



# Cotonou Infokit

## *Towards a stronger political partnership*

*At its inception, the Lomé Convention was primarily an economic cooperation agreement. Over the years, the political aspects of the ACP-EU partnership became increasingly important, reflecting changing perceptions on the role of the State in development as well as worldwide trends towards democratisation, institutional pluralism and public accountability. The Cotonou Agreement puts political cooperation at the centre of the partnership relation. In this fiche, we provide an overview of the central aspects of this reinforced political partnership.*

### **From Economic to Political Cooperation**

The first Lomé Convention (1975) introduced an agreed 'partnership between equals', based on mutual rights and obligations. Both parties made long-term commitments to achieve common goals. ACP countries took a lead role in managing Lomé resources, with the EU playing a supportive role. Economic cooperation was at the heart of the ACP-EU relationship, reflected in a progressive trade régime and innovative instruments such as STABEX. The Community adopted a fairly neutral position on political issues, stressing its willingness to respect the sovereignty of ACP States.

Over time, politics became part of ACP-EU cooperation. It started with the attempt by the European Community to introduce a human rights clause in the Lomé III Convention (1985). The move was strongly resisted by several ACP States, who considered such a clause to contradict the principles of sovereignty and equal partnership, proclaimed in the Lomé Convention.

The end of the Cold War gave a further boost to the political dimensions of ACP-EU cooperation. Particularly at the EU

level, it was recognised that external resources can do little more than support domestic efforts. It was also felt that, in the absence of decent governance structures that allow for participation and public accountability, aid is not likely to contribute to development. All this led the EU, to consider human rights, respect for democratic principles and the rule of law, as essential elements of the ACP-EU partnership (Lomé IV bis). It also led the EU to gradually abandon the principle of 'aid entitlements' in favour of a more performance-based allocation of dwindling aid resources.

Confronted with a need to show 'value for money' to European taxpayers, the EU entered the negotiation process of a successor agreement to Lomé IV determined to give the new ACP-EU partnership a much stronger political basis.

### **The Cotonou Agreement**

Politics will be at the centre of future ACP-EU cooperation. The new Cotonou Agreement contains a wide range of provisions that deal directly or indirectly with the political dimensions of ACP-EU cooperation. In theory, the partnership now rests on a much more solid political foundation, taking into account the following innovations:

#### *Reinforced political dialogue*

The Agreement seeks to deepen and widen the present political dialogue between the ACP and the EU (i.e. to include new areas such as peace and conflict prevention, arms trade, etc), to work out more flexible and diversified institutional arrangements for dialogue (i.e. to avoid excessive formalism)

and to involve non-state actors in these political dialogue processes (see infokit 19).

### *Essential and fundamental elements*

Lomé IV bis saw the respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law, as 'essential elements' of ACP-EU cooperation, whose violation could lead to a suspension of aid. During the negotiation process of a successor agreement to Lomé IV, the topic of 'good governance' was widely debated. Defined as 'the transparent and responsible management of human, natural, economic and financial resources for the purposes of equitable and sustainable development', it was finally considered to be a 'fundamental element' in the new Agreement (see infokit 20).

### *Conflict prevention and resolution*

Another key innovation is the commitment to pursue an 'active, comprehensive and integrated policy of peace-building and conflict prevention and resolution' (article 11). Particular focus is placed on capacity building and targeting the root causes of conflict.

### *Performance based aid allocation*

The Cotonou Agreement includes a system of rolling programming where the allocation of funds is based not only on an assessment of each country's needs, but also of its performance. This allows the Community and the beneficiary country to regularly review and adjust their cooperation programme and overall budget (see infokit 21).

### *Asylum and immigration*

The Partnership Agreement notes that the EU will initiate negotiations with ACP states aimed at concluding bilateral agreements requiring specific obligations for the readmission and return of their nationals. Ultimately this will help to define ways to repatriate immigrants illegally present

on the territories of each party, subject to the constraint of international convention and law.

## **Implementation Challenges**

It is clear that the new 'rules of the game' with regard to the political dimensions of ACP-EU cooperation are quite ambitious. They will require a major adaptation of current strategies and processes of political cooperation. A few examples illustrate this:

*Appropriate strategies.* Recent evaluations have shown that the EC, much alike other donor agencies, has not yet developed a comprehensive and effective set of strategies to promote political reforms in partner countries, to prevent conflict or build peace or to help developing a strong civil society.

*Processes.* For a performance-based partnership to be effective, thorny 'process questions' need to be clarified. How will performance criteria be agreed upon? Who should be involved in their elaboration, negotiation and monitoring? What role can be played by independent local institutions (e.g. human rights associations)? How can the EU's performance assessment be coordinated with that of other donor agencies?

*Policy coherence.* Partnership is a two-way process. EU demands for improved governance, transparency and accountability would gain in strength if similar standards were applied on the donor side. The growing focus on the politics of ACP-EU cooperation calls on the EU to ensure greater policy coherence towards ACP countries at different levels (e.g. in the standards applied to different ACP countries, between aid and trade, and with other policies affecting developing countries such as agricultural policies).

*Capacities.* The new Cotonou Agreement invites the EU to transform itself from a fairly traditional aid donor to a 'political animal' that can support complex domestic political and institutional changes in ACP countries through dialogue, positive measures and cooperation with civil society. This is not an evident thing to achieve in a short time. Capacities may be found wanting all levels, especially in the EC Delegations.

The European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) is an independent foundation that aims to improve international cooperation between Europe and countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific (ACP). It does this through capacity building for policy management, the promotion of policy dialogue between ACP countries and Europe, and through the provision of information and facilities for knowledge exchange.

Designed for policy makers and practitioners in ACP and EU countries, the Cotonou Infokit brings together, in a readable form, information on the implementation of the new Cotonou Partnership Agreement. For further information on the infokit, please contact Kathleen Van Hove (kvh@ecdpm.org).

European Centre for Development Policy Management, Onze Lieve Vrouweplein 21, NL-6211 HE Maastricht, The Netherlands,  
E-mail: info@ecdpm.org, Fax: (31)-(0)43-350 29 02, <http://www.oneworld.org/ecdpm/>

**All our publications are available on the Internet: <http://www.oneworld.org/ecdpm/en/pubs>**