

1. Introduction

1.1. No shortage of policy innovations at the European Commission level

Reforms have been high on the European agenda since the end of the 1990s. Changes in the overall institutional machinery for dealing with European external relations and administering aid have received considerable attention. The yearly reports of EuropeAid on the implementation of EC aid testify to the progress achieved and the further challenges ahead in terms of improving aid delivery¹.

There have also been many changes at the strategic level. Over the past decade, the EC has been actively developing new policies to keep up with a rapidly changing world. A case in point was the thorough revision of ACP-EU relations, which led to the signing of the Cotonou Agreement in 2000. The transition from the Lomé Conventions to the Cotonou Agreement involved more than a change in name. The new Treaty marked an important break with the past. Major innovations have been introduced to improve the overall impact of aid, trade and political cooperation between the ACP and the EC.

This drive for policy innovation has continued in a variety of partnership relations, sectors of intervention and thematic areas. On the whole, the EC tends to be lauded for the quality of its policy frameworks. Such a positive assessment can, for instance, be found in a variety of independent evaluations of EC Development Cooperation.

1.2. Gap between policy objectives and actual practices

However, what about the implementation of new policy objectives? Is the EC –as an institution– able to deliver on this host of new policy commitments? Or is it systematically confronted with major gaps between stated policy objectives and actual implementation practices?

In order to better understand the delivery challenges involved in EC policy changes, three specific cases are considered in this paper. They concern important policy changes recently introduced with regard to:

- The new partnership between Africa and Europe, as proposed in the ‘Joint Africa-Europe Strategy’ (JAES) adopted during the Lisbon Summit (December 2007).
- The growing support for governance as a key priority of EC Development Cooperation (which gained momentum from 2000 onwards).
- The adoption of the participatory development agenda and related changes in cooperation approaches with civil society (which also became prominent from 2000 onwards).

For each of these three cases, this paper (i) briefly reviews the policy changes involved; (ii) examines the EC implementation strategies followed and the progress achieved; and (iii) identifies some the main

¹ Annual Report 2008 on the European Community’s Development and External Assistance Policies and their implementation in 2007. EuropeAid, 2008

‘implementation gaps’ that arise in practice. Building on this analysis, the paper draws a set of overall conclusions on EC delivery capacity and offers some pointers for discussion.

2. The joint Africa-EU strategy (JAES)

2.1. The search for a new strategic partnership

The Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) was endorsed at the Lisbon Summit in late 2007 and commits both the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU) to a renewed long-term political partnership, based on a formal consensus on a set of values, common interests and strategic objectives. The Strategy embodies the need for both parties to adapt their relationship to a context² that has drastically evolved since the previous Africa-EU Summit in Cairo (2000) with:

- the emergence of issues such as security, migration and environment on the international agenda;
- the birth of the African Union which provided Africa with political institutions geared towards continental integration and created a new framework for political dialogue and interaction with an enlarged European Union ;
- the growing trend toward regional differentiation, reflected in the formulation of specific EU support strategies for Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

The new Africa-EU strategic framework is *ambitious* and reflects four major shifts compared with the past. First, the framework goes *“beyond aid”* and encompasses all policy issues that govern the relationship between the two continents. Second, the new strategy offers the possibility to overcome fragmentation and to enter into a continent-to-continent relationship³. One cannot expect the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which encompasses North Africa, to simply disappear as a consequence of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy. However, it will be a challenge for Europe to fulfil its commitment to adapt its instruments and practices in order to start *“treating Africa as one”*. A third innovation is the *commitment to joint implementation* with African partners. The new Strategy is clearly seen as a multi-actor endeavour. Its successful implementation will depend on the association of all relevant actors, including Member States and other institutional actors on both sides (e.g. the European and Pan African Parliaments), the regional economic communities (RECs), civil society, and the private sector as well as local governments. *Fourth, there is a strong commitment to delivering* concrete results (‘early deliverables’) to be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis.

2.2. Implementation strategies followed and progress achieved

In order to implement the new commitments, the Joint Strategy first Action Plan translates them into *eight priority partnerships* covering various themes (see Box 1). The Action Plan covers an initial period of three

² For further details see Mackie, James a.o in *“Coherence and effectiveness: Challenges for ACP-EU relations in 2008”*. InBrief ECDPM, No 20, February 2008, particularly p. 6-8.

³ The Africa-EU relationship has historically been fragmented into three agreements and policies: the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership with Northern Africa; the Cotonou Agreement for sub-Saharan Africa and the Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement with South Africa.

years, but is intended to be rolled forward as time advances. The first objective is that the implementation of all priorities set be initiated within this first three-year period.

In principle, there is *no blueprint approach* for implementing the partnerships. In some, like the partnership on migration, joint priorities and action plans have already been drafted and efforts will focus on implementation. Peace and Security is another area where joint AU-EU work gained momentum before the JAES appeared on the scene (in the context of the Africa Peace Facility). As a result, a relatively clear agenda already exists for joint work in the years ahead. In other areas, such as the partnership on climatic change, a common agenda still needs to be agreed upon. The Strategy and related action plans do not provide a detailed implementation strategy for the JAES. The parties agreed a basic set of implementation principles (e.g. with regard to participation of all relevant actors). The actual modalities will have to be sorted out as the process moves on, based on experimentation and knowledge acquired.

Box 1: Priority partnerships of the new Joint Africa-EU Strategy

1. Peace and security
2. Democratic governance and human rights
3. Trade and regional integration (which includes the partnership on infrastructure)
4. Millennium Development Goals
5. Energy
6. Climate change
7. Migration, mobility and employment
8. Science, information society and space

In order to ensure effective implementation of the new Strategy, efforts are undertaken to put in place an adequate and potentially innovative *inter-institutional structure* with the following key features:

- Quite logically, the *overall coordination* of the process is put in the hands of the two Commissions. They are seen as the motor that should ensure an effective implementation, by playing a variety of roles such as organising the dialogue; facilitating the work of the partnerships; mobilising the European and African actors; and ensuring funding from various sources. The annual ‘College to College meetings’ are a central mechanism for dialogue and are expected to become more political and operational.
- The JAES will rely on Joint Africa-EU *Expert Groups* (JEGs). They should ensure the implementation of the Action Plan. The EC and the AUC will take part in each of these groups.
- The involvement of the *Member States* (MS) is another key feature of the new strategy. The main instrument used to get Member States on board on the European side are the so-called *Implementation teams*, i.e. coordination structures between the Member States, the Commission and the Secretariat of the Council. They are based on a lead-agency model, allowing MS to actively engage in a partnership of their choice. The African side is also undertaking efforts to put in place coordination systems. But the story there is more complicated because the institutional set-up is less consolidated and there also Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to be integrated into the scheme.
- The role of the (first ever) EU *Ambassador to the AU* in Addis Ababa should also be mentioned. After lengthy discussions in the relevant Council working groups, the decision was taken in 2007 to create a new common