation approaches and conventions as the EU itself.

[5] Source of information on meeting frequencies: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/configurations/

[6] These meetings take place in the Foreign Affairs Council and are chaired by the EU High-Representative for Foreign and Security Policy (HRVP).

Conclusion

EU relations with Africa today are as prominent in the EU's development policy as they were half a century ago. Yet the EU's overarching cooperation vision and approaches have evolved considerably, in response to a growing European Union and key changes in Africa as well as the world at large. This paper analysed how the views on the complementarity of the EU's development cooperation with Africa vis-à-vis the policies of the member states evolved over time. Initially, and influenced by a 1974 policy statement called 'Fresco of Community action tomorrow', the Commission emphasised its complementarity by being different from and complementary to the member states. As its financial and geographic reach matured, this complementarity was mainly considered to be expressed through its long-term commitment and predictability, but also through its approach to cooperation with African states that emphasised joint decision-making and ownership.

Treaty and institutional changes, an evolving political landscape within the EU as well as geopolitical pressures have changed the EU's understanding of its complementarity in its development cooperation with Africa. These drivers contribute to a strongly felt need for the EU's development cooperation with Africa to become more similar to those of the member states. In contrast to the formative vision expressed in the Fresco proposal, its development policy today may be expressed as 'Presto': the emphasis is on the need for fast-results, flexibility and the direct pursuit of member state interests. Among other emerging changes, this has resulted in an increasing discrepancy between new policy initiatives developed and presented following minimal consultation with African stakeholders, and a political discourse that continues to express the need for working 'with Africa' in pursuit of an equal partnership. The next few years will determine to what extent this approach may create value in addition to satisfying the EU's short-term needs. Based on the 'horizontal' analysis presented here, there would seem to be considerable value in future micro-oriented research looking into the different approaches to cooperation on the ground, and to what extent the changing approach to engagement with Africa matters in terms of ownership and effectiveness.

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