

The future of the Cotonou agreement Which institutional set up after 2020?

The scenario proposed by the European Commission in its Communication 'Towards a renewed partnership with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries after 2020' consists of three distinct regional partnerships with Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, with an opening for closer involvement of other countries, under a common umbrella. This seems to be a compromise and a scenario worth exploring, depending on the preferences of the ACP group (and possibly other candidate countries/regions to which the partnership is extended). This umbrella gathering ACP and EU authorities should be the political cornerstone of the new institutional set up: the main space to increase a true political dialogue between the EU and ACP countries as a block, securing the continuity of the *acquis* from the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA).

If this scenario is pursued, the umbrella should be a shared framework of collaboration and partnerships that would not only provide common values and principles, but also set the general rules of engagement between the EU and all three regions, in order to safeguard transparency and mutual accountability between the parties. General principles and rules set up at the umbrella level should apply to all development, trade and investment cooperation policies between the EU and ACP regions. At the umbrella level, the political dialogue should serve to monitor the implementation status of the rules and principles set by the agreement, especially on Human Rights, transparency, accountability and governance including an enhanced diversification of participation by civil society organisations from ACP and EU member states.

Another objective of the umbrella should be to define joint approaches with other regions and common positions in the framework of international and multilateral processes or institutions (such as the UN system). In order to make a link with Northern African countries, the African Union (AU) could have an observer status at the umbrella level. The umbrella should define adapted mechanisms to coordinate efforts with other countries and agreements. In some cases it could entail inclusion of new members and in others building bridges with other existing agreements.

At the umbrella level, institutions such as a Joint Council of Ministers and a Heads of State Summit should be set up. In addition, other independent institutions or mechanisms must guarantee the participation of the national Parliaments and the diversity of CSOs in order for them to play their advocacy role. Both spaces must be recognized by the new institutional set up with rules and means, allowing a true participation and influence of all stakeholders. This must be organized in a practical way avoiding abundantly heavy and expensive mechanisms.

National Parliaments and CSOs working together, could be the link between policy outcome at country/ regional levels and the general frame/evaluation discussed at the umbrella level. CSO engagement and representation should be guaranteed at all levels via dialogue and transparent management mechanisms. At country level, the inclusion of Civil Society

promotes and safeguards human rights. Further it also ensures that the interests of the local population are represented in the actions, policies and agreements undertaken under the new ACP-EU partnership.

Taking into account the limited capacities of the CSOs, one proposal could be to build:

- At umbrella level, a permanent forum funded by the EC and ACP countries in order to get CSOs' comments and proposals about cooperation policies and political issues. Members of this forum will represent several sectors of the ACP and EU Civil society organisations but also the different regions. The number of participants, elected by representative CSO platforms in each region will be limited but a true dialogue mechanism must guarantee that the voices of CSOs will be taken up by the umbrella body.
- CSO advisory groups in the framework of the trade and investment agreements with each region
- An enhanced participation of CSO platforms and networks at national level/EU level with established dialogue mechanisms with the institutions regarding issues related to the EU-ACP relationships
- An enhanced cooperation between CSOs and the joint parliamentary bodies, with inclusive spaces for debates which should include more than EESC representatives.



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