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HIGH REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE UNION FOR
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JOINT STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Executive summary

Evaluation of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement

{SWD(2016) 250}

JOINT STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Executive summary

Evaluation of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement

The Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA) between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries was signed in 2000 for a twenty-year period and will expire on 29 February 2020. It is based on three complementary pillars: the political dimension, economic and trade cooperation, and development cooperation. The main aim of the Agreement is to eradicate poverty and promote the integration of ACP States into the world economy. It also seeks to contribute to maintaining peace and security, and to creating a stable and democratic political environment in ACP countries. The CPA is mainly financed by the European Development Fund (EDF), a financial instrument outside the general budget of the Union. Since 2000, new priorities and urgent needs have arisen and the CPA has been revised on two occasions (2005 and 2010) to adapt it to the changed circumstances.

Objectives and assumptions

The objectives and assumptions set out in the CPA, as set out in Article 1, have remained relevant and valid throughout the time it has been in force. As concerns the achievement of the objectives, the EU has provided effective support towards the eradication of poverty, the strengthening of the capacity of countries and regional organisations to intervene in conflict management and peace building, and the integration of the ACP States into the world economy.

The main assumptions underlying the partnership relate to the respect by the parties to the CPA of the essential elements of the Agreement in the areas of human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law. Other assumptions relate to issues such as ownership, the mobilisation of key actors and the functioning of joint institutions. These assumptions have not always been met on the side of the EU's ACP partners.

The CPA has contributed to the strengthening of democracy and human rights in the ACP countries. For some of the ACP governments, however, respecting the essential elements referred to above has not yet become a priority, as demonstrated by their resistance to addressing politically sensitive issues. The role of the EDF National Authorising Officers in programming, monitoring and evaluation has strengthened the principles of co-management and ownership. Nonetheless, revisiting their current role in implementation could open up various ways of tackling inefficiencies in aid delivery. The level of involvement of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) has varied considerably. In some countries, the environment is relatively conducive to the involvement of CSOs, which facilitates the dialogue between the citizens and the State, while in others their space has been or is still being reduced further. Institutional practice in the joint institutions (i.e. Council of Ministers, Committee of Ambassadors, Joint Parliamentary assembly) is largely perceived as being complicated and hampering efficiency.

Some of the stronger features

Formal political dialogue, Article 8 of the CPA, is a relatively recent feature and is considered an important element of a lasting ACP-EU relationship. The current CPA has provided the basis for what has become a structured political dialogue at country level between the EU and most ACP governments, and a valuable framework for conducting open exchanges and communicating views, including on sensitive issues, and for maintaining and developing bilateral relations. The CPA has contributed to supporting regional mechanisms for addressing peace and security issues, in particular

through the African Peace Facility, which was set up to support Africa in building the African Peace and Security Architecture and to strengthen conflict prevention and resolution.

The relative increase in trade flows to and from the ACP countries, the finally increasing number of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) concluded, the growing number of ACP countries that are members of the WTO and the group's increasing role in international trade negotiations are evidence of the importance of CPA support for the integration of the ACP States into the world economy.

The EU has contributed significantly, through the implementation of the CPA, to the eradication of poverty, and the improvement of food security and social protection for the most vulnerable communities in ACP countries. General budget support has been one of the main ways of improving economic governance, as it has promoted macroeconomic stability, improved public finance management and encouraged more strategic and efficient public expenditure. Improved economic governance is considered to be an important factor in the relatively steady positive economic growth experienced by a significant number of ACP States since the conclusion of the Agreement.

EU support has contributed to improved and more equitable access to basic services. There has been a significant increase in enrolment rates in primary and secondary school, and rates of access to basic healthcare have improved, which has had a positive effect on the literacy and basic health indicators. The number of people on treatment for HIV/AIDS has also increased.

EU support has also contributed to strengthening institutional capacity in the areas of environmental and climate governance. Political cooperation between the EU and ACP was instrumental in creating the international 'High Ambition Coalition' that led to the Paris Agreement on climate change in December 2015.

Some of the weaker features

In some cases, ACP partner countries have considered discussions on human rights and fundamental principles to be inconsistent with their own values and culture, resulting in a lack of political will to change or improve the human rights situation. Whilst the use of Article 8 of the CPA (political dialogue) and Article 96 of the CPA (consultation procedure and appropriate measures as regards human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law) provided a sound and legally based procedure for mutual engagement on sensitive issues, the discussions did not necessarily lead to the fundamental principles of the CPA being respected. The effectiveness of the articles is ultimately determined by the political will at all levels.

Implementation of the peace and security provisions has mainly been concentrated at sub-regional and regional African level, with a limited role for the ACP level. The legal obligation contained in Article 13 of the CPA, requiring countries to readmit their own nationals has not, in practice, been implemented satisfactorily.

The expected results on increasing diversification and reducing commodity-dependency have not yet been achieved. More work still needs to be done to create a stable and rules-based business climate that will attract new investment in sectors that are vital for growth and job creation. The support provided to private sector development via government institutions has not been particularly effective, while the support provided directly to private sector organisations and productive sectors has been occasional and not always compatible with the procedures and systems for providing EU support.

The support provided in conflict situations has generally not been directed at tackling the root causes of conflict, but rather at mitigating the consequences or providing 'classic' development support. The

assessment of the political and economic dimensions of the problems identified — intended to ensure better understanding of and greater impact on the root causes of the problems — has not been adequate. The contribution made by the CPA to promoting inclusive growth, and specifically to increasing the level of participation of the poor and accelerating the reduction of the incidence of poverty, has been insufficient. The CPA has not been able to have a sufficient influence on either the internal mechanisms determining income distribution or the political economy equilibria in the ACP societies.

Improvements to social infrastructures and services have, in some cases, stagnated, or have even been reversed as a result of high population growth, low levels of funding from partner governments and conflict or natural disasters. Population growth has not received sufficient attention and is, in many ACP countries, becoming a significant factor contributing to potential vulnerability. The EU's strong policy commitments on gender equality and the empowerment of women have not always been matched by its organisational capacity to deliver results. The sustainability of the achievements of the CPA remains a fundamental issue: improved sustainability is, in particular, dependent on the political will and commitment shown by domestic decision makers, and their openness to liaising with the EU at international level.

The tools of the partnership

The legally binding nature of the CPA has made the framework effective and has often been essential for implementing the provisions contained in the CPA. It has helped in the development of trade relations between the EU and ACP countries, and an increasing number of EPAs have been concluded, including the objectives and essential elements of the CPA. Likewise, replies to the public consultation indicated that the legally binding nature has been critical for the implementation of the CPA, as it meant that there was a legal foundation for political dialogue and consultations. This type of dialogue did not, however, necessarily lead to full implementation of the Agreement, as illustrated by the provisions that have not been fully implemented (e.g. Article 6 on non-state actors and Article 13 on migration).

The tools created under the CPA have made an important contribution to achieving the objectives of the ACP-EU partnership, thanks to their variety (instruments, approaches and financing systems) and the range of implementing actors they involve. The choice of tools available has allowed the design and implementation of programmes to be tailored to the actual needs and constraints of each of the different contexts and partners. On the other hand, a number of aspects of the management of the CPA are seen as areas of concern, from an efficiency point of view. Delays and inefficiencies, mainly caused by complex administrative procedures, are often mentioned as the cause of bottlenecks affecting the quality of the programming and the adherence to the implementation cycle.

EU added value

The strategic added value of the CPA has been in the ability of the EU to promote a single legally binding framework with underlying values and principles, which has been ratified by all ACP countries. The comparative advantages of an EU-wide approach have included: (i) a long-term presence, (ii) general neutrality, (iii) predictability of financial resources, (iv) critical mass mobilised in terms of financial support, (v) the wide range of instruments put in place, and (vi) recognised political and technical experience in critical sectors for the partnership. These elements were unique features of the EU action, and highlighted the position of the EU as a strong and reliable partner for all ACP countries.