



External evaluation of EU-Central Africa cooperation (2008-2016)

Final report
Executive Summary

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"This report represents the views of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission, those of the Regional Organisations, nor the authorities of the countries concerned."

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Executive Summary

Evaluation objectives

The evaluation covers the European Union's (EU) regional cooperation in Central Africa (CA) for the period 2008-2016 and extends to recent developments related to the planning and early implementation of the Regional Indicative Programme (RIP) of the 11th European Development Fund (EDF). The evaluation assesses the regional cooperation of the EU as a whole. This relates, primarily, but is not limited to, assistance in the sectors where the EU's cooperation with Central Africa is most concentrated, namely:

- (i) Economic integration, including infrastructure;
- (ii) Political integration and contribution to peace and security; and
- (iii) Sustainable management of natural resources.

The Central African landscape for the EU cooperation has changed under the different RIPs. However, for the purpose of this evaluation, it covers the two Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in the region: the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC). Regional cooperation is mainly defined through the RIPs. However, similar thematic projects of the other external aid mechanisms of the EU with multi-country or cross-border dimension were also considered and were also included in the analysis in terms of their coherence and complementarity.

Methodology

The evaluation was developed with the support of the Reference Group (RG) (comprising EU staff from headquarters as well as from two regional offices). There were eight evaluation questions covering the evaluation criteria of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) as well as those specific to the EU. After the documentation phase, a two-week field mission was carried out to verify the identified working hypotheses and to complete the preliminary findings. The mission interviewed about 60 respondents across six countries representing a broad spectrum of stakeholders. This report summarises the various steps and analyses.

Background

Central Africa (7 million km² with a population 180 million people) was and remains the least integrated region on the African continent. The region is also characterised by high social inequalities, long-term instability, and a large reserve of natural resources and raw materials. The region has poorly developed infrastructural connectivity. Statistics show that intra-regional trade accounts for only 2% of the countries' exports¹. The bulk of the trade is generated by the informal and micro-SME sector and is primarily related to everyday consumer goods.

The two Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in the region have very wide-ranging mandates, but little implementation. This is mainly due to their limited operating resources attributed to little contribution from their Member States (MS). In addition, the Communities do not have decision-making powers. The member States of ECCAS and CEMAC publicly display pro-regional and pan-African positions that are inconsistent with the focus of their development policies.

¹ UNCEA - Assessing Regional Integration in Africa VIII: Bringing the Continental Free Trade Area About, 2017

RELEVANCE

The EU's regional cooperation has addressed specific and well-identified needs of the region, countries and final beneficiaries in the areas as defined by the Cotonou Agreement. The strategic priorities and activities are logical responses to the needs, even if the stated expectations are not very much in line with the regional and national dynamics.

However, the EU's regional strategic response as regards Central Africa has been unrealistic in the context of the well-known and established weaknesses of regional organisations since the 9th EDF. This is also due to the reluctance of their Member States to broaden the scope of regional integration actions. The needs formulated by Regional Organisations (ROs) have never been realistic and credible enough. The same applies to their capacity to implement and promote the harmonisation of national policies.

The EU has implemented generic strategic frameworks in Central Africa that are common across all ROs on the continent and has failed to tailor its actions to respond to the region's very weak political, institutional, administrative and operational capacities. The EU's strategic response has gradually become autonomous vis-à-vis the context and partners by giving priority to adapting to the changes in its interests, policies and instruments. This is reflected in the re-introduction of centralised management under the 11th EDF. This has improved the strategic coherence and complementarity of EU actions. Nevertheless, the situation has undermined the ownership by beneficiaries, an issue that has repeatedly been raised for several decades for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of external aid.

EFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Peace and Security - The EU's regional cooperation has contributed to positive results in conflict mediation, peacekeeping operations, tackling hybrid cross-border threats as well as maritime piracy. Moreover, the EU's support has contributed to the establishment of a regional structure that lays the foundations for conflict management in the future. This has made it possible to work directly with the beneficiaries on the ground to overcome their weaknesses. Despite this, the Central African region remains the most sensitive region on the African continent yet the EU is unable to contribute to a sustainable transformation of the conflict drivers in the region. The achievements made have not only been hampered by complex regional geopolitics, but also by the weaknesses of the initial assessment, and the fact that the priorities of the Technical Assistance (TA) and the political agenda have not been well integrated. The regional cooperation has not addressed the root causes of conflicts or hybrid threats as well as regional crime.

Economic and trade integration - the EU's regional cooperation has not contributed significantly to the strengthening of regional economic integration in Central Africa. The region still remains insufficiently integrated in international trade and the competitiveness of the companies in the region has made no significant progress. A review of the three RIPs during this period regarding obstacles to economic and trade integration clearly identifies the underlying challenges. In the 10th EDF planning, the priority was given to the signing of the regional Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and therefore to actions that were intended to encourage the partners to sign the Agreement and to accompany its implementation. However, the choice of sectors of concentration and priorities for EU cooperation does not necessarily correspond with the regional integration priorities of the Member States in the region (e. g. quality infrastructure).

The failure to achieve many of the results and outputs of the Trade and Economic Integration Support Programme (PACIE) is in no way related to the non-signing of the regional EPA. Nevertheless, the negotiations of this agreement have witnessed the emergence of demands for accompanying measures from Member States that are much more substantial than the content of the PACIE. The implementation of many components of the PACIE only commenced at the end of the evaluation period. These delays have been caused by a combination of several factors, including a difficult security environment (CAR), delays in Member States' contributions (Afristat), the unprecedented use (in this domain and in the region) of contribution agreements with international organisations and a lack of political will on the part of

Member States to achieve regional economic integration. The PACIE has become a platform of about fifteen activities whose complementarity has remained entirely academic, especially since they have been implemented in a disjointed manner. The delegation contract with UNIDO for Competitiveness (PRMN) and Quality Infrastructure (PIQAC) has undermined the EU's regional approach by diverting resources to national sub-projects that are not relevant to regional integration and that are not sustainable. The implementation modality has not made it possible for the EU to adjust its approach and at the same time it has also stripped it of room for policy dialogue.

Infrastructure - the slow pace of setting up operations, firstly under decentralised management with CEMAC and then blending through the two successive investment facilities weakened the EU's mobilisation of its support for economic infrastructure during the period under review. The EU's regional cooperation has achieved almost nothing despite the fact that it was supposed to take over from the NIPs from the 10th EDF.

The accompanying measures and conditionalities on blending operations in the transport sector, which should also have taken over from the NIPs to improve sectoral governance, have not been implemented as expected. It is likely that previously constructed or rehabilitated corridors and networks are deteriorating at an increasing rate, with increasing repercussions both on intra-regional and national, and to some extent on local trade (rural accessibility).

On the other hand, the situation is different for interventions to improve access to quality electricity at an affordable price. The EU is currently supporting the initial stage of building the institutions that will manage the regional market with a view to achieving physical interconnection in the future. The EU's initial outputs are expected in 2019.

Biodiversity and natural resources - The EU's regional cooperation has contributed to the sustainable management of natural resources, in particular forest resources, as well as the protected areas and their biodiversity. However, the EU has not achieved all the expected results and the desired performance levels. The EU's regional cooperation in this field has proceeded in a complex and often fragile context, and has failed to achieve the expected results. In particular, the strategy has failed to build strong and sustainable regional capacities to manage these resources, despite the fact that it has strengthened such resources in the areas of training and data management.

The EU's regional cooperation as the main financial contributor to biodiversity and forest resource management issues in the Central African region has played a key role not only in preserving biodiversity in the 16 protected areas that it supports, but also in the strategies and approaches implemented in this sector and in the sustainable management of forest resources.

Regional organisations - the result of the 2011 four-pillar audit, such as the MICOPAX financial audits in 2015, shows that mastery of EDF procedures was not achieved and did not improve during the period. The accumulated delays further corroborate this observation and indicate that they are not just caused by a lack of technical or administrative capacity. In fact, the difficulties encountered were more of a decision-making than technical nature and signalled a latent (and sometimes overt) opposition to the EU's strategic response, even though it had been jointly endorsed.

The support given to Regional Authorising Officers was not able to compensate for the weaknesses of the host administrations as well as their unwillingness to cooperate. The performance remained extremely poor both in terms of participation in the planning and implementation of the projects. By contrast, the need to switch from a "substituting" TA of the 9th EDF was not embraced by the ROs and the ensuing support mechanism was anchored in the sectoral projects and proved to be ineffective.

IMPACT

The EU's regional cooperation has been powerless in countering political and institutional stalemates between Central African ROs and their Member States. Although these challenges existed in the previous

period, the EU's cooperation has not deviated from its stereotypical models of regional political and economic integration, nor has it abandoned ambitions that are not commensurate with its importance in the region, its resources and the constraints faced by its partners.

The innovations introduced by the 11th EDF RIP - in Central Africa just as in other regions on the continent - remove the monopoly of ROs on the European cooperation, open spaces for dialogue and coordination between regional and national bodies, and limit the scope of programmable aid in favour of more agile and flexible tools, especially where the EU is fully the decision-maker. Initial results indicate a significant improvement in the pace of engagement procedures by the DUEs regarding centralised management and investment facilities. However, the value of this procedural efficiency remains to be determined on the attainment of public policy results and the sustainability of the gains to the final beneficiaries. In addition, stakeholders cannot be bypassed in the implementation of projects.

COORDINATION, COMPLEMENTARITY, COHERENCE

The EU's regional cooperation is coordinated with the limited technical and financial partners (TFPs), in particular the AfDB, who support regional integration and ROs. While this coordination is not formalised, it is implemented through cooperation in the elaboration of the respective projects and through information exchange meetings during AfDB monitoring missions. No cases of duplication or inconsistency were reported. On the contrary, the EU's PAMEC, the then PARCIC, coordinated with the AfDB's PARCI. This type of coordination exists also with France in the area of "Peace and Security". The other Member States of the EU are not involved at the regional level. As regards natural resources and biodiversity, the complementarity between the different EU instruments (EDF-PIN, FED-PIR, intra-ACP and thematic budget lines) has been well utilized in the region.

DEVCO had at its disposal a mechanism for ensuring the consistency of the projects of the various cooperation instruments during their development, called the QSG1. The mechanism has been challenged for its ability to regularly integrate good-level inputs from the different units involved in managing an instrument. Although the reorganisation of the central services into thematic units managing the various instruments to coordinate with the other DGs constitutes, at first glance, an improvement, it is too recent to have significantly changed the current interventions. The recent reorganisation of the regional delegations into a team dedicated to regional projects and a stronger hierarchical authority of the heads of cooperation go towards the same goal.

EU ADDED VALUE

EU Member States have not developed cooperation with regional organisations in Central Africa. Therefore, the EU's cooperation can add significant value by positioning itself at regional level, while at the same time establishing links with its national cooperation strategies.

CONCLUSIONS

The EU's strategic response has been relevant in targeting very genuine needs that constitute continental priorities yet it failed to align effectively with realistic regional policies endorsed by the States in the region. The theory of changing regional integration in Central Africa, like that of the three key sectors of the EU's regional cooperation has been unrealistic, over-ambitious, and unstable.

The demand for effective EU regional cooperation has led the EU unilaterally introducing more and more flexibilities to overcome the difficulties of partnership with regional organisations. This has contributed to the implementation of the majority of activities, but generally resulting in outputs that are much more modest than expected. More specifically, the environment in which the results of regional cooperation were delivered seldom proved to be conducive to the application of the gains made by the countries of the region.

In terms of efficiency, the orderly and logical approach of the regional cooperation has been hampered by the serious delays experienced in almost all activities during each implementation phase. Lack of ownership of EU projects has led ROs to deliberately endorse major ineligible expenditures.

The impact of regional cooperation has remained limited as most of the results, such as capacity-building, have been superficial and without any development prospect or even sustainability. Hardly any of the partners or mechanisms supported by the EU has used this backing to better fulfil their mandate or missions. This has been due to the lack of political and financial support from the Member States. The European "model" of regional integration has proved to be too much out of touch with the Central African regional context to have any tangible added value.

The implementation of complementarities and coherence on the part of the EU's actions has remained essentially formal, without bringing about any tangible benefits.

The effective integration of cross-cutting dimensions into EU regional cooperation actions has been insufficient.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The EU's regional cooperation with Central Africa needs to be aligned with the expectation that the regional project in Central Africa will be institutionalised in a way that is effective. In addition, it should have both operational resources and political legitimacy.

Until this major transformation takes place, the cooperation could benefit from extending the implementation modalities that were established during the 11th EDF and which have started to be successful. These include the use of other operators, centralised management and investment facilities.

In order to adjust to the nascent stage of development of regional dynamics in the region, the EU's strategic response should exclusively promote the structural requirements of the regional integration (infrastructure, security) and its basic forms (cross-border and multi-country cooperation) in areas where the gains from coordinated action are strongest and most immediate. It also needs to promote the preservation of global public assets, including forestry and biodiversity.

To address the need for a differentiated strategy for regional cooperation based on the fundamentals of each of them, it is necessary to rebuild the political dialogue with the regional economic communities by adopting a new EU Communication on regional integration within a broader framework for consultation.