

Post-Cotonou Agreement: “The ACP Group could be the OECD of the countries of the global South”

Post-Cotonou Agreement: “The ACP Group could be the OECD of the countries of the global South”



Brussels, 11 July 2019/ACP: While the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group and the European Union (EU) are negotiating the new version of the Cotonou Agreement, Viwanou Gnassounou, Assistant Secretary-General, is calling for greater balance in this partnership.

For Viwanou Gnassounou, Assistant Secretary-General of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group, in charge of Sustainable Economic Development and Trade, the future partnership with the EU must be a real driver of economic transformation. This Togolese economist, who is very involved in the negotiations for a post-Cotonou Agreement, spoke to Jeune Afrique at the European Development Days, which took place in Brussels on 18 and 19 June 2019.

Bringing together 79 ACP and 28 EU States, the Cotonou Agreement, which was signed almost twenty years ago and revised every five years, sets out the key areas of trade cooperation and development policies linking the two regional groupings. Its current form will expire on 29 February 2020.

Jeune Afrique: How do the Member States of the ACP Group communicate their expectations to the negotiators?

Viwanou Gnassounou: From 2013 to 2016, eminent persons within the Group - Ministers and Heads of State - reflected on what the ACP Group should be and met with Member States' economic and social actors, to assess their knowledge of the organisation. On this basis, the Group's Ambassadors prepared a document entitled “The ACP We Want,” which outlines their recommendations.

What are the Group's influencing organs?

In Brussels, the Committee of Ambassadors is a permanent organ, which meets at least once a month, and has six Subcommittees [on private sector, sustainable development, political and social affairs, development, and establishment and finance - Editor's note]. Their main objective is to prepare for the Council of Ministers, which is the real decision-making organ. The Council of Ministers meets twice a year, and has an annual encounter with the EU Ministers, to evaluate the partnership's implementation.

The Summit of Heads of State is held every three years, on average, to provide broad guidelines. Lastly, we have a Parliamentary Assembly, which we hope to strengthen. It meets four times a year, including twice with European representatives, to relay information and questions on specific subjects (trade, private sector, policy, etc.).

Up until this point, the Cotonou Agreement has been based on three pillars: development cooperation, economic and trade cooperation, and political dialogue. Will there be new pillars to include issues relating to migration, security, and sustainable development?

The migration issue is a part of the political dialogue that already exists. Cross-cutting issues relating to gender, education, health, the environment, and human security will be addressed, but the ACP Group will not take specific actions in those areas, since it is up to each State to work on them.

What are the ACP Group's main expectations, with respect to the new agreement?

The number one priority is equality in the partnership. Up until now, questions and sanctions have only been directed by the European Union at ACP States. Togo, Burundi, and Zimbabwe, for instance, have been subject to sanctions, with the termination of economic cooperation programmes.

The second priority is support for private sector development. This partnership must really help us to achieve industrialisation and develop our countries' economies, by facilitating the establishment of subsidiaries of foreign groups, or by promoting local processing rather than the export of unprocessed raw materials to the EU.

Let's be clear: who are the partnership's players and what are their roles? Many associations on the continent are in fact emanations of European bodies or lobbies, which jeopardises the very idea of giving more power to civil society. However, we are now finding it difficult to obtain a clear commitment from our European partners on these matters of interference.

Ultimately, we want to build our capacity to have international influence. Some countries may find it easier to negotiate with our States than with the EU. It is perhaps ambitious, but we could be the OECD of the countries of the global South. [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Editor's note]

What are your main selling points for negotiating?

Our sheer numbers and our diversity can make us a key player when we come together to formulate a common position. The EU is repeatedly stressing that it wants to play a role in global stability, but we do not think that it is capable of doing so with 28 Member States.

What are the European side's expectations?

The EU says that it is looking for a stable and substantial partner on the international scene. It prefers to speak of a partnership, rather than of cooperation. The Europeans also want to work more closely with the regions, especially with Africa, probably since India and China are both charging towards the continent, and it does not want to get left behind.

Can you quantify the achievements of the Cotonou Agreement since its establishment?

The trade figures are not necessarily encouraging. Africa's share of global trade has progressed very little and the ACP Group's share of European trade has decreased. This is why we are questioning the partnership's functioning. Also, from the very beginning, we did not put in place analytical tools to evaluate the Agreement's contributions to our countries. This is the type of tool that we need in the new agreement.

Doesn't the creation of the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) pose a risk of competing with the post-Cotonou agreement on the African continent?

It is an entirely complementary mechanism. We think that it will add coherence and reduce trade policy incompatibilities between the different African regions and States. We will support it to the best of our ability.

Tags: [News articles](#) ^[1]

Source URL: <http://www.acp.int/content/post-cotonou-agreement-acp-group-could-be-oecd-countries-global-south>

Links:

[1] <http://www.acp.int/category/story-type/news-articles>