



Critical Reflections on the Joint Africa-EU Strategy

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Abstract

The Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES), adopted at the EU-Africa Lisbon Summit in 2007, is a vision for a long-term relationship between Africa and Europe in which the two should come together in a shared framework for stronger collaboration. I will here critically reflect on the JAES based on developments up to the recent high-level Africa Europe meeting which took place in Tripoli in December 2010. The developments are well documented and debated both on an official level and by the NGO community. The article is based on a literature review.

The findings point at some positive developments, but also on many and difficult challenges met. The historical heritage is very difficult to overcome, but is also a starting point for better and more equal relationships in the future. Very little seems to have been done to meet the new challenges from new actors on the scene and the increased strength of many African countries due to raw-material shortages in the rest of the world and improved economic developments. However, success in implementing the JEAS will, in the final analysis, depend on how well the strategy will be owned by the countries and peoples of Africa and Europe.

Résumé

La Stratégie conjointe Afrique-UE – *The Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES)* – adoptée au Sommet UE-Afrique de Lisbonne en 2007, est une vision pour une relation à long-terme entre l’Afrique et l’Europe dans laquelle, les deux continents doivent se retrouver dans un cadre partagé pour une collaboration plus forte. Dans cette article, nous réfléchissons de manière critique sur la JAES l’évolution de la Stratégie jusqu’à la récente réunion de haut niveau Afrique-Europe qui s’est tenue à Tripoli en décembre 2010. Cet évolution est bien documentée à la fois au niveau officiel et par la communauté des ONG. Ce papier est basé sur une revue de littérature.

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Les conclusions montrent certains développements positifs, mais aussi de nombreux et difficiles défis relevés. L'héritage historique est difficile à vaincre, mais il est également un point de départ pour des relations meilleures et plus égalitaires à l'avenir. Très peu semble avoir été fait pour relever les nouveaux défis de la part des nouveaux acteurs en scène et pour la puissance accrue des pays africains du fait de la pénurie en matières premières dans le reste du monde et de meilleures évolutions économiques. Cependant, la réussite dans la mise en œuvre de la JEAS dépendra, en dernière analyse, du succès de l'appropriée de la stratégie par les pays et les peuples d'Afrique et d'Europe.

Background to the JEAS

The relationship between Europe and Africa has a long and complex history where the colonial past still has a great influence. History as well as the geographical proximity between the two continents has created close trade and aid relationships and a tight interdependence on issues such as security and migration. Europe has for long dominated this relationship, labelled 'partnership' in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy from 2007. However, a historically unfair relationship, in which one side has taken advantage of its superior position and exploited the weaker, does not change overnight. EU is still acting as the 'big brother' towards Africa and the African Union (AU); also, as the stronger economic power, Europe has for long set the rules in trade and agricultural policy to mention just two areas. This being said, the relationship is not static and it is today increasingly influenced by shifting international power dynamics. By examining the potential impacts of EU policy on Africa, the factual characteristics of the EU-Africa relationship can be revealed and compared to other emerging players on the African arena, such as China, India and Brazil. The new dynamics between western and non-western actors opens up for increased negotiation power for African states which influences the implementation of EU strategies for Africa.

The predecessor to the Joint Africa-EU strategy from 2007 (JAES) was The EU strategy for Africa from 2005. This strategy aimed to improve EU's relationship with Africa and was supposed to be governed by the principles of equality, ownership and partnership. However, directly after the launching in 2005, the strategy was heavily criticised for a lack of African ownership and involvement of Africa in the creation of the strategy. Strong voices from NGOs in Europe as well as Africa condemned the double standard of claiming mutual ownership and partnership as the basis of the strategy, while at the same time not involving the partner in focus in the construction of the strategy. After a long discussion and major consultations, both EU and AU jointly started to prepare a new strategy that would adjust the deficiency of the earlier one. With this criticism in mind, the ownership and partnership of the 2007 strategy needs to be closely analysed. An unequal relationship cannot change into an equal partnership when the prerequisites

making one side gravely disadvantaged to the other prevails. In that case, all the words about partnership are likely to remain mainly rhetoric. What then is the JAES strategy all about?

Objectives and Priorities of the JEAS

The JAES is a vision for a long-term relationship between Africa and Europe in which the two should come together in a shared framework for stronger collaboration. The partner on the European side is the EU and on the African side, the African Union (AU), created in 2002 as an intergovernmental body with 53 members. Regional actors in Africa are also involved in the strategy.¹ The stated aim of the strategy is as follows:

The purpose of this Joint Strategy is to take the Africa-EU relationship to a new, strategic level with a strengthened political partnership and enhanced cooperation at all levels. ... This partnership should strive to bridge the development divide between Africa and Europe through the strengthening of economic cooperation and the promotion of sustainable development in both continents, living side by side in peace, security, prosperity, solidarity and human dignity.²

The four main objectives of the JAES are to:

- Improve the Africa-EU political partnership;
- Promote peace, security, democratic governance and human rights, basic freedoms, gender equality, sustainable economic development, including industrialisation, regional and continental integration, and ensure that all the Millennium Development Goals are met in all African countries by 2015;
- Promote effective multilateralism;
- Enhance a people-centred partnership, which should involve non-state actors.³

To meet these objectives the strategy aimed to guide the implementation of the following 'strategic priorities':

1. Peace and security: Promoting a safer world, e.g., through strengthening the AU's role in conflict prevention, management, resolution and peace building. AU and EU should also cooperate on trans-national security challenges such as international terrorism and organised crime.⁴
2. Governance and human rights: Upholding our values and principles. Focus on the promotion of democratic governance and human rights. *Weaknesses* ... should be addressed in a dialogue'.⁵
3. Trade and regional integration: Raising potential and using opportunities. That is, improving the climate for investments, developing domes-

tic and regional markets, promoting private sector investments supported by foreign investments, improving South-South and North-South trade relations, making trade rules more coherent and harmonised. In addition, the strategy aimed at reducing 'trade distorting' subsidies and working at promote African goods on the international market. It specifically mentioned that the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) should be supportive of Africa's regional and continental integration. The EPAs should assist African nations to live up to EU norms and productivity. While the JAES views these bilateral agreements as 'development-oriented trading relationships', the strategy did not fail to include Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) into the agreement.⁶

4. Key development issues: Accelerating the progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including a firmer stated commitment to the percentage of GNI. The Paris Agenda should guide this work and in addition to reducing conditionalities.⁷

The goal of the strategy is long-term, but to facilitate its implementation, short-term action plans are developed to specify what should be done in-between summits. The first plan covers 2008 and 2010. Yearly progress reports are also conducted by the European Commission and the Secretariat of the Council and the African Union Commission. The operational plan is based on eight partnerships approved by both partners. These are:

- Peace and security;
- Democratic governance and human rights;
- Trade, regional integration and infrastructure;
- The Millennium Development Goals;
- Energy;
- Climate change;
- Migration, mobility and employment;
- Science, information society and space.⁸

Challenges and Opportunities Ahead

What then are the strengths, challenges and weaknesses of the JAES strategy, and what are the prospects for revitalising it? Even if the partnership can be questioned on several grounds, one of its positive aspects is that it has emphasised that the donor-recipient relationships should be renewed and Africa should not be looked upon only as a development concern. Another positive aspect is that EU and AU now have structures for dialogue and both partners have permanent representations in Brussels and Addis Ababa. This shows good prospects for improved cooperation; and even if it is only one small step, it has symbolic importance on a political level. In addition, a

greater commitment to make the JAES work can improve a mutual understanding through 'day-to-day' dialogue.⁹ In the strategy, one section also highlights the need to 'promote more accurate images of each other, and fight stereotypes, xenophobia and racism, through enhanced exchanges and contacts of non-state actors, including trade unions, professional associations, the private sector, media, schools, universities, research and cultural institutions...'¹⁰ Whether and how this will be implemented remains to be examined. However, this kind of exchange could create foundations for better understanding and genuine respect between the two continents in the long run. Although, if instead African states perceive this proposal as an attempt only to conceal other interests, the vital respect for the partnership will be undermined.

At the same time roles are changing and Africa is partly in a stronger position today, as Europe is facing competition on the African continent from emerging powers such as China and India. This could push Europe to treat Africa with greater respect in order to win the trust of African partners over other actors. The partly emerging new choices for Africa contain both strengths and challenges. European partners fear that hard-won battles for human rights and democracy can be lost in the relationship with new actors. Europe can also be pushed to create attractive deals compared to competing actors, which can be of benefit to African partners. On the other hand, there is no guarantee that relationships between old or new partners truly benefit the poor people in a country. One also needs to remember the diversity of governments that exists under the umbrella of the AU, where some have become increasingly autocratic compared to others and different motives exist for forging their external relations. According to reviews of JAES, one area that has improved collaboration is security partnerships, where the partners have shared interests, such as combating international terrorism, conflict and instability.

Several reports establish that one of the major challenges of the JAES is that the EU is still using strong pressure in order to enforce some agreements to take place, just as was the case in the EU-Africa trade (EPAs) negotiations, rather than creating a dialogue. This has been strongly criticised by the civil society in both Europe and Africa, since it can have negative impacts on the development process of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP).¹¹ The debate about EPAs has been intense and created a division between EU members. The United Kingdom's Departments for Trade and Industry and International Development was among the critics of EPAs, saying: 'The European Commission clearly wants to use EPAs as a tool to open markets and further its own interests. This is not good. EPAs in their current form would be detrimental to development. They are free trade

agreements by any other name and are currently designed to get the most for Europe without the necessary considerations of the negative effects on weaker developing country partners.¹² Another critique against the EPAs is that it undermines inter-regional integration which is one of the objectives of the Joint Strategy from 2007. Different EPAs are set up with different regional bodies instead of trying to harmonise these regional differences. In this way regional trade, integration and infrastructure is promoted instead of greater integration and coherence.¹³ Commentators such as Kamidza claim that this regional fragmentation can be compared with the Berlin Conference where Africa was divided into ‘small but controllable states solely for the benefit of Europe’.¹⁴ This parallel is used to describe the new scramble for Africa in which EU is one of the actors. The negotiation of separate agreements has reduced the ACP countries’ ‘collective bargaining power’ and even weakened existing regional economic arrangements. To dissolve the power of the counterpart is a strategy that has been used for long for domination. Some critics argue that this ongoing process is equivalent to a repartitioning and recolonising Africa.¹⁵

AU and EU: Different Roles

As with the EPAs, conflicting internal views on issues exist both within EU and the AU which complicates the implementation of a joint strategy.¹⁶ Another challenge is how to combine ownership that needs to be in place for a sustainable development with the conditionalities imposed on the weaker partner. Extensive critique has been raised about the gap between the agreed intentions and what the partnership strategy has actually managed to deliver. Global trends such as new emerging powers and the impact of the economic crisis has been two aspects affecting European commitment to funding the implementation of the partnerships. Another weakness that has influenced the implementation of the ambitious strategy is the slow and young process of the continental integration through the AU, coupled with the administrative complex institution of the EU. According to Oladiran Bello, a Nigerian researcher at FRIDE – the European Think Tank for Global Action – Europe does not sufficiently take into account that the role of the AU differs from that of the EU as the AU does not control the agendas of its member states and regional bodies.¹⁷ He further highlights that the pan-African agendas are still at an early stage, which implies that the JAES is not well known outside the higher political circles. He claims this casts doubts upon Africa’s readiness and maturity for an ‘equal inter-continental exchange’ as the one proposed in JAES. His standpoint is that the asymmetry of capacity between the two partners is too large and that JAES therefore is ‘ahead of its time’.¹⁸ How to follow up the JAES, in line with the result-oriented approach the parties

have committed themselves to, is another dilemma. In addition, the unclear role of JAES in relation to other treaties limits coherence in EU policies towards Africa and creates competing agendas and channels.

What's in the Bargain?

Without a broader engagement and commitment to the strategy from intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental actors, such as the civil society and the private sector in both Europe and Africa, the strategy will not have sufficient support base and its politics will therefore be hard to legitimise. To revitalise the strategy, sufficient political will on both sides and appropriate funding from the EU members needs to be in place to enable implementation of the strategy.¹⁹ The dialogue is seen as the central operational method in the partnership, but there are many deficits that threaten these dialogues. If meetings are too seldom and always overloaded with the most pressing issues, such as conflicts, other matters will not be given sufficient space. The recent Africa Europe meeting in Tripoli held in December 2010 is a case in point. There is also a tendency to handle some issues outside the JAES framework which further undermines the strategy.²⁰ One important critique of the relevance of the strategy is that the motives seem unclear. This can cause confusion on both sides and lead to lack of trust and a weak partnership. Africa needs to know what is in the bargain to be able to compare this relationship with other potential partners on the global arena.²¹ With the Asian partners, African nations can more clearly see what should be the give-and-take in the relationship, e.g., natural resources such as oil. This motive that Europe partly shares with Asian actors is a sensitive question for Europe on the basis of its colonial exploitative power in Africa. At the same time underlying intentions needs to be discussed more openly for Africa to believe in the relationship and see the relevance and potential gains on their side. As the EU fails to fulfil its commitments in terms of funding implemen-tations of the different partnerships agreed upon in the action programmes following the JAES, Africa might not find it beneficial to engage in the strategy. If there is too much homework to be done in the form of conditionalities to receive support, countries that want 'quick fixes' such as infrastructure investments and revenues from natural resources can be more willing to enter into deals with other actors. On the other hand, many African leaders do see the importance of cooperating with Europe on broader development issues. Hence, as a way forward, Europe needs to be clearer on what 'added value' the JAES has that other actors do not offer. To analyse why the incentives on both sides are low for engagements in the JAES process, both parties are recommended to make assessments and 'in-depth reflections' on why this is happening and what they think needs to be done to revitalise the strategy and partnership.²²

Underlying Motives?

One reason for AU to be sceptical about the JAES strategy is that it avoids a thorough discussion on interests, motives and sensitive political issues where conflicts exist, such as the EPAs, climate change and migration. These issues need to be handled in some way or another for a genuine partnership to evolve. On the other hand, one major challenge related to this is that views differ a lot within Africa as well as within Europe when it comes to some of the most sensitive issues, leading to compromises and therefore a risk of dissatisfaction from both sides and the enhanced use of parallel channels. Europe and Africa do need each other and even if the policy can be criticised on several grounds it is a step ahead from 'donorship' to partnership, but it also contains so much to be addressed without sufficient capacity or funding to do so. The issues to be addressed take time but the pressure to gain support by showing quick results can push for rushed unsustainable solutions. Another fear refers to the British comment on the EPAs: Is this how Europe tries to get the most out of Africa along other scramblers? If that is partly the case, this scrambling 'with a human face' is more hideous than the scramblers who are more frank with what they are up to. It is of relevance for Africa to know the intentions behind the strategy.

Diverse Voices and Weak Ownership

Finally the JAES have to be further surveyed regarding one of its main objectives: to be people-centric. With awareness of the lack of democracy in many African countries, the representatives active in the JAES have varying degree of legitimacy and many are likely to speak for the interest of few rather for the interest of the broader masses. Another challenge is related to the diversity of development challenges the African continent faces today, which makes it hard for Africa to speak with one voice. (This is true also for EU with vast diversity and internal challenges.) On the other hand, with improved intercontinental commitment, Africa can become a stronger voice that can start to put demands on its partners in the global arena. This would be an achievement that could lead to more equal partnerships.

Notes

1. Wohlgemuth and Wallnöfer In: Odén and Wohlgemuth, ed., 2009, p.82
2. The Joint Africa-EU Strategy, 2007, p.2
3. Africa – EU strategic partnership official site: http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/partnerships/partnership_en.htm
4. The Joint Africa-EU Strategy, 2007, p.4-7
5. Ibid. p.7-9
6. Ibid. 9-11

7. Wohlgemuth and Wallnöfer In: Odén and Wohlgemuth, ed., 2009, p. 83 http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/partnerships/partnership_en.htm
9. Jean Bossuyt and Andrew Sherriff, 2010, *What's Next for the Joint Africa-EU Strategy? Perspectives on Revitalising and Innovative Framework*, p.5
10. The Joint Africa-EU Strategy, 2007, p.19
11. Wohlgemuth and Wallnöfer, in Odén and Wohlgemuth, eds., 2009, p.84
12. Lee, Margaret, in Southall and Melber, eds., 2009, p.91.
13. Oladiran W. Bello, 2010, *A Crucial Moment in EU-Africa Relations*, p.3
14. Lee, Margaret, in Southall and Melber, eds., 2009, p.92-93
15. Melber, Henning, 2010, *China in Africa: Any Impact on Development and Aid?* p.221
16. Wohlgemuth and Wallnöfer, in Odén and Wohlgemuth, eds., 2009, p.85
17. Oladiran W. Bello, 2010, p.4
18. Ibid p.5
19. Wohlgemuth and Wallnöfer, in Odén and Wohlgemuth, eds., 2009, p.90
20. Wohlgemuth and Wallnöfer, in Odén and Wohlgemuth, eds., 2009, p.6
21. Oladiran W. Bello 2010, p.2
22. Jean Bossuyt and Andrew Sherriff, 2010, p.8

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