

# THE FUTURE OF EU-AFRICA COOPERATION

## BEYOND THE COTONOU AGREEMENT

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Front cover: Agricultural production is one of the economic sectors where the Cotonou Agreement shall support sustainable policy and institutional reforms. The photo shows women harvesting shea nuts in Leo, Sissili Province, Burkina Faso. Photo credit: Ollivier Girard, CIFOR. Back cover: Factory workers producing fruit drinks at Blue Skies, in Accra, Ghana. Photo credit: Dominic Chavez, World Bank.

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# The Future of EU-Africa Cooperation Beyond the Cotonou Agreement

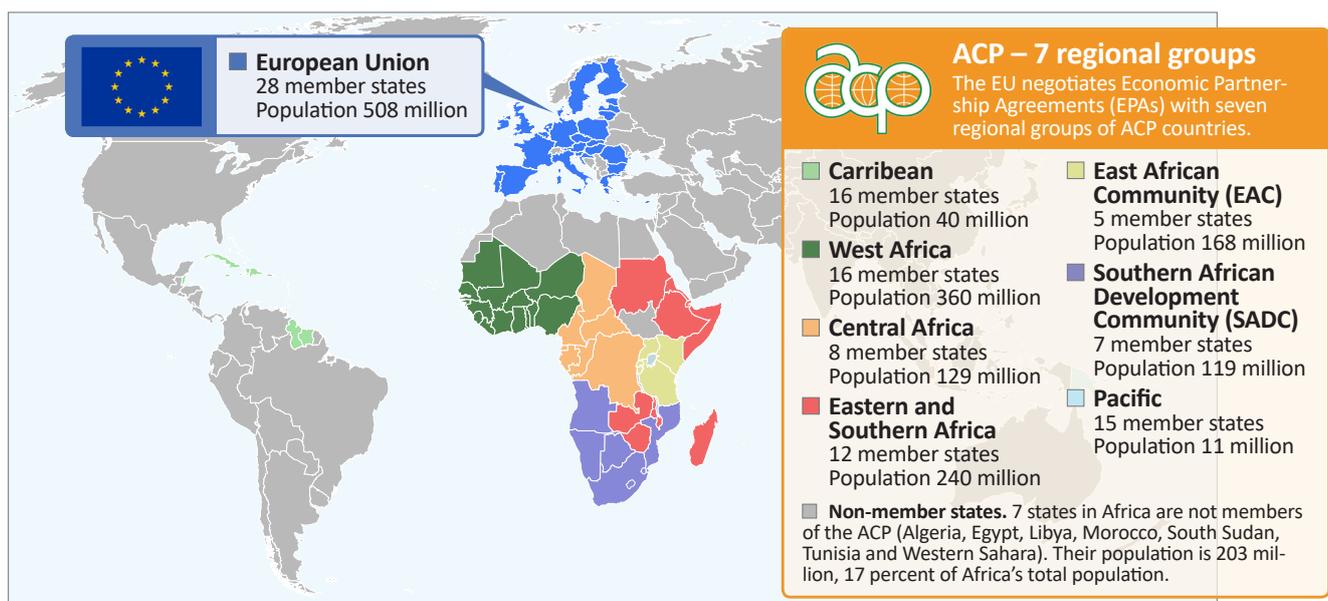
There is profound concern in large circles in Africa that the Cotonou Agreement obstructs African governments from supporting domestic production, and that the EU is splitting Africa in two by striking separate deals with different African regions. These perceptions are important considerations for those involved in the upcoming negotiations to replace the existing agreement.

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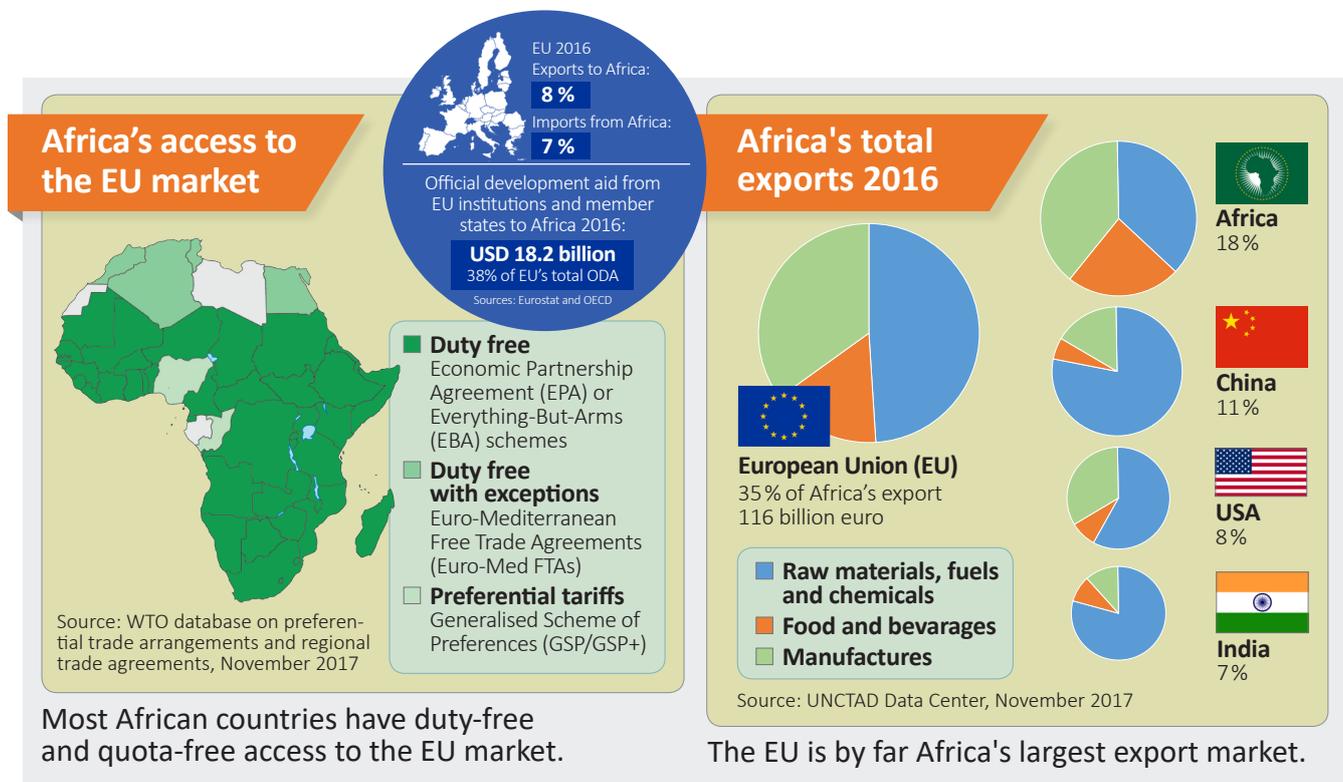
The EU-Africa relationship is guided essentially by the provisions of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA), which covers trade and development cooperation, and also contains a political dimension. It comprises the 28 member states of the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states, which comprises 79 countries – 48 in Africa, 16 in the Caribbean and 15 in the Pacific. The agreement expires in February 2020 and re-negotiations will open by August 2018 at the latest.

Since the CPA was signed, back in 2000, major changes have swept the world and many new roadmaps

have been drawn, with important consequences for the EU-Africa relationship – the UN 2030 SDGs Agenda, the Paris Climate Change Agreement, the European Consensus on Development, the AU Agenda 2063, to mention a few. Other new geopolitical features include increased globalisation, regionalisation dynamics, the rise of nationalism and far-reaching changes within the EU (as illustrated by Brexit). Also, since the Cotonou Agreement was signed, the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) have grown from strength to strength; these powerful economies project themselves as able to offer African countries an alternative to the EU trade agreement. A number of initiatives



**The EU and the ACP Countries.** The Cotonou Agreement unites more than one hundred countries with a total population of over 1.5 billion. The total population of the 79 ACP countries is 1,067 million people, 95 percent of which are from Africa.



and agendas at the continental, regional and sub-regional level suggest an increasing tendency towards regionalisation: for example, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), adopted in 2001 with the aim of accelerating economic cooperation and integration among African countries; the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063; and the recently established Continental Free Trade Area for Africa (CFTA).

### Changes in global context

Since the end of the Cold War, the world has witnessed some far-reaching changes. These include democratisation, the expansion of liberal democracy, the dominance of market forces and the liberalisation of global trade, contemporary globalisation and transnationalism, the growing interdependence of states, and the emergence of non-state actors within the international relations system. Plus the rise of nationalism and – in some instances – of rightist political parties across the world, but particularly in Europe.

Moreover, there has been a worldwide trend toward increased inequality between states and continued imbalance in the distribution of power in the international system. For instance, the current unevenness in the power relations between the global North and other regions is quite glaring. The decline of multilateralism and the continued fragmentation of the architecture of international regulations and global governance have not improved matters for the less-powerful states. Not even the United Nations has been able to help the developing regions overcome the constraining effects of

global pressures. Nevertheless, the EU remains committed to multilateralism as an approach to foreign policy. It should be recalled that the EU Strategy for Africa, drafted in 2005, made Africa a 'testing ground' for the practical demonstration of this multilateralism.

Contemporary globalisation – both the global expansion of production, trade and finance, and the less frequently acknowledged global expansion of ideas, culture and norms – has generated new imperatives for consensus formation and international coordination. The growth of transnational civil society networks, the upsurge in transnational communities and the significant engagement of new social movements with networks that cross national frontiers are both drivers and consequences of recent globalisation. The emergence of new organisations and networks that seek to represent global civil society has received substantial support from inter-governmental organisations such as the UN, the EU and the Commonwealth of Nations; these have encouraged the participation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) across the range of development programmes. For example, during the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations, civil society actors across Africa and Europe had an opportunity to participate in the processes and procedures.

### Downturn in the aid sector

The global aid sector is experiencing a recession, made more acute by (among other things) the global refugee crisis. Many development organisations have seen their aid budgets slashed. Undoubtedly, this will have impli-

cations for financing of the aid and assistance components of any successor agreement to the CPA. While a few countries, such as Sweden, maintain relatively high levels of Official Development Assistance (ODA), most European countries, including some other Nordic states, use asylum seekers as an excuse for allocating less ODA.

Given the present downturn in the aid sector generally, the status and role of the European Development Fund (EDF) is likely to be reviewed. It was created in the early days of the EU to channel financial development assistance exclusively to the ACP countries. But the EU is under pressure now to extend the range of EDF beneficiaries to countries outside the ACP. Development programmes and projects within the EU-ACP framework may have to cede their exclusive access to the EDF. Africa and the ACP generally should realise that the time has come for the ACP countries to move beyond dependence on aid.

### **The political dimensions**

There are several imponderables about post-Cotonou 2020, and there is no way of determining the outcome of the negotiations. The situation is further complicated by the multi-layered relationship between the EU and Africa: for example, the CPA supplies an institutional structure comprising a council of ministers, a committee of ambassadors and a joint parliamentary assembly. These bodies formulate general principles and strategies to guide the relationship with the EU. At the same time, though, there are continent-wide and regional agreements, as well as bilateral agreements between individual EU Member States and individual African states. This all has consequences for EU-Africa cooperation.

However, the EU seems determined to negotiate with the ACP as a single entity, as in previous negotiations. While it acknowledges Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific as separate regions, it seems reluctant to let go of the ACP concept and its most recent addition – the EPAs. Thus, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) may assume more responsibility in a future EU–Africa relationship, with some components of the new agreement being implemented at the regional and sub-regional level.

The promotion and protection of human rights is today an essential component of EU development cooperation policies and programmes. The negotiations (and their final outcome) are likely to reflect the EU's commitment to rule of law, human rights, democratisation and participation by non-state actors. It is expected to invoke these general principles and values, which also

underlie the Africa–EU Strategic Partnership and the Joint Africa–Europe Strategy adopted in 2007. On the evidence of previous negotiations, the ACP group may reject any one-sided interpretation of concepts such as good governance, civil society and human rights.

The risks – both perceived and actual – of the international migration crisis have generated concerns within the EU. In some extreme cases, migration has been demonised, denied its development potential and wrongly framed as a risk to security. Within the EU, for instance, the policy response has focused exclusively on securing Europe against invasion by African migrants. This explains the adoption of a number of panicky measures, such as the EU Emergency Trust Funds for African Projects, the Global Approach for Migration and Mobility and the new European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD). The EU may come up with further tough measures based on its Member States' perceptions of the risks associated with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

The African negotiators in particular may raise concerns about the separate EU arrangements with South Africa and certain countries of North Africa (the latter are members of the AU but are not parties to the Cotonou Agreement). The AU has complained that the Cotonou Agreement splits Africa in two. It is unlikely that North Africa will be included in a new agreement, but there is the possibility that the North African countries could be encouraged to seek to affiliate to the new agreement.

### **Future trade cooperation**

Trade between the EU and Africa will follow the rules of the new EPAs. Under the CPA, preferential market access is based on reciprocity. This arrangement has been criticised in many circles in Africa for being based on an unequal partnership: it supposedly works against the trade liberalisation regimes in existing regional schemes, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Under EPA, trade liberalisation is expected to move ECOWAS towards a WTO-compatible trade regime in its relationship with the EU. The EU has dismissed the fears and concerns of some Africans as unfounded, and has promised to address the so-called “supply-side constraints” by providing funds to meet the “adjustments costs” of EPAs. In addition, there are concerns about the implications of the EPAs for the newly created African Continental Free Trade Area, which – once up and running – is expected to be the biggest free trade area in the world.

The European Commission has been criticised for



## A modified form of 'Nordic exceptionalism' could be adopted to guide the negotiation

not having adequate understanding of the economies of the African countries, as well as for its lack of concern for Africa during the EPA negotiations. Enforcing reciprocity between unequal trade partners makes a mockery of free trade as a path to development: for example, agricultural products from Africa are not admitted to the EU market under a full free-trade regime. A similar arrangement in North-South trade cooperation is the US-initiated African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which supports unrestricted free trade. Both the EPA and AGOA operate within a global economic system that has become increasingly unfavourable to the countries of the South. As the gospel of complete liberalisation of the international trading system spreads, so countries in the South are under increasing pressure to adapt to the new changes in the global economy.

Meanwhile Africa (as represented by the AU) is determined to negotiate with the EU as a separate group, distinct from the Caribbean and Pacific countries. Already concerns are being voiced in the ACP group that the AU's position may have negative consequences for the group's solidarity and cohesion, as expressed in the Georgetown Agreement. However, the AU is committed to its position. In this respect, the AU has adopted a common position on the post-2020 negotiations for a new cooperation agreement with the EU. An ad-hoc working group has been set up to ensure that the new agreement is based on "a strong and sustainable continent-to-continent partnership", equality, equity, mutual respect and shared responsibility on the part of both continents. In addition, the successor treaty is likely to reaffirm the interdependence of Africa and Europe and is expected to be based on African priority development pillars. Arguably, the AU's position represents a desire for a post-Cotonou framework that supports equitable socio-economic transformation in the ACP countries.

### Conclusions and lessons learned

The EU-Africa relationship to date has been asymmetric, due to the imbalance of power between Europe and

Africa. This power relationship has been supported by the structures and institutions of the international political system, which generally favour the global North over the South. Depressed world commodity markets, discriminatory protection and a debt crisis characterise the contemporary global economy. Of course, there are ways of addressing the power imbalance and changing it. And it is imperative for African countries to identify those opportunities, as well as the challenges that limit the scope for change.

Many African countries exhibit a lack of initiative and a readiness to make the best of the opportunities available under the EU-ACP partnership. A lack of detailed planning has prevented many countries from reaping the maximum benefit, as is clear from the performance of African countries under previous agreements. A better option would be for the various African governments to concentrate on programmes and projects that have a greater impact on the living conditions of their populations. Moreover, the shortage of skilled experts and qualified professionals in the relevant agencies in Africa has not helped the efficient management of Africa-EU cooperation; and the frequent changes of government have not helped to tackle the lack of expertise.

Beyond the challenges at the operational level, the differences in opinion over what constitutes aid and trade, and how these are linked to development also pose a challenge. For example, the notion of using aid as an instrument of foreign policy for the EU to advance its interests in Africa runs counter to the idea of aid as an expression of solidarity, which has long been at the heart of the Nordic countries' policies on Africa, particularly in the 1960s. The apparent lack of EU interest in aid as a measure of solidarity presents a major stumbling block that is likely to remain so long as the trade and investment relationships between the EU and Africa are organised and maintained on the basis of the free play of market forces and easy access to raw materials.

Key recommendations for effective partnership between the EU and Africa within the context of a post-Cotonou Agreement are:

- The logic, rationale and justification for the EPAs have to be reconsidered. The EPAs have so far not changed the dominant perception in many circles in Africa that they are seeking to open up the ACP economies to the free entry of European goods and the free operation of European investors, while undermining the ability of ACP governments to give preferential support to domestic products, producers and investors.
  - The complexity of migration (in all its forms), its root causes and its impacts must be addressed in the appropriate multilateral fora, in order to move beyond the present panic measures to tackle immigration.
  - Support for democracy and good governance should not be based solely on a one-sided, Western interpretation of what constitutes good governance, civil society and human rights; it should also take account of Africa's specificities.
- To protect and advance their interests in the global economic system, the African countries need to work with existing initiatives within AU and NEPAD to promote broad-based regional integration in Africa.
  - The EU and Africa should work together more closely to boost cooperation in the UN and other international fora, especially on such issues as trade, human rights and climate change.
  - A modified form of 'Nordic exceptionalism' – an approach to international partnership and cooperation that is based on Nordic ideas, values and practices and that places the welfare of people above all other considerations – could be adopted to guide the negotiation of a post-Cotonou agreement.
  - In implementing the Africa–EU Strategic Partnership Agreement, the EU and the AU need to stop focusing solely on institutions and instead involve a wider spectrum of non-traditional actors from civil society – women, young people, professional groups and the African diaspora, as well as people from the private sector and academia.



Liberia, 23 August 2011. Pollworkers show each ballot to observers to ensure they are being counted correctly. Electoral support is one of the objectives of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy.



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## About the Author



NAI POLICY NOTES is a series of short briefs on policy issues relevant to Africa today, intended for strategists, analysts and decision makers in foreign policy, aid and development. They aim to inform public debate and generate input into the sphere of policymaking. The opinions expressed in the policy notes are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute.

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