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The new EU development policy shifts in practice: Views from Kenya and Cameroon

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This paper looks at the implications of significant changes the European Union has made in recent years in its international partnerships and development cooperation and how these changes 'land' in partner countries.

The Global Gateway strategy and the overarching objectives of the so-called 'geopolitical Commission' give it a more political course, which is funded and implemented through the NDICI-Global Europe instrument and follows a Team Europe approach. With this new framework in place, the EU aims to become a more strategic global player able to forge stronger and mutually beneficial partnerships.

Drawing from the examples of Kenya and Cameroon, we argue that while the EU's discourse is progressively moving from narrow development cooperation to broader and more strategic international partnerships, the cooperation is still in practice geared around a development approach. The changes envisioned by the EU, in terms of strategic priorities and modus operandi, are taking time to shape at the country level.

Our research also points out limitations in how the EU has communicated and accompanied partner countries to understand and adapt to the practical changes brought about by its new framework, such as the shift from grants towards other financing modalities. The policy changes and new modalities require significant adjustments and learning from all sides. Yet, these adjustments take time, and our research points to a number of steps needed to actually set those changes in motion, starting with more capacities for the EU and its member states to address those challenges and accompany their partners in this transition.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ii

Acronyms ii

Introduction 1

1. The EU's narrative evolving towards a more political approach 2

    1.1. Interest-driven cooperation, and the challenge of defining and agreeing on mutual interests 3

    1.2. The untapped potential of Team Europe to have a stronger political voice 5

2. Adapting to the new instrument and its political implications for partner countries 8

    2.1. From an off-budget EDF to a unique EU instrument, the NDICI-Global Europe.... 8

    2.2. The end of the national (and regional) authorising officers & of the co-management system 10

    2.3. Coping with new financial modalities.... 12

Conclusion.... 13

List of Tables

Table 1: Evolution of the cooperation priorities in Cameroon and Kenya.... 4
Table 2: The EU and MS working better together 7
Table 3: The practical changes in the relationship between the EU and its partners 9

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Acronyms

AFD	Agence Française de Développement / French development agency
CAON	Cellule d'appui à l'ordonnateur national
CDP	Cassa Depositi e Prestiti
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
EC	European Commission
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
EDF	European Development Fund
EFSD+	European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
EU	European Union
EUD	European Union Delegation
Eurocham	European Chamber of Commerce in Cameroon
Finnfund	Industrial Cooperation Fund Oy
FLEGT	Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade
FMO	Nederlandse Financierings-Maatschappij voor Ontwikkelingslanden/Dutch development bank
GG	Global Gateway
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (Germany)
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MINEPAT	Ministry of Economy Planning and Land Planning
MIP	Multiannual Indicative Programmes
MS	Member states
MTE	Mid-Term Evaluation
NAO	National Authorising Officer
NDICI-Global Europe	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation instrument – Global Europe
NIP	National Indicative Programme
OACPS	Organisation of Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific States
ODA	Official development assistance
TEI	Team Europe Initiatives
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme

Introduction

The European Union (EU) has shifted the scope of its development cooperation and international partnerships towards a more political approach. The geopolitical Commission's objectives as well as the Global Gateway (GG) strategy are setting a renewed political framework, bringing about significant changes in the EU's relationship with its partner countries (Teevan and Sherriff 2019; Teevan et al. 2022). Moreover, new tools in EU development cooperation such as the transition from the intergovernmental off-budget European Development Fund (EDF) to a new instrument Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-Global Europe) included in the EU's multiannual financial framework, and the increasing use of innovative financing mechanisms, are also having far-reaching consequences for partner countries (Sergejeff et al. 2021). The Team Europe approach also proposes a renewed methodology of work among the EU stakeholders, aiming at a more effective, coordinated and coherent delivery of the EU and member states' (MS) actions and interests at partner country level. For the EU, these changes were set in motion immediately after the adoption, in 2021, of the legal framework (the NDICI-Global Europe instrument), but they are taking longer to land and unfold at partner country level.

As the European Commission (EC) currently undertakes the midterm review of the NDICI-Global Europe, this paper provides an analysis of some of the implications of the EU's new political framework for international partnerships, including the 'policy first' principle and the 'geographisation' process, both principles that also inform the NDICI-Global Europe. 'Policy first' essentially means widening the relations with partners beyond financial transfers into stronger political and policy dialogue, as well as cooperation around the EU interests and some shared priorities, and moving away from outdated donor-recipient relationships (Sergejeff et al. 2021). Geographisation, on the other hand, refers to an increased focus on bilateral cooperation with partner countries and regions. The geographic programmes are the preferred channel for development cooperation activities, and thematic envelopes, mostly managed by headquarters, are used when appropriate and on a complementary basis. These new principles aim at changing the EU's narrative in external action, better enabling the EU to pursue its own and mutual interests with partner countries, and moving away from a relationship centred on development cooperation towards one emphasising equal partnerships.

In order to set this transition in motion, the EU has put a great deal of effort into strengthening internal strategic orientation, coordination and communication, as well as collaboration with the EU Member states. But this inward-looking work has arguably taken precedence over the efforts aimed at explaining the envisaged changes and a new approach to partner countries. The latter were not sufficiently well informed about the new framework and instrument, and whether they were potentially losing anything compared to the former system. On the side of the EU, the NDICI-Global Europe is the main tool to put into practice the move towards a more assertive and geopolitical union that doesn't shy away from pursuing more openly than before, its own interests through international cooperation (Chadwick 2023). The NDICI-Global Europe brings in simplicity, flexibility, agility, and reactivity - all crucial to making the EU a more geopolitical player.

This study looks at how some of the changes brought about by the new EU approaches and instruments elaborated and set in motion over the past few years "land" in partner countries. What do partner countries think about the new EU geopolitical narrative, cooperation approaches and financing instrument, and how do they adapt to these changes? The paper focuses on the big picture, showing how the discourse and the operations are changing on both sides, illustrated by two case studies - Kenya and Cameroon. Both are middle-income countries (MICs), towards which the EU has committed to renew partnerships (CoEU 2017). Both also play a key role as regional actors in their geographical areas, respectively in Central Africa and in the Horn of Africa, where the EU wants to develop a more strategic relationship with Kenya, as a MIC contributing to regional stability (MIP Kenya 2021). Their national contexts and trajectories are different, and so is their respective history with the EU. Both countries are part of the Organisation of Africa, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), and thus impacted by the so-called EDF budgetisation. Unlike Kenya, the end of EDF, including the end of the principle of co-management and the National Authorising Officer (NAO)'s role has been felt hard in Cameroon and has triggered a need for institutional adjustments (Sabourin et al, 2023). In Cameroon, five member states are represented and the partnership has been structured around aid, which has long been a pillar of the relationship between Cameroon and the EU. In contrast, the partnership between Kenya and the EU has developed in a much more competitive context. The EU is one player among many: some twenty Member States are present (against ten before 2021) (ECA 2020), as well as a plethora of bilateral and multilateral representatives, Nairobi being also the headquarters of United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). In this context, the relationship between the EU and Kenya has been built within an existing institutional and administrative framework, which manages the relations with all development partners.

The paper builds on 36 interviews of European and local stakeholders conducted in Kenya and Cameroon in May 2023, complemented by interviews with institutional and non-governmental actors based in Brussels (from April to September 2023).

1. The EU's narrative evolving towards a more political approach

While the EU has been seeking to revamp its partnership with African countries for some years, there is a sense of urgency and recognition that the EU is losing ground in the face of growing competition. The increasing geopolitical tensions and competition in Africa mean that the EU is compelled to present an attractive offer to African countries and deliver on it.

Up until now, the relationship between the EU and most African countries was centred on development cooperation and trade. The intensified geopolitical competition in Africa means that the EU is increasingly struggling not only to remain the partner of preference in the area of development cooperation but also to retain influence and gain wider political leverage. As part of the battle of narratives and competition of offers the EU has embarked on, the EU has made big promises under the Global Gateway (Teevan et al. 2022), creating lots of expectations regarding the mobilisation of funds, and putting a lot of political weight behind it. By presenting a consistent and credible offer to partner countries, the Global Gateway is supposed to help put back Europe on the map and counter other global powers. However, if it does not deliver on its promises, its credibility could be affected in the eyes of partners globally, particularly in Africa. Interviewees across the board confirm significant geopolitical risks linked to the financing and implementation of the Global Gateway, particularly in middle-income countries, like Kenya, which have plenty of partners to choose from, the EU needs to play its cards right to maintain good relationships and influence.

The EU's narrative is evolving towards a more interest-driven cooperation, building a clear understanding of the needs and key priorities of African stakeholders, their context, as well as a clearer definition of the EU's interests and offers towards African partners. Over the past years, against the background of increasing geopolitical rivalries reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the EU has not only engaged in a competition of narratives but also a competition of offers. Major efforts were made to better articulate and communicate the EU's strategic interests and priorities vis-a-vis partner countries in order to clearly distinguish the European offer from that of other big players such as China and Russia. In that sense, the Team Europe approach and the Global Gateway are clear illustrations of the EU's narrative evolving towards a more geopolitical approach and moving towards more political partnerships.

One important change in the EU discourse on development and international cooperation is the strong focus on the pursuit of mutual interests with partner countries. **The identification and definition of mutual interests start with the EU being more assertive in setting its own priorities and interests for a renewed relationship with its partners** (Rios 2020). The State of the Union speech in September 2023 by Commission president Ursula von der Leyen confirmed the geopolitical ambitions of the current Commission, and the continued will of the EC's President to renew the partnership with Africa (Miyandazi 2020). This year's speech pointed to increasing awareness of Africa as a key partner and ally amidst geopolitical tensions. Announcing the EU will work on a new strategic approach in the perspective of the next African-Union–European-Union (AU-EU) summit, von der Leyen emphasised that "we need to develop a mutually beneficial partnership which focuses on common issues for Europe and Africa" (EC 2022).

1.1. Interest-driven cooperation, and the challenge of defining and agreeing on mutual interests

The external projection of the Commission's priorities at country level was one of the key features of the programming instructions sent by the EC's headquarters to the EU Delegations. The EU internal policies on the EC's key priorities now enclose an international dimension (Koch and Keijzer 2021). This contributes to the definition of the EU's interests.

At the partner country level, the Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs) reflect the geopolitical priorities: **the programming phase of the NDICI-Global Europe allowed the EU, not only to define its cooperation activities, but primarily to set its interests and priorities for each partner country, and then seek where and how these could match with the partner country's priorities**. This is a move away from the approach and the principles of the Cotonou agreement, which is supposed to work in partnership through established joint mechanisms, in the name of 'shared ownership, reciprocity, mutual accountability and transparency' (EU 2000 rev. 2005). This is also a step change from previous programming exercises where the starting point was partner countries' needs and priorities, and then looking at if and how the EU could respond to them. The logic now is to start with EU strategic priorities and interests and then explore possible matches with those of partner countries.

In both countries, **the EU priorities for the cooperation activities as they were set in 2021 are broader than in the previous period, as they also seek to contribute to establishing a broader partnership on areas of strategic interest for the EU, such as the Green Deal, digitalisation, or regional security in Africa**. Table 1 shows the evolution of the priorities and concentration sectors between the previous and the present financial cycles.

Cameroon's 2014-2020 National Indicative Programme (NIP) set the priorities of the 11th EDF's cooperation activities (EU 2014a). Based on the Cameroon strategy "Vision 2035" (Republic of Cameroon 2009), the EU had prioritised its support and cooperation in the areas of public governance as well as sustainable and balanced rural development for inclusive growth. The programming of NDICI-Global Europe for the 2021-2027 period reduced the emphasis on rural development as part of a broader priority related to the Green Deal, and put a stronger focus on governance and inclusive growth (EC 2020).

In Kenya, the priorities of the 2014-2020 EDF programme were aligned with the country's Second Medium Term Plan operationalising its Vision 2030 (Government of the Republic of Kenya 2013). The priorities stated for 2021-2027 contribute to "transforming [the partnership] beyond development cooperation into a relationship based on common values and mutual interests" (EC 2021). Practically, the MIP's priorities focus on the green transition and digital inclusion, which are also in line with the geopolitical priorities of the EU. The third priority on democratic governance, peace and stability also includes a component aiming at supporting the role of Kenya in terms of regional security.

Table 1: Evolution of the cooperation priorities in Cameroon and Kenya

	2014-2020 EDF priorities		**2021-2027 NDICI priorities Indicative allocations for 2021-2024**	
Cameroon	Public governance and rule of law*	84 M€	Governance, democratisation, peace and stabilisation*	36 M€
	Sustainable and balanced rural development and inclusive growth*	178 M€	Inclusive growth, sustainable jobs and private sector*	32 M€
	Technical cooperation	20 M€	Green Deal: sustainable development and climate action*	98 M€
			Support measures*	12 M€
	Total	282 M€	Total**	178 M€
Kenya	Food security and resilience to climate shocks*	190 M€	Green transition: environmental sustainability and resilience*	147 M€
	Sustainable infrastructure	175 M€	Leave no-one behind: Human development and digital inclusion*	83.5 M€
	Accountability of public institutions *	60 M€	Democratic governance, peace and stability*	83.5 M€
	Support measures	10 M€	Support measures*	10 M€
	Total	435 M€	Total***	324 M€

Sources: EU 2014a; EU 2014b; EC 2021

* Measures in support to civil society are integrated in the priority sectors

** Between 2021 and 2024, 25 M€ of this total amount may be used to provision European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) guarantees

*** Between 2021 and 2024, 61 M€ of this total amount may be used to provision EFSD+ guarantees

The support to the regional role of Kenya on trade and economic development (EP 2023), and the recent signature of the bilateral Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) (EC 2023a) are also an illustration of the converging interests and openness on both sides for deepening access to their respective markets and advancing sustainability issues (Euractiv 2023). The narrative is also changing as Kenya reassesses its priorities towards a more modern and greener model of development and growth. The conversation needs to be different and integrate those changes on the partner's side, as this is being done in Kenya.

The renewal of the partnership might be difficult in some contexts, where the development cooperation part remains central, both in terms of money invested and visibility. Defining mutual interests in Cameroon has not been easy in practice. While there is a match overall between the EU and the partner's interests, some stakeholders were more cautious about the potential consequences and the risk of going too far in the pursuit of the EU's interests. The programming process did not allow sufficient consultation with the partner country, and the midterm review can be seized as an opportunity to catch up with the dialogue with the partners' administrations and civil society. Indeed, there is a level of tension between the EU's drive to pursue its interests via policy first principle on the one hand, and partner country's ownership and involvement on the other (Jones and Keijzer 2021). Although the EU is able to find synergies while prioritising its geopolitical ambitions, in part due to the already strong presence of EU member states as well as strong ties with the country, the weak consultations and actual negotiations are not conducive to building more equal and mutually beneficial partnerships. The Global Gateway strategy as well as the Team Europe approach have been welcomed from all parts, but most stakeholders would need more clarity and better communication to allow for more ownership and a renewed balanced partnership.

The EU should not underestimate the consequences and risks related to lack of communication with partners. The EU should dedicate more time and effort towards explaining to partner countries the practical changes brought about by the NDICI-Global Europe and big initiatives such as the Global Gateway. These efforts ought to go beyond branding and marketing and address the concerns of partner countries regarding the EU's new approach and instruments. Indeed, the stakeholders in both Kenya and Cameroon called for clearer communication to mitigate potential tensions arising from the transition, and to increase the understanding of whether and how the changes will affect the partnership with the EU. While some targeted communication efforts have been carried out, including a regional workshop on Global Gateway organised in Cameroon in January 2023, the interviewees in both Kenya and Cameroon pointed out that further steps in communicating should be taken, and they should go beyond simply marketing the GG. The communication efforts should go beyond European audiences and engage more with local partners in governments, civil society, local authorities and the private sector. While the EU and delegations increasingly engage in outreach, communication campaigns and public diplomacy in partner countries, our interviewees point out that there is room for improvement. Some interviewees also suggested that EU commissioners or directors should have more frequent and longer visits to the country, pointing out that Chinese or Turkish partners took the time to visit and meet more actors during their country visits. In the context of increased geopolitical competition, improving communication and outreach can help better explain the EU to partners as well as provide channels to improve the EU's response to their demands. That way, the partners can better understand and seize what is good for them in the EU's offer.

Although there were concerns and criticisms from local stakeholders regarding the limited and precipitated consultations in the programming process, it proved very inclusive within the EU family at country level.

1.2. The untapped potential of Team Europe to have a stronger political voice

The Team Europe approach appears as a necessary solution for more collective visibility and influence of the European Union as a whole. **Both in Cameroon and Kenya, the Team Europe approach was instrumental in the definition of the EU's interests: MS played a key role in the programming of the NDICI-Global Europe**. It has served the geopolitical repositioning of the EU and the MS in Kenya and Cameroon in an increasingly competitive environment where other players such as the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South (Association of five major national emerging economies) (BRICS), the Gulf countries, as well as Turkey, Morocco and Tunisia, gain economic leverage and political influence.

The Team Europe approach was welcomed in both countries, by the EU stakeholders as well as by the partner countries. For the former, this represents an opportunity to have more visibility and political weight in the partner country. **EU countries may benefit from acting under one flag and one brand such as Team Europe, notably in contexts where relations between member states and partner countries are politicised or grievances fuelled as**

part of a disinformation campaign. For example, putting forward Team Europe as a collective European identity can help disentangle the EU identity from that of single member states, such as in the case of France in the Sahel. The 'working better together' dynamic brings together the MS and the EU for more than development cooperation: joint policy dialogue and public diplomacy are two tools in that regard (EU 2023a).

The case of the Team Europe Initiatives (TEI) in Cameroon brings a positive example in this regard. Indeed, the Team Europe approach led to organise a joint mission of EU ambassadors to the north of Cameroon, to launch the TEI on the Green pact and resilience in North Cameroon' (EU n.d.-a). **This was carried out as a collective communication effort to position the EU in a very competitive sector**. In that region, natural resources like wood are in high demand and other international players are investing in the timber sector, such as Vietnam and China. While unsustainable and illegal logging has long been recognised as a significant problem in Cameroon, the EU's focus on sustainable management of forests (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade [FLEGT] Programme) has sometimes been met with resistance and questioned the agenda-setting of European initiatives (Andong and Ongolo 2019). Going as a Team Europe to the North of Cameroon to launch the joint initiative **shows the added value of working as a team and gives political weight to the EU approach in a competitive context.**

The Kenyan case is more complex, according to several member states present in Kenya, the Team Europe approach could still do more to fully leverage its potential. As more policy-driven partnerships are refined, it is still difficult for the MS to characterise unanimously what they expect from the EUDs, for instance, whether they should act as mere coordinators of the EU member states, or play a more political role. So far the Team Europe approach has provided more visibility to the European strategic interests in a context where EU member states are present alongside a multitude of other international actors who have also established strong relationships with Kenya (for example, World Bank, United Nations Development Programme, China, Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, et cetera.) (Russell 2023). The government of Kenya and the EU have very similar priorities, notably on trade (Office of the President of the Republic of Kenya 2023), as well as on the green and digital transitions. Thanks to this synergy and Kenya's clear commitment in these sectors (Muganda 2022), the EU has been able to accelerate the development of Team Europe initiatives, which have the potential to bring more visibility to the EU as well as benefits to Kenya. In that context, the EU's Digital Economy Package for Kenya (EC 2023b), as part of the GG strategy (Pugnet 2023), will be implemented through the TEI on Human Centred Digitalisation which has already gotten a lot of traction and visibility, thanks to the involvement of the Commission, the EIB and 12 EU member states as well as four European DFIs (Agence Française de Développement [AFD], Nederlandse Financierings-Maatschappij voor Ontwikkelingslanden [FMO], Industrial Cooperation Fund Oy [FinnFund], and Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau [KfW]).

Our interviewees in Kenya and Cameroon pointed out that despite the transition in the narrative, the EU's partnership with the country is still largely based on the management of official development assistance (ODA) and centred around development cooperation. The **Team Europe initiatives should also have a stronger political dimension, but the institutional mandates, processes and mindsets have not been fundamentally transformed**. Moreover, the NDICI-Global Europe remains essentially a development instrument. On the values agenda, a stronger Team Europe approach could help the EU gain some political leverage. For example, it was mentioned that more efforts could be made to avoid occasional disagreements on the wording of joint statements that ultimately prevent a strong collective positioning and messaging on sensitive political matters (such as corruption, and gender equality). In that context, **the EU delegation could have an important role to play as the political steer of the EU family at the partner country level, for instance in the context of the political dialogue**[1]. In Kenya, in addition to the sectoral dialogues carried out on cooperation's priorities, like the green transition and digitalisation, a structured strategic

[1] Brought up as a key feature of the Cotonou agreement, the "political dialogue" (art. 8) has become the "partnership dialogue" in the new post-Cotonou agreement (art. 3). The NDICI-Global Europe also refers to political dialogue (art 8) and policy dialogue, reinforced in the context of budget support (art. 27).

dialogue has been set by the EU and the Kenyan government with 3 priorities: security, development, and trade. All EU MS present in Kenya have a seat at the table.

To be in line with the policy first principle, the policy and political dialogue should be backed up with strong policy analysis, which in turn requires strong capacities in the EUDs. It also requires making stronger linkages between the operations and the political sections of the EUDs, to ensure a broader overview of the partnership going beyond development cooperation (Terrón Cusí 2022). This would contribute to strengthening the political voice, and political role of the EU at the country level. For instance, the Team Europe approach also aims to involve the European private sector and more broadly to strengthen trade and economic ties, including in areas like digital, which are crucial to help the EU establish better political partnerships. **In order to engage in economic diplomacy and achieve the global gateway's objectives, EUDs need to acquire new expertise**. Building partnerships requires time and manpower, and the EU can benefit from the member states' expertise. Member states seemed generally keen on joining the EU's efforts in economic diplomacy, even though it can trigger some competition among their domestic interests. In spite of that, some of them, based in Kenya, suggested that one way for them to contribute more to the EU's dynamic would be by sending more seconded experts in EUD's political and trade sections, for instance, so that the EUDs can rely on the MS expertise on economic diplomacy as well. Another way to achieve the EU's objectives in economic diplomacy is to set up European chambers of commerce, like it was done in Cameroon, with the European Chamber of Commerce in Cameroon (EUROCHAM).

Although a Team Europe approach could help find synergies in trade and investment, some tension appears between the EU's interests and the partner countries. Indeed, **some stakeholders from the private sector, in Kenya and in Cameroon, questioned the added value of having the EU invest ODA resources to attract and leverage European private sector investments when the challenge of both countries is to strengthen their own private sector**. For those interviewees, there is confusion between the EU's will to leverage private investment and mobilising EU-based companies to that end, on the one hand, and the EU's shared objective to strengthen the locally based private sector, which requires support to grow. In that context, the mobilisation of EU-based bigger companies raises concerns about the competition in partner countries, which then would be asymmetrical (Concord 2023).

Table 2: The EU and MS working better together

	Joint programming exercise	**Team Europe Initiatives**
Cameroon	Roadmap developed in 2019 and joint analysis (EU 2023b) drafted in 2020 by Belgium, France, the EU, Germany, Italy and Spain	**TEI Green deal and resilience in the Green Septentrion in Cameroon** (Pacte vert et résilience dans le Septentrion Vert au Cameroun) (EU n.d.-a) with the EU, Belgium, France, Germany, as well as AFD, EIB, FMO, KfW, Proparco
Kenya	EIB, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Slovak Republic, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom engaged in the European joint cooperation strategy with Kenya 2018-2020 (EU 2023c), also supported by Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Spain	**TEI Digital Transformation in Kenya** (EU n.d.-b) with the EU, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Sweden, as well as AFD, EIB, Finnfund, KfW and Proparco **TEI Kenya - Green deal** with the EU (EU n.d.-c), Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Slovakia, Sweden, as well as AFD, Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (CDP), EIB, FMO, Finnfund, KfW and Proparco

Sources: EU n.d.-d., interviews led by the authors

The changing political and financial framework also brings practical changes to partner countries that eventually can have political implications on the relationship with the EU. The next section will elaborate more on this aspect.

2. Adapting to the new instrument and its political implications for partner countries

The evolution of the EU framework of international partnerships and development cooperation also has practical implications for partner countries. The perception of these more technical changes in partner countries is highly influenced by the EU's changing geopolitical position, as well as by the historical nature of its partnerships and the place of development cooperation within. Switching from an off-budget EDF to a unique EU instrument (NDICI-Global Europe) has some technical implications for the EU and for partner countries, which in turn may bring some political consequences to the relationships between the EU and its partners. Last but not least, the new instrument leads to increasing the weight of financial modalities, which contributes to reframing the partnership and requires adaptation on all sides.

2.1. From an off-budget EDF to a unique EU instrument, the NDICI-Global Europe

One key change introduced with the NDICI-Global Europe is the so-called "budgetisation" of the EDF. The EDF was an intergovernmental fund that remained outside the EU budget and was subject to different budgetary rules, which characterised its flexibility. **Incorporating the EDF in the EU budget has a lot of practical implications, mostly linked to the EU budget principles and its financial framework's rules of procedures**. Concretely this means that under the NDICI-Global Europe, funds allocated to a country have to be spent during the year they are allocated for and unlike in the past, the resources cannot be carried over to the next year[2]. **According to some experts, it may lead to a heightened emphasis on disbursement rates over the quality of the action and a potential reduction in the predictability of EU development assistance** (Gavas and Pleeck 2021).

Table 3 below shows an overview of the variety of differences between the former EDF, and NDICI-Global Europe, both for the EU and the partner countries. For instance, geographisation, bringing a higher concentration of resources to country-level programmes has, according to our interviewees in Kenya, brought better coherence at the country level. In the past, EUDs were not always informed about thematic programme allocations in their own country of residence. Similarly, the EU's toolbox of modalities has expanded over time and brought more opportunities.

[2] Under EDF, the unused funds did not flow back into the budgets of EU member states, but made up a 'reserve' which could be used later. While the NDICI-Global Europe permits the rollover of unused commitments to the next year, it imposes a deadline of end of the year of disbursement.

Table 3: The practical changes in the relationship between the EU and its partners

Under the EDF	Under the NDICI-GE	Implications
Co-signed agreements	(content empty) financing agreements signed by the partner country's financing authority	> Less ownership and involvement of the former NAO structure in the policy content
Flexible/accommodating procedures (D+3)	Limited procedures to one year between the signature and the end of the implementation N+1	> Less flexibility for the EUDs
EDF multiannual programme	Multiannual indicative programmes declined into Annual action plans	> Less visibility and predictability for the partner countries
Co-management via National and Regional Authorising Officers	Direct management	> Less ownership for the partner country > more possibilities for the EUD
Political dialogue is not linked to the instrument anymore	Nothing binding, depends on the country: > Strategic dialogue in Kenya > Policy dialogue, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and economic dialogue, ministry of Economy Planning and Land Planning (MINEPAT) in Cameroon	> Adaptable to the countries' realities > Not legally binding
Different thematic programmes applying at country level, managed by HQs	Geographisation means a bigger concentration on geographic programmes, less on thematic programmes	> More EU coherence at country level (EUD was not always informed about thematic programme allocations)
National and Regional Authorising Officers	No more one entry point for the EUDs	> Loss of a single-entry point but more opportunities for engagement with line ministries
Priority to grants and projects	Open to more financial instruments (loans, blending, EFSD+ guarantees)	> More diverse financing options depending on sector/interest; more reliance on DFIs and PDBs; potential for mobilising private investments
Off-budget EDF	EU budget's NDICI-Global Europe	> Less leverage from some MS on the design and adoption of the programmes

Source: Authors

The EDF and the NDICI-Global Europe operate according to a similar logic of a multiannual programme, which would then be operationalised in annual action plans. Yet, under NDICI-Global Europe, envelopes are only communicated for the first half of the period and renegotiated upon the results of the mid-term review. While for the EU this adds flexibility to make changes according to emerging priorities, for partner countries, it may mean a lower level of predictability: there is less certainty regarding the volumes of financial support. One Cameroonian stakeholder recognised that some of these changes, especially predictability, might relate to how the change is perceived more than to how the change concretely happens.

In Kenya, interviewees also pointed out that the EU's procedures are perceived as not always working well together with the country's public finance management system. Moreover, the contractual documents are seen as too complex, compared to the ones by other stakeholders.

One key evolution in this transition from the EDF to the NDICI-Global Europe has been the growing role of European actors in the implementation of the EU funds. Also **encouraged by the Team Europe approach, the EU member states' development agencies, development finance institutions and public development banks** are taking an increasing role in the implementation of the EU funds. As such, this is an efficient way for the EU to make sure that projects at scale are in place and the funds effectively disbursed in time. However, their increased role in the implementation comes at the cost of partner countries' administrations and other stakeholders, such as CSOs and local authorities who used to play a bigger role in (directly) implementing EU funds. According to an interviewee from the civil society, this illustrates the disconnect between what the EU preaches about ownership and alignment, and what the EU does in practice. For the administrations, just as for NGOs, in both countries, this is a drawback compared to the previous system that benefited more directly partner countries' organisations. Moreover, as they are less involved and have less control over how resources are used, the increasing role of the EU MS-based organisations may limit the agency of the local actors.

2.2. The end of the national (and regional) authorising officers & of the co-management system

A key principle of the EU-ACP cooperation was that of 'co-management' of EDF resources through the system of NAOs. The NAOs were essentially tasked with ensuring the effective co-management, coordination and monitoring of EU-funded programmes. Generally, under the aegis of the Ministry of Finance, they served as the main interlocutor for the EU on matters linked to development cooperation, acting as an entry point and an intermediary between the EU and partner country governments, liaising and coordinating with line ministries. Previous ECDPM research and the 2017 Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) of the EDF showed that the NAO system had a double-sided effect which resulted often in heavy bureaucracies and the EU remaining in the driving seat of the EDF programming (Bossuyt et al. 2016), despite the co-management system: 'the programs under indirect management through the NAO experience serious dysfunctions due to several factors such as weak absorption capacity, mismanagement of financial resources, deficiencies in internal control, and poor inter-ministeriality' (EC 2018).

The budgetisation of the EDF has led to the end of the NAO system, which is perceived as a positive step by most EU actors. One of the main reasons put forward by the EU to abolish this system was to broaden the partnership beyond pure aid management and to establish stronger political ties with other relevant actors, notably with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **This greater flexibility in the choice of interlocutors and the possibility to have more direct access to relevant line ministries and actors who can act as 'champions' in their respective domains is seen by the EU as a way to establish stronger political partnerships**.

Yet, the end of the NAO system is perceived differently in partner countries where the justification and consequences are not always well understood and accepted (OACPS 2023). Our interviewees both in Kenya and Cameroon pointed out that lack of communication around this change could have some unexpected and unanticipated political effects, especially in countries where the relationship with the EU was anchored on development cooperation.

The importance of the NAO has varied from country to country. In Kenya, the NAO was situated in the National Treasury and had a limited role due to the absence of a formal financing and co-management agreement with the EU. The end of the NAO system in Kenya doesn't seem to be problematic and the transition is rather seamless. **In Kenya, a smoother transition seems to have been operated over the last years of the 11th EDF, and these practical changes do not seem to affect the partnership much**. Moreover, in Kenya, the Public Finance Management Act limits the signature of annual agreements[3] only, for instance.

In Cameroon on the contrary, the NAO and its office Cellule d'appui à l'ordonnateur national (CAON) were lodged within the Ministry of Economy Planning and Land Planning and played a key role in all aspects related to the co-management of the EDF. **The end of the NAO system in Cameroon has raised many concerns and questions about the management of aid and the future direction of the partnership.** For instance, in Cameroon, the former NAO was left with no link to the content of the cooperation. It does not co-sign cooperation agreements anymore but is left with the signature of sectoral - yet content-empty - financing agreements. Although they were the ones to know the EU procedures and systems (and had sometimes used them for internal power struggles), they are no longer involved in content policy discussions.

The end of the NAO system has also triggered institutional readjustments to innovate and rethink the format of the dialogues with the EU. In Cameroon, building on the current settings of the policy dialogue, now also taking place in sectoral formats, the government has recently proposed to establish a policy dialogue and an economic and technical dialogue, which would allow the Cameroonian authorities to exchange with the EU on both key priorities. The Cameroon-EU Structured Political Dialogue was established; the latest dialogue took place in June 2023 with a focus on regional security and economic resilience (EEAS 2023; Emmanuel 2023).

It is important to note that the role of the NAO is only progressively phasing out and that the changes are not yet completely discernable in most countries. Two systems are still running in parallel, with on one hand the newly programmed NDICI-Global Europe resources which do not foresee a role for the NAO any longer, and on the other, the management of EDF-funded programmes which are still being implemented until 2025 and which the NAO continues to play a role, including spending resources until their final depletion.

The perceptions of the end of the NAO system vary from one country and stakeholder to another. For instance, some debates are taking place in Cameroon on the ending of the NAO, which may have contradictory effects: While removing the previous 'one-stop shop system' it could also deprive the EU from a single contact point. What the EU potentially loses is a knowledgeable interlocutor familiar with EU procedures, a coordinator and a mediator among various ministries. This unilateral change by the EU may also have deep implications for the political economy and institutional power battles in partner countries. In Cameroon, this has triggered some confusion on role division and even competition between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Yet, partly these political risks also stem from the loss of specific expertise, institutional memory and political anchor of the relationship with the EU.

Indeed, unaccompanied by the EU, the transition from co-management to direct management has left some partner countries with a sentiment of abandonment and/or frustration. Against this background, the EU should pay more attention to the need to explain and accompany transitions and seek effective alternative systems on a country-specific basis, while not intervening in the institutional dynamics of the country.

[3] A rather technical change relates to the timing of the implementation. The new system imposes a limited time frame of one year between the signature and the end of the implementation, as opposed to a previous more flexible and accommodating procedure (N+1 vs. D+3).

2.3. Coping with new financial modalities

The NDICI-Global Europe shifts the focus from grants towards financial instruments including blending and guarantees. The European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) is the core component of the EU's increased commitment to using blended finance and guarantees for development financing. With this new instrument, the EU is shifting more aid resources towards promoting external investment in developing countries, and mobilising private finance for sustainable development. Unlike its predecessor, the EFSD, which focused on the EU's Neighbourhood and Africa, the EFSD+ has a global scope and benefits from a significantly increased financial scope (Bilal 2019; Lundsgaarde 2023; programming guidelines). Put in practice, in Kenya, the MIP indicates that EFSD+ guarantee operations could be particularly used in housing and slum upgrading, including microcredit lending; the public transport system in Nairobi; and last-mile internet connectivity. Between 2021 and 2024, 61M€ of the total 324M€ envelope could be used to provision EFSD+ guarantee operations on priority area 1 - environmental sustainability & resilience, and on priority area 2 - Human development and digital inclusion. In Cameroon, the MIP indicates potential use in urbanisation, circular economy, waste management, connectivity and energy transition. In total, 25 M€ of a total of 178 M€ may be used to provision EFSD+ guarantees on the EU's 3 priority areas (see Table 1).

Although the provisioning amounts in the MIPs offer an estimation of the relevance and needs for the EFSD+ in Cameroon and Kenya, they do not predict/determine the scale and specific nature of blending and guarantee operations in these countries (Lundsgaarde 2023). **To benefit from guarantees under the EFSD+, the implementing partners under the EFSD+, i.e. the DFIs and PDBs, must have identified (sometimes in collaboration with the EUDs and the Commission) one or several investment operations in partner countries. The proposals are then approved by the Commission in the operational boards of the EFSD+.** Our interviewees pointed out that under EFSD+, the blending operations will be awarded on a 'first come - first served' basis at the national and the regional level, which is feared to in practice put African countries in competition with one another over access to EU resources. This was also brought up by some of our interviewees, who noted that the environment has become more competitive for partner countries as well over access to EFSD+ guarantees. Moreover, guarantees are arranged with partners such as development finance institutions (DFIs) and public development banks (PDBs), which potentially makes it more challenging for the partner countries' governments to engage, especially in a context where most PDBs and DFIs have limited presence on the ground.

The EFSD+ implementation has been slow, especially in the case of the open architecture guarantee. While some EFSD+ operations (blending and those under the EIB guarantee window targeting sovereign entities) have been signed already, their implementation follows a long timeframe, taking at least a year to materialise, at the earliest. In Kenya and in Cameroon, the EU, the member states and their respective development finance institutions point out the delays in defining the scope, equipping the in-country structures with the right capacity and expertise, and the clumsy communication towards the partners. The member states present in Kenya and Cameroon expressed their interest and willingness to assist the EU and more specifically the DFIs/PDBs involved in the EFSD+, in the implementation of Global Gateway but the unclear division of labour prevents them from being proactive on this.

The slow pace of implementation is likely to affect the extent to which the EFSD+ will be able to reach its policy and investment mobilisation objectives, which were heavily communicated through the **Global Gateway, and created expectations from partner countries.** Against this background, it will be difficult for the EU to quickly show concrete deliverables and impact regarding the Global Gateway. Yet, our interviews indicate that the EU is facing growing demand for results, and will have to manage expectations. Therefore, **the implementation of GG is crucial to the EU's geopolitical standing and credibility in the eyes of African partners**.

Another challenge is linked to debt. The indebtedness of both Kenya (Africanews 2023) and Cameroon (Vines 2022) raised concerns among the interviewees on whether GG and NDICI-Global Europe with a strong focus on financial instruments are the best fit for these countries, or whether it will drive them only further into debt distress. Issues relating to local currency lending and the extent to which financial instruments are concessional also affect the extent to which their use will have an impact on the debt sustainability of partner countries. Like many other African countries, both Kenya and Cameroon are highly indebted, limiting space to use financial instruments (Bryan and Mooney 2023). Hence, the shift from grants to blending and guarantees is needed, but can also seem quite unfortunate, as it suffers from a bad context, for instance in Kenya. It should be implemented in a way that does not pose a threat to countries' debt sustainability, whilst providing the much-needed space to invest in sustainable development. Greater efforts should be paid to this issue, including by leveraging solutions around concessional finance and local currency lending, but also debt for nature/development swaps.

Overall the shift towards more emphasis on blending and guarantees thus brings new requirements of competences for both Kenya's and Cameroon's administrations to come up with bankable projects. While the operations under EFSD+ are yet to be implemented, the EU will need to respond to growing expectations while remaining wary of not fuelling the debt crisis in partner countries.

Conclusion

When it comes to introducing the changes in the EU policy towards its partners, **direct communication with partners beyond simply marketing should be considered a priority.** It should be restored and intensively practised, be it to share exchange on the political priorities, or on the practical changes that will face the partner administrations and other stakeholders, especially when it comes to adapting to the new financial instrument. The midterm review of the NDICI-Global Europe is an opportunity to allocate more resources and dedicate more time to undertake proper consultations with partner countries.

All the changes carried by the EU's new policy for international partnerships and development cooperation, including a new strategy (Global Gateway), a new instrument (Global Europe) and a new approach to working together as the EU (Team Europe) are slowly landing at country level, but concrete changes take time to fully unfold. Nevertheless, they have raised questions and triggered a need for adjustments from all sides: The partner country's, the EU's and the member states'.

The partner countries' administrations and civil society have different levels of capacities to stay updated on the EU's policy priorities and evolving framework. The way the partner countries' governments manage the relations with the EU and its member states is also unevenly organised; different levels of ownership of the partnership with the EU bring up different reactions to the transition from a development cooperation-centred approach towards a more political one. This highlights the need for the EU to communicate and engage more with partner countries to deal with the implications of the EU's transition towards a more political approach and towards a renewed financial instrument.

On the EU and its member states' sides, for now, the more systematic involvement of the EDFIs, the bigger amounts of EU funds delegated to MS development agencies, as well as the new tasks the EUDs are mandated with an invite to question the resources available for the EU family at the country level. In those conditions, is the EU fit to deliver on the new system at country level? Does it have the capacity, in terms of resources and political steer, to set the changes in motion?

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