

Towards an Africa-European Joint Strategy for African Development : Some General Observations from the CODESRIA Secretariat

Contribution to African Civil Society Organisations' Consultation on AU/EU Joint Strategy for Africa's Development, Organised by the AUC in Accra, Ghana, 26-28 March 2007.

By *CODESRIA*

Introductory Background:

1. Africa and Europe have relations that date back a very long time in history. Indeed, some, mostly focusing on old Egypt, date the relations back into antiquity. However, it would be fair to argue that insofar as the relations which shape the contemporary period are concerned, these can be dated to the last five hundred years. Over that period, relations between Africa and Europe underwent an immense transformation that occurred in different phases. The first phase was characterised by the European trans-Atlantic slave trade that entailed the denuding of whole regions of the African continent of their population for transfer to European-owned plantations in the Americas and the Caribbean as slave labour. Considering the numbers of people transferred from the continent, not a few historians have observed that the slave trade has been the biggest, most significant transportation of people from one part of the world to the other in the modern world system.
2. The second phase in Africa's relations with Europe was the short period between the abolition of the slave trade and the onset of colonial rule. Characterised in the conventional historical literature as the period of the "legitimate trade", it involved the unequal exchange of African raw materials for basic European consumer goods. Predicated as it was on the huge European appetite for African raw materials and a growing search for external markets, the period of the "legitimate trade" was to presage the onset of the third phase, namely, the colonial era when the sovereignty of African states and peoples was put at bay and direct European rule imposed. It was the heyday of empire and in the European imperialist project of the period, Africa was, together with India, the most prized territory for which different European powers scrambled.
3. The end of the colonial period in Africa, ushered in by the independence of The Sudan and Ghana in the second half of the 1950s and followed by many others during the decade of the 1960s ushered in the fourth phase. Various characterised as post-colonial or neo-colonial, it is the period that characterises the present moment in Africa's history in which the achievement of independence has been and continues to be conditioned by a heavy, sometimes overarching presence and interest by the former colonial powers and new key international players, as well as the international financial institutions dominated by the leading Western countries.

Basic Historical Facts and Principles for a Meaningful Partnership:

4. Africa's contemporary relations with Europe are certainly complex enough to allow for generalisations. On the one hand, the continent's historical connections with Europe mean that Europe continues to exercise a heavy political, policy and socio-cultural influence. On the other hand, the imperatives of Africa's development mean that the continent is constantly in search of a formula for greater self-realisation, even self-determination. The tempo with which the quest for self-realisation has been pursued has fluctuated from one period to another even as the European concern to maintain a determinant role and influence has remained constant, only changing in its nuances and sophistication over time.

5. It is in this broad context that the quest for a new framework for an Africa-Europe partnership for the development of Africa needs to be viewed and certain basic historical facts and principles spelt out to serve as a basis for the exploration of cooperation. These facts and principles could be summarised as follows:
- a) Europe's relations with Africa have never been based on altruism but on the pursuit of clearly defined interests corresponding ultimately to the requirements for securing the welfare of its peoples. Though bound by history and geography to Europe, Africa has been the worsted partner in the relationships forged over the last 500 years and allusions to deep historical ties should not be made as though the history in question has been innocent and neutral;
 - b) For too long, Africa's relations with Europe have, overall, been driven less by the pursuit of the strategic interests of the continent in part because of the vulnerability of the continents political and policy structures to external hijack. The situation has subsisted for a long time in which Europe has assumed it to be a right not only to join in deciding for Africa on various issues but also to determine or prescribe what is right and acceptable;
 - c) In the formulation of a new Africa-Europe partnership, the priority concerns for advancing the frontiers of development on the continent should as a matter of course be set by Africa based on a reading by Africans themselves of the key developmental needs and concerns of the peoples of the continent;
 - d) In the implementation of the priorities set, Africans should, incontestably, be in the drivers seat. Co-drivers, or worse still, drivers who usurp the African leadership position under whatever guise or for whatever reason cannot, in all seriousness, be considered as worthy partners. The tragedy in the history of post-independence development cooperation assistance to Africa is that all too frequently, Africans have been relegated to the position of hapless passengers as different drivers take turns at experimenting with their livelihoods;
 - e) The proposed new partnership between Africa and Europe would need to be constructed on a principle of reciprocal accountability in which the latter would be as accountable as the former. The practice has gone on for too long of a one-sided structure and culture of accountability that ultimately explained the highly authoritarian nature of the donor-recipient relationship.

Africa's Contemporary Development Concerns:

6. A review of the contemporary political economy of African countries will indicate a range of development concerns which could be summarised as follows:
- a) Insufficient economic growth rates which have meant that the rates of unemployment have remained very high, particularly among young school leavers, the cost of living relative to individual and household incomes has been too high for a great majority of the populace, social inequalities are growing, and poverty remains a widespread problem;
 - b) A prolonged crisis in the real sectors of African economies that has translated into a combined industrial and agrarian decline, diminished capacities to produce and sell even as speculative activities in finance and real estate thrive, and deepened the structural imbalances in the economies of the countries;
 - c) Problems of market access for the output of African countries, especially agricultural and manufactured commodities which are not only subject to a variety of non-tariff barriers but also undermined by the regime of subsidies put in place to secure the competitiveness of western economies;
 - d) A massive drain in human resources taking the form of a prolonged brain drain and an outward migration of an increasing number of young people from the continent, many seeking to relocate themselves from what they see as the "dead-end" of the continent to "greener pastures" abroad;
 - e) A massive and continuing flight of capital from the continent which not only denies the countries of the region of investible resources generated from their economies

but also perpetuates a dependency on aid and the accumulation of official and private debts with all the familiar consequences;

- f) A rapid expansion of the informal sector side by side with the growth of informal urban processes which not only bring out in sharp relief, the inadequacies of the infrastructural framework for development but also fuels domestic insecurity as criminality sinks roots;
 - g) Problems of political stability in a significant number of countries where the democratic quest continues to be obstructed by an admixture of socio-economic and political factors that are too many to enumerate here;
 - h) Extensive public administration challenges that are generally described in policy and political dialogues as problems of “good” governance but which go to the very heart of state-society relations, citizenship and legitimacy;
 - i) Challenges with the project of regional integration and cooperation in Africa which have made the process heavy on formal institutional structures and rituals but weak in content, dependent on external donors, and removed from the dominant policy processes of the very countries which should be cooperating on the way to integration; and
 - j) Difficulties with the terms of Africa’s participation in the contemporary world economy, including the question of how it might manage international trade rules in its own interest, the trade relations between Africa and the European Union, the trade relations between Africa and the United States of America, and Africa’s strategy in relation to Asia generally and China and India in particular.
7. These development concerns are traceable in their origins to a multiplicity of sources and they vary in their intensity from country to country. They can be clustered under seven broad categories that are central to the prospects of continental development. They are:
- a) Macro-Economic Policies for Growth and Development;
 - b) Macro-Social Policies for Human Welfare;
 - c) Democracy, Participation and Citizenship;
 - d) Public Institutions and Service;
 - e) Regional Integration and Continental Unity;
 - f) Physical Infrastructure;
 - g) Balanced Integration into the World Economy encompassing trade, labour movements, and investments.

Issues for Africa-Europe Partnership:

8. It is true that there are already in existence several framework documents for cooperation between Europe and Africa. The most prominent of these is the Cotonou Accord that was the much-heralded successor to the Yaoundé and Lomé conventions. It is also true that several initiatives are being discussed to further enhance cooperation. Perhaps the most prominent – may be even significant of these is the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) framework being discussed with different sub-regional organisations on the continent. Various resolutions and action plans for promoting “good” governance, democracy, human rights, peace, and conflict resolution have also been adopted and pursued by the EU in its relationship with Africa. Further, commitment has been expressed in relation to the promotion of African ownership in the relationship with Europe. Substantial progress has been registered in the promotion of institutionalised exchanges between the AU Commission and the EU Commission.
9. However, a key question which African countries and the AU need to address and resolve is whether it is wise to employ some of the existing frameworks for the promotion of the relations of cooperation with Europe. Perhaps the most important of these frames are the Cotonou Partnership Agreement and the on-going EPA negotiations. It is important to pose these questions because of the many contentious consequences which they carry not only

for the promotion of a relationship of equality with Europe but also the realisation of Africa's own long-term development objectives.

10. Related to the question of the existing frameworks is the multi-track approach which has been built into them and within which Europe pursues a three-tier relationship with Africa as a region. The three tiers consist of sub-Saharan countries grouped under the Cotonou Agreement; the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership which is targeted at the countries of North Africa and built into the new European Neighbourhood Policy; and the Trade and Development Cooperation Agreement with South Africa. This three-tier approach carries serious problems of differential treatments for the continent especially as Africa itself primarily relates to Europe as a bloc and not in a differentiated way that is co-terminus with its multiple interests.
11. The main themes that have been tabled to date as the issues that are of concern to Europe in its partnership with Africa were spelt out by the Council of Ministers in December 2006 and include five broad concerns: A Shared Political Vision for Collaboration; Peace and Security; Governance, Democracy and Human Rights; Trade and Regional Integration; and Key Development Issues. While these different clusters may be broad enough as to allow Africa to integrate as many of its own concerns as possible into the negotiations, these concerns need to be carefully articulated in order to ensure that European perspectives do not predominate in the definition of the problematic and the articulation of solutions. In this regard, it would be strategic for the AU to lay out a set of non-negotiable principles that would guide the negotiations around the five issue-clusters; these principles would represent the foundation on which African concerns would be anchored and secured.
12. While the five issue-clusters are broad umbrellas under which many concerns can be accommodated, it is crucial to keep in mind that the priorities spelt out within the ambit of each of them, whilst being important, are not necessarily all of the first order of priority either in their content or sequencing for policy action. Thus, increasing aid to meet set targets may be desirable but perhaps even more important is the stemming of capital flight. Similarly, it bears pointing out that while there might be agreement on the importance of an issue-cluster, the interpretation put on it will definitely differ in material details between the partners. Thus, an agreement on the importance of peace and security cannot be taken as agreement that terrorism, which is a big concern in Europe, is also of the same magnitude of concern in Africa.
13. The issue of migrations has emerged as a major concern in Europe, as in indeed for Africa, but for different reasons which are well-known. What has not been sufficiently tackled as a substantive agenda item is the treatment of African migrants in Europe and the many attacks to which they are subjected, whether legal or illegal, especially as European politicians pander to xenophobic publics. Considering the central importance of the Diaspora to the strategy of the AU for the development of Africa and the dignity of its peoples, this question would require to occupy a central place.
14. Linked to the question of migration is the drain of talent from Africa through out-migrations by qualified African professionals themselves but also through massive recruitment drives pursued by various European countries. A comprehensive examination of this question is required in order for a sustainable and equitable solution to be found. For example, what Europe offers in aid for the development of the African health sector can hardly ever be sufficient to compensate for the number of doctors, nurses and laboratory technologists recruited through direct visits to service the European health system. It is in the light of such developments that the entire fabric of European development assistance to Africa should be assessed for their real worth and effectiveness.
15. The monitoring and evaluation of the joint cooperation between Europe and Africa is an important task that should be undertaken as a strategic responsibility which the AU

Commission would pursue on behalf of the African side. This means, in effect, the strengthening and re-orientation of the institutional mechanisms of the Commission to assume this responsibility on behalf of the continent in an overall coordinating capacity that involves other key institutional players, especially non-governmental ones, in the assessment of the quality of the partnership with Europe.

16. There are a number of important issues of history, identity and responsibility which have hung over Europe–Africa relations, flaring up occasionally to assert themselves but still largely unresolved. They include particularly the injustices of slave trade and colonialism, both of which had hugely tragic consequences that Europe has not adequately addressed. Indeed, if anything, over the last few years, attempts have been made to re-write history by seeking, as the French Parliament did in 2005, to even glorify the colonial system and deny the basic responsibility of Europe for the slave trade. It would be important to clear the historical decks in the forging of Europe-Africa relations first by Europe fully acknowledging its responsibility and tabling an apology through the AU, and, secondly, by seriously responding to the African campaign for reparation. There is no option of wishing these unhappy historical experiences away; they simply are too big to sweep under the carpet.
17. The governance of the international development architecture, including the international financial institutions, is an issue which is central to African concerns – and indeed, the prospects for the development of Africa. Surprisingly, it is an issue which has not been high up on the agenda of Africa-Europe collaboration. Considering the disproportionate ways in which the activities and powers of the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, the UN family of organisations, transnational companies impact on Africa, it is clear that for Africa, the reform of their governance – and with it the governance of the entire international development architecture is a live concern that should be of more central concern. In this connection, it should go without saying that the treatment of the WTO and the international financial institutions as “neutral” agents in the world economy can certainly not stand as a basis for the serious re-thinking of the international development architecture.

Concluding Thought:

18. There is a whole world of challenges and opportunities in the building of Europe-Africa relations for the development of Africa. But in exploring this world, Europe in particular has to unlearn many things with regard to its mode of relating with Africa, namely that of a senior partner entitled even to determine the course which the continent of Africa should be following. There is a lot, historically and contemporaneously, in Europe-Africa development cooperation that is both authoritarian and short on accountability. Africa too needs to unlearn many things, including the syndromes of dependency that have developed over the years, in order to play its role as a full and equal partner with Europe in deed and as a matter of principle.