

Towards a new partnership between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries after 2020

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Common global interests in a multi-polar world

1. To which degree has the partnership been effective in tackling global challenges?

The ACP group is home for 18.5% of the global population, and the ACP and EU together account for the majority of all votes in the UN.

The relevance of the Cotonou Agreement is undeniable. It not only created a framework to support the ACP countries in tackling their development challenges. It also strengthened the unity of a very diverse group of developing countries and allowed them to speak up for their interests in the international realm. It established a comprehensive partnership between the EU and the ACP, which achieved important development goals. However, it has also failed to some extent. It was unable to promote stronger cooperation among the members of the ACP group. It is therefore important to be careful about how the success of the partnership is measured, especially given its width (development, trade, and political relations) and depth (elaborate institutional structure).

It seems like the ACP Strategy was primarily adopted in order to negotiate EPAs in a structural way. The political dimension of the partnership is very little visible.

The ACP-EU partnership seems to have lost political influence on the most important topics of the international agenda, such as the negotiation of the SDGs. In addition to that, the EU's influence is diminishing in the developing countries, which are now focusing more on South-South cooperation and on strengthening their cooperation with new emerging countries. These changes need to be taken into account, when revising the ACP strategy.

2. What would be needed to strengthen results in this respect and on which global challenges could the partnership add most value in the future, in the context of the new SDGs framework and in relevant international fora?

The partnership is inherently asymmetrical, with important implications for what is hailed “a partnership among equals”. The lack of equality in the relationship includes the donor-recipient dynamics that characterizes the ACP-EU relations.

The partnership needs to be reframed in its political, institutional and financial dimensions. It must be adapted to a different international context and be able to address the new socio-economic and political challenges faced by the ACP countries and EU member states. There is a need for a clearer focus. The parties also have to identify and agree on new areas of cooperation. The link with the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) must be clearer, as parallel structures should be avoided.

The role of civil society organisations (CSO) as active and necessary stakeholders in both strategies (ACP and JAES) must be defined more clearly. CSOs have immense knowledge and added value through their wide presence on the ground, e.g. in early crises warning systems. They need to be involved in a structural and permanent way, not only on an ad-hoc basis. Political Foundations, as represented in the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP) work at the interface between population, CSOs on the one hand, and political actors, administrations and Governments, at the other. They are in a best position to enhance political dialogue within societies on a variety of issues, such as Good Governance, Peace & Security, Trade, Development, Migration etc.

On a political level, the EU should develop a partnership with the ACP group that can support the realisation of its global aspirations, as declared in the Lisbon Treaty.

The ACP and EU together account for the majority of all votes in the UN. In this context, they should cooperate intensively towards the achievement of the new sustainable development goals.

Human rights, democracy and rule of law, as well as good governance

3. Have the mechanisms provided for in the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA) (i.e. political dialogue, financial support, appropriate measures, suspension of the agreement) achieved meaningful improvements on human rights, democracy, rule of law and good governance, including the fight against corruption? Should the future partnership do more in this regard, and in what way?

Shared values – e.g. the respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law – are essential elements of the ACP-EU partnership. Since the 1960s there has been visible progress in the ACP countries in the fields of human rights, freedom of expression and democracy (e.g. introduction of parliamentary democracy and free elections). However, diverging views regarding the rights of the LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex) community and the follow-up of rulings by the International Criminal Court (ICC) have raised questions about the true commitment of the parties to shared values. Corruption remains a challenge. Certain policies (or lack of policies) of the EU and its member states towards third countries don't contribute to an improvement of certain crises or setbacks in development, such as arms trade, agricultural subsidies and illicit financial flows from Africa to Europe. Policy Coherence for Development remains key. Also here, the role of CSO needs to be enhanced, as a reliable watchdog.

4. Has the involvement of local authorities and non-state actors (i.e. civil society organisations, the media), national parliaments, courts and national human rights institutions in the partnership been adequate and useful to promote human rights, democracy and rule of law as well as good governance? Could they contribute more and in what way?

The development of capabilities must be taken as a top priority. There is a desire that the private sector and civil society organizations play a much bigger role, not just as implementing partners, but also at a conceptual level and in shaping the partnership.

Peace and security, fight against terrorism and organised crime

5. Are the provisions on peace and security in the CPA appropriate and useful and has the balance between regional and ACP involvement been effective?

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6. Should the future partnership provide for more effective joint action on conflict prevention, including early warning and mediation, peace-building and state-building activities, as well as on tackling transnational security challenges? Should this be done in the EU-ACP context?

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Sustainable and inclusive economic growth, investment and trade

7. How effective has the partnership been in promoting sustainable and inclusive economic development?

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8. Taking into account the new SGDs framework, should the future partnership do more in this respect, and what?

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9. How effective has the partnership been in supporting macroeconomic and financial stability? In which areas would there be added value in ACP-EU cooperation on macroeconomic and financial stability?

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10. How effective has the partnership been in improving domestic revenue mobilisation, in promoting fair and efficient tax systems and in combatting illicit financial flows? Would there be added value and more efficiency in stronger ACP-EU cooperation on these matters?

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11. Has the partnership been able to contribute substantially to mobilising the private sector and attracting foreign direct investment?

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12. How could the potential of the EU and ACP private sector be better harnessed? What should be the main focus of EU and ACP private sector cooperation in a post-Cotonou framework, and what might be the role of ODA in this?

A huge potential for cooperation is seen in renewable energies, seabed resources, green economy, for example.

An increased role of the private sector in the crafting of the partnership is needed. In this context, eight points that could be improved are: (1) Working on improving the risk classification of African countries within the OECD guidelines, thereby facilitating the access to export credit agencies (ECA) guarantees for doing business; (2) Supporting European importers in finding potential partners in Africa; (3) Removing tariff and non-tariff barriers, especially for agricultural and industrial products with the aim to integrate ACP countries states into global trade; (4) Helping partners to comply with sanitary issues in the field of organic farming to facilitate export to non-ACP countries. (5) Critically discussing the EU's agricultural subsidies and the negative effects on producers of ACP countries; (6) Pursuing the negotiations on investment treaties lying at the Commission since the transfer of competence of FDI; (7) Liberalizing the visa frameworks for businessmen with a view to promote more contact between business in Europe and in the ACP countries; (8) Implementing an institutional dialogue with private sector institutions.

13. In this setting, what opportunities do you see for the new, digital economy?

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14. To what extent has the partnership been able to contribute to increase agricultural development and trade?

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15. What has been the contribution of the partnership trade preferences to the integration of ACP countries in the world economy and to its development goals?

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16. Is there still a need for specific provisions on trade cooperation in the post-Cotonou framework, also taking into account the ACP countries which have not signed an EPA? If so, what could/should they cover?

Experts from the EU and the ACP countries recognize the existence of an asymmetry between the negotiating parties in the EPA negotiations, which is also reflected in the commitments undertaken by the parties. African countries stress that trade agreements must be based on fairness, justice and transparency, and that was not seen during the negotiation of the EPAs.

In any case, for many ACP politicians, trade is still the central focus of the ACP-EU agenda. From the perspective of ACP representatives there is a perception that current trade patterns continue to be influenced by the colonial past, with the ACP economies failing to make an industrial transformation that would create the jobs required to absorb the growing work force. There is a focus on raw materials and lack of strategies to promote value addition.

Human and social development

17. Has the partnership delivered on its human development objective in an effective and efficient way, in particular on poverty eradication, and also concerning gender equality and empowerment of women? How could it be improved?

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18. Taking into account the new SDGs framework, what are the main challenges related to human development that the future partnership should focus on?

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Migration and mobility

19. Has the partnership been a useful vehicle for discussing migration issues and has it positively contributed? Has Article 13 CPA been fully applied?

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20. Should a future partnership do more in this regard, and on which particular aspects should it focus (legal migration and mobility, addressing root causes of migration, return and readmission, tackling human trafficking and smuggling, international protection)?

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A stronger political relationship

21. How effective has the political dialogue been and at which level is it the most effective: national, regional and through the joint EU-ACP institutions? Should the scope of political dialogue be widened or narrowed?

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22. Would a stronger involvement of EU Member States, associating their bilateral policies and instruments to the political dialogue at national level, enhance the dialogue's effectiveness and efficiency?

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23. Has the fact that the agreement is legally binding been instrumental to its implementation as compared to other regional partnerships based on political declarations?

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Coherence of geographical scope

24. Could a future framework be usefully opened up to other countries than the current members of the ACP Group of States? Which countries would that be?

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25. What kind of framework should govern EU and ACP relations? How could an ACP-EU successor framework relate to the more recent EU regional partnerships with Africa, Caribbean and Pacific States? Could a future ACP-EU framework include distinct partnerships with regional partners?

There is a strong perception that the focus of attention of key decision-makers in the EU and in the ACP countries has shifted from the ACP-EU partnership to continental agendas. Thus, there is a need for re-balancing the mandate of the ACP group in order to allow better coordination between the different partnerships, avoid duplication and develop synergies.

There seems to be an emerging consensus for a more complementary role of the ACP group compared to regional groupings. This should require a re-focusing of its mandate with a view to clarify the relationships between the ACP and the three regions and their respective partnerships with the EU, with a view to avoid duplication and overlap and also to strengthen synergies.

There is a need for a stronger focus (possibly accompanied by downsizing) on the benefits that the partnership can bring in terms of transformative change to the population and on the value added it can provide to the regional partnerships. The ACP could also have a role in sharing lessons learned.

26. Is there scope for building in more structured relationships with Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa?

Cooperation tailored more towards groups of countries with similar development level

27. Is the current system of allocation of development resources, based on need and capacities as well as performance, sufficient for channelling funds towards those countries where the highest impact can be obtained? Should allocation of resources continue to prioritise countries most in need, including fragile states?

The problem is that the ACP group today does not correspond any longer with the target group of its development policy and the world of least developed countries (LDCs). While only eight least developed countries are not in the ACP group, the income and development levels within the group have become quite high and some ACP countries have higher per capita incomes than that of the poorer new Member States.

28. What kind of cooperation could help to cover the specific needs of more developed ACP countries with a view to attaining more equitable and sustainable growth?

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Strengthen the relationship with key actors

29. Has the current model of stakeholder engagement been conducive to attaining the objectives of the partnership in an efficient way? Which actors could play a more significant role in the implementation of the partnership? How could this be addressed?

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30. What could be done to promote effective and efficient involvement of both international and domestic private sector, civil society, social partners and local authorities in the partnership?

There is a need for a major reform to increase the involvement of the civil society and remove the 'cast-in stone boundaries' of the engagement of societal actors within the Cotonou framework. ACP civil society organizations (CSOs) note a mismatch between what is on paper and what happens in reality. They consider that the implementation of Cotonou is left to policy-makers, while CSOs are invited to make technical contributions. They are concerned that their advocacy role has been compromised by an increasing role in implementation, leading to situations where they have to negotiate with the people who fund them.

In this context, it would be important to promote a shift in the mind-set of policy-maker. This could be facilitated by means of a stronger focus on the positive roles CSOs have had in areas such as security. In addition, a greater level of systematic networking with global partners would be an added value.

31. Should the partnership be open to new actors as referred above?

An important step would be to better include the role of diasporas in the partnership.

32. In this regard, should the possibility of opening up the partnership to 'associated members' or 'observers' be considered?

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33. How could a new framework promote triangular and South-South cooperation, including the increased involvement of ACP States as development actors in support of other ACP countries?

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Streamline the institutional set-up and functioning of the partnership

34. Has the joint institutional set-up (with the ACP-EU Council of Ministers, the ACP-EU Committee of Ambassadors, and the Joint Parliamentary Assembly) been effective in debating and promoting common views and interests and in providing political guidance and momentum to the EU-ACP partnership and the implementation of the CPA?

The developments within the EU demand a reassessment of the partnership. Under the Lisbon treaty, the EU's capacity to fulfil effectively the role of a global actor has become a priority. To respond to the European integration dynamics, the ACP's current institutional structure has proven too limited to tap the full potential of its partnership with the EU. There is also a risk of divergences in strategic interests between the EU and the ACP group.

The EU is traditionally the party that initiates changes, whereas the ACP tend to be reactive. For example, the ACP countries had to accept decisions on performance-based allocations and the differentiation agenda. It is time for the ACP group to make up its mind and be clear about its expectations regarding future cooperation with the EU.

35. What is the added value of the joint ACP-EU institutions as compared to more recent regional and regional economic community frameworks for dialogue and cooperation?

The ACP and EU together account the majority of all votes in the UN.

36. What institutional arrangements would most effectively help address common challenges and promote joint interests?

We perceive a divergence of opinions on a number of contentious issues, and believe that more honesty and transparency in the relationship can promote a more equal partnership.

A key question remains what kind of lessons can be learned from the EPA process with respect to the negotiations of a future more comprehensive agreement between the ACP and the EU, notably in the area of communication.

Furthermore, there is a necessity to improve intra-ACP coordination: among the member countries and between the Secretariat based in Brussels and relevant governments and domestic stakeholders.

ACP countries have to take full ownership – including financial – of their institutions and governments and stakeholders in ACP countries need to develop closer links with the ACP Secretariat. The fact that the ACP “Headquarters” (Secretariat) are in Brussels – i.e. on European territory – can be seen as a sign of weakness with a negative psychological effect.

37. Should a higher degree of self-financing of this functioning (ACP-EU Joint institutions and ACP secretariat) by the ACP States be required?

The ACP group must take full ownership – including the financial responsibility – of its institutions, which are today financially supported by the EU. The better-off ACP countries should assume stronger financial commitments to the institutional funding and support of the group. This would be a litmus test for the importance attached to the ACP group by its members.

Better adapted and more flexible development cooperation tools and methods

38. Is there added value in having a dedicated financing instrument in support of the ACP-EU partnership? If so, what are the reasons and how would it differ from other external financing instruments funded by the general budget of the Union? Is this instrument flexible enough, especially to address crisis situations? Can this instrument be deployed differently?

Despite the great financial support for development projects made available by the EU to ACP countries, there is a need for improvements on the implementation side. As an example, some cases of developing countries - e.g. microstates in the Pacific and in the Caribbean - have problems of absorptive capacity and face problems in implementing projects due to lack of administrative capabilities. National partner institutions are understaffed and cannot cope with the strict and highly bureaucratic standards and procedures set by the EU. This is an area where both sides can and should cooperate to find solutions and increase the efficiency of the partnership.

39. What is the added value of the EDF's co-management system involving national authorities in the programming and management of aid programmes, as compared to other EU cooperation instruments in non-ACP countries?

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40. Does the current set-up of the programming process and implementation of activities lead to real ownership by the beneficiaries? What could be improved? How can the EU and Member States maximise the impact of joint programming?

The ACP group must take full ownership of its institutions, including their finances. Better-off ACP countries should make stronger financial commitments towards the group. Moreover, measures must be taken to reinforce the links between governments and institutions in ACP countries and the ACP Secretariat.

Furthermore, whereas the enormous support from the EU is acknowledged, ACP participants aspire to a future scenario where the members of the group become less dependent on aid, and aid becomes less centered on governments. The development of capabilities is taken as the top priority, and there is a desire that the private sector and civil society organizations play a much bigger role not just as implementing partners, but also at a conceptual level and in shaping the partnership.

41. Does the variety of existing tools adequately support the EU and ACP common principles and interests and are there gaps that should be addressed? How do you assess the effectiveness and efficiency of various implementation modalities?

42. Should a higher degree of self-financing from the ACP States be required for activities to ensure ownership? Would this apply to all countries? On which principles should this be based?

43. How can the expertise of the EU and its Member States be better mobilised, particularly in the middle-income countries?

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