CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CHALLENGES, RELEVANCE AND BENEFITS OF AFRICA-EUROPEAN UNION RELATIONS

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Abstract
This paper aims to critically examine the impact of Africa's relations with the European Union (EU). Europe is Africa's biggest trade partner, with the EU accounting for half of Africa" s trade exchanges and two-thirds of foreign investment, with total trade volume at 268 billion Euros and 90% of African exports as of 2021. This paper, using secondary sources of data collection, therefore, employs the Dependency theory as a tool of analysis and posits that relations between Africa and the EU have been detrimental to Africa’s economic growth and development and only serve the imperialist goals of Europe. The paper recommends that there is a need for Africa to reassess her agreements with the EU, as well as look inwardly at her quest for economic growth and development.

Introduction
Africa and Europe are bound together by history, culture and geography. From a European perspective, Africa has never been the ‘forgotten continent’- the concept so often used in contemporary politics to describe the African continent. The relationship between Africa and the EU has evolved, beginning from the colonial era, the rise of independence movements, and the subsequent process of decolonization, as well as the end of the Cold War. These factors impacted the relationship between Africa and Europe and coincided with the accelerating pace of European integration. Although bilateral relations between individual EU member states and African states had been pursued for many years, the 1957 Treaty of Rome introduced the first ‘formalized’ relationship between Europe and

Africa, which led to a series of beneficial and privileged agreements such as the Yaounde Conventions (1963-1975), the Lome Conventions (1975-2000) and the Cotonou Agreement (2000-2020) (Bradley 2003). In recent years, international awareness of the situation and the challenges facing Africa has significantly improved, and it is now widely acknowledged that Africa is an important partner in dealing with global problems. This growing significance of Africa in international relations and European policy discourse can be related, inter alia, to the potential consequences and risks of state failure, which were exposed by the attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001, increased geopolitical and economic interests in Africa; globalization; and the importance for the EU of transnational challenges such as migration and environmental concerns, including climate change (Bradley 2003). Consequently, Africa has gained prominence on the EU's external relations agenda and has also presented the EU with an opportunity to improve its capabilities in external relations.

Initially, the Africa-EU relationship was exclusively focused on trade, as reflected and manifested in the EU's relationship with the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) group of states. Based on the European Commission Communication of 23 May 1995, the first formal introduction of the principle of democracy in relations with Africa was captured in the Lome Convention IV (1995-2000), which provided the legal instrument for the EU's relationship with the ACP group. In expanding its relationship with the ACP group beyond trade and development cooperation, the EU included political dialogue as one of the pillars of the Cotonou Agreement. The ACP-EU political dialogue was centreed on agreed essential elements (democratic principles, the rule of law, and respect for human rights) and the fundamental principle of good governance, captured in Article 9 of the Cotonou Agreement. In this way, the EU embedded democracy as one of the cornerstones of its relationship with Africa. Since 1990, remarkable changes have occurred in Africa's political landscape. This systemic shift had a gradual trajectory, and at the dawn of the 21st century, most countries on the continent had met the initial demand for multi-party democracy and embraced the idea of holding free, fair, and competitive elections (Priser 2009). Africa also made advances in finding common principles and values related to democracy building. To this end, the adoption of the African Peer Review

Mechanism (APRM) under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) at the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Summit in Durban, South Africa, in 2002 and the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, provided the framework for the inclusion of democratization and democracy building in policy frameworks and declarations issued by successive EU-Africa Summits as well as EU policy and strategic orientations on Africa.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the dependency theory of underdevelopment. Dependency has been defined as an explanation of the economic development of a state in terms of the external influences (political, economic, and cultural) on national development policies (Sunkel, 1969). Theotonio Dos Santos emphasized the historical dimension of the dependency relationships in his definition when he wrote:

> Dependency is...an historical condition which shapes a certain structure of the world economy such that it favors some countries to the detriment of others and limits the development possibilities of the subordinate economics...a situation in which the economy of a certain group of countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy, to which their own is subjected (Dos Santos, 1971).

There are three common features to these definitions, which most dependency theorists share. First, dependency characterizes the international system as comprised of two sets of states, variously described as dominant/dependent, centre/periphery, or metropolitan/satellite. The dominant states are the advanced industrial nations in the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The dependent states are those states of Latin America, Asia, and Africa, which have low per capita GNPs and which rely heavily on the export of a single commodity for foreign exchange earnings and the importation of a variety of goods from the Western developed dominant states. Second, both definitions have in common the assumption that external forces are of singular importance to the economic activities within the dependent states. These external forces include multinational corporations, international commodity markets, foreign assistance, communications, and any other means by which advanced industrialized countries can represent their economic interests abroad. Third, the definitions of dependency all indicate that the relations between dominant and dependent states are dynamic because the interactions between the two sets of states tend to not only reinforce but also intensify the unequal patterns. Simply put, dependency theory attempts to explain the present underdeveloped state of many nations in the world by examining the patterns of interactions among nations and by arguing that inequality among nations is an intrinsic part of those interactions.

The concept of dependency as an explanation for economic underdevelopment has been developed most prominently by Frank (1966, 1979) and Samir Amin (1974). For Frank, the concepts of development and underdevelopment have meaning only when applied to nations within the capitalist world-economy. Frank describes this world-economy as divided into two major components: metropolis and satellite. These concepts are equivalent to Wallerstein's (1974) concepts of core and periphery. The flow of economic surplus in the world-economy is from the satellite (or periphery) to the metropolis (or core), and the world-economy is organized to make this happen. The underdeveloped nations, therefore, have become and remain underdeveloped because they are economically dominated by developed capitalist nations that have continually been extracting wealth from them. Frank (1966) has called this process the development of underdevelopment. In this view, the development of the rich nations and the underdevelopment of the poor ones are but two sides of the same coin as the underdevelopment of some nations have made development for other nations possible, and the development of other nations made the underdevelopment of other nations possible.

The primary victims of this process are the vast majority of peasants and urban workers of the underdeveloped world itself. While the members of the developed nations do benefit from this since their standard of living is raised substantially, the greatest benefits go to capitalists in the metropolitan countries, as well as to the agricultural and industrial elites of the satellite countries; hence, the latter have close economic and political ties to the metropolitan elite and play a crucial role in retaining, maintaining and sustaining the situation of economic dependency of their states. They are aloof to the stark reality of the lopsidedness in their relationship with the metropolitan capitalists, leading to Samir Amin's (1974) articulated and disarticulated economies. According to him, the developed nations have highly articulated economies, or ones whose multiple sectors are closely interrelated, such that development in any one sector stimulates development in the other sectors. Underdeveloped societies, by contrast, have disarticulated economies. These are economies whose various sectors do not closely interrelate. As a result, development in any one sector is commonly unable to stimulate development in the other sectors.

Africa's interaction with Europe can be better understood from the viewpoint of the dependency theory. Many scholars have argued that the gory situation of the continent's economy and overall socio-economic underdevelopment are not far-fetched. Various African writers have pointed out Africa's colonial experience as the reason for the underdevelopment of the continent. European powers' exploitation of the continent's natural resources and labor force left an indelible mark on the continent. Several years later, Africa is still dependent on Europe. Europe is Africa's major trading partner, accounting for half of Africa's trade relations and two-thirds of foreign investment. Securing access to Africa's raw materials has remained a core driver of Europe's policies towards Africa. Most trade relations between Europe and Africa are based on the export of raw materials from the African continent and import of finished goods from Europe into the African market. Critics see this relationship of the Africa-EU relations as a continuation of Africa's exploitation by Europe - a form of imperialism. This is further understood by looking at the unequal and unfavorable trade agreements between Africa and Europe.

Historically, Africa's economic dependence is tied to Western European capitalist expansion and imperialism. European capitalist expansion was necessitated primarily by the internal contradictions of capitalism in Europe, or what Lenin (1917) referred to as the crises of profitability as reflected in the reducing consumption capacity of the ever-increasing mass production of goods, increasing cost of labor, and increasing cost of raw materials. According to Lenin (1917), the panacea for these profitability crises required economic expansion overseas to open up new regions for investments, guaranteeing cheap sources of raw materials, access to cheap foreign labor, and access to new global consumer markets. This process culminated in integrating the hitherto self-sufficient third-world countries into the world capitalist system and subsequent exploitation and underdevelopment of the third world. However, on the flip side, this same process aided the growth of industrial capitalism in the West in a bid to meet the aforementioned needs at the expense of the third world (Webster 1989:70). In examining this dynamic, Frank (1966), asserted that "development and underdevelopment are two different sides of a universal historical process". To him, the same process of capitalist expansion, which led to development in Europe and America, led to underdevelopment in the third world or what he termed the 'development of underdevelopment'. Webster Andrew (1989) and Kwame Nkrumah (1965) delineated this process into historical epochs namely: Mercantile Capitalism (1650-1850), Colonialism (1850-1960s), and Neo-Colonialism (Post Independence).

The EU's imperial projection in Africa has been evident in the areas of trade, agriculture, energy, and security. It has been expressed primarily with the establishment of the Yaounde and Lome Conventions, the Cotonou agreement, the related Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), and the Africa-EU Partnership for Energy. These agreements have traditionally disadvantaged African states and have been initiated by certain Member States' desire to preserve links with former colonial authorities to ensure continued access to raw materials and natural resources and protect economic investments established during colonialism. It must be underscored that the African political elite has contributed to this situation through the implementation of policies that support external EU interests at the expense of African ones. What the EU has been promoting with these agreements is the neo-liberal economic model across the African continent and, in the process, attempting to secure for itself continued market access and privileged economic status in the continent's markets and raw materials while giving little consideration and resources to the trade, agricultural, energy and security challenges of the continent. Complementing the dependency theory at the economic level and utilizing a statistical analysis that combines Galtung's (1971) "structural theory of economic imperialism" and Emmanuel's (1972) "unequal exchange theory," it can be detected that a hierarchical and centre-periphery structure exists; this structure is asymmetric and is hinged on inequality and dependence which consequence fortifies exploitation.

Africa-EU Relations: From a Historical Perspective

Africa and Europe are connected by history. It is, first and foremost, largely a history of domination and intrusion. African first fell victim to the slave trade beginning at the end of the 15th century and second to European colonialism, reaching its peak at the end of the 19th century. Whereas the slave trade was organized by Arabian and African traders and their European and American counterparts, colonialism was, to a much greater extent, a project of European imperialist powers. The Berlin Conference of 1884/85, with Chancellor Bismarck as an "honest broker" between the competing powers, fixed the partition of Africa for the interests of imperialist European powers. Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, and even latecomer Germany received "their fair share" - colonies. The reasons for colonialism were multifaceted and cannot be discussed here because the long-term effects are of prior interest to this article. The experience of European intrusion, the destruction of African societies and systems of governance, and the humiliation Africans faced form a central part of the collective memory of Africans. With only a few exceptions - Ethiopia was liberated from Italian domination by Allied forces in 1941 and became independent - independence was achieved after WW II during the 1950s and 1960s.

The decolonization process started with Ghana, the former Gold Coast, in 1957 and took different paths. In contrast, the way to independence was a smooth transition in Uganda; a violent struggle, including the Mau-Mau revolt, occurred in neighboring Kenya. Belgian colonialists left the Congo in haste, leaving only a handful of professionals to lead the vast country. Portugal, itself a small country, succeeded in maintaining Mozambique and Angola under colonial tutelage against armed guerrilla movements up to 1974 and 1975, respectively, and left the countries because a democratization process started in Portugal. The Anglophone settler colonies in Rhodesia (from 1979, Zimbabwe), Namibia, and South Africa resisted pressure for change even longer. They managed a more or less peaceful, negotiated transition after years of armed struggle. These few examples emphasize that the experience of colonialism and decolonization was different from country to country with respect to the timeframe, the atrocities experienced, and the mode of transition. European policies in Africa, therefore, face historical legacies leading toward a consciousness of responsibility or even moral guilt by the European political elite. The shackles of neo-colonial control have been hardest to remove from African countries that endured settler colonial communities. From a psychological perspective, the general willingness to provide development aid can be interpreted as a kind of compensation.

Modern EU-African relations can be traced back to the European Economic Community (EEC) treaty of Rome in 1957. This was designed to safeguard the special relationship between the EECs and their former colonies, and geared towards enhancing the colonies' economic and social development. Spearheaded by France and other founding members of the EEC, Belgium, and Italy, they envisaged that with increased resources, Europe would be able to pursue the achievement of one of its essential tasks, namely, the development of the African continent. In this way, it will be realized quickly that fusion of interest is indispensable to establishing a common economic system; it may be the leaven from which may grow a wider and deeper community between countries long opposed to one another by sanguinary divisions. Thus, the framework of the privileged" relationship between the EEC and Africa was laid down through the Association Agreements signed between them, as provided in the Rome treaty under the - Association of Overseas Countries and Territories (Haastrup, 2013). With Africa being an important source of raw materials, by advocating for their interests, the EEC provided an opportunity to glue their relations together as they pursued a pooled production model and eliminated the threat of war among its members.

The first association agreement was signed in Yaounde, Cameroon, in 1963 and subsequently renewed in 1969 (Yaounde II), an essentially reciprocal trade, technical assistance, and economic assistance pact. The accession of the UK to the EEC in 1973 led to a new single agreement with the additional former British colonies that led to the Lome, Togo convention of 1975. The convention was subsequently renegotiated and entered into force in 1980 (Lome II), 1985 (Lome III), and 1990 (Lome IV), and with each renegotiation, new issues were introduced, which was a sign of the gradual development of the relations. The changing international environment with the end of the Cold War and the 1992

Treaty of Maastricht that transformed the EEC into the EU made it imperative that the relationship be reviewed and a more comprehensive form of partnership be established. Thus, the EU in 1995 published a green paper that laid the groundwork for the transformation of EU-African relations under the ACP auspices. In this regard, the Cotonou Agreement 2000 was born to usher in the 21st century and a new era of EU - Africa relations. Over the last fifty years, EU-Africa relations have evolved from unilateral associationism to a multifaceted strategic partnership embedded in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy adopted at the second EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon in 2007.

Areas of Africa-EU Relations

Economic Partnership Agreement (EPAs)

The European Union accounts for half of Africa's trade exchanges and two-thirds of foreign investment. An assessment of the so-called Lome Conventions, which used to frame its relations with ACP countries before 2000, led the European Union to a negative balance. Those countries could not diversify their productions, notwithstanding their free access to the European market for 95% of their agricultural products (FARM, 2006). It, therefore, proposed a new type of partnership in 2000. The Cotonou Convention provided for free trade agreements and the establishment of EPAs (Hugon 2010). The objective of the EPAs is to introduce reciprocal trade liberalization measures in return for access to the European market.

Two complementary ideas are associated with this trade reform: to promote regional groupings and to strengthen trade capacity. In the ‘development’ component of this new partnership, other ideas are included: to introduce a political dimension in the agreements, initiate a dialogue with civil society by giving, in addition, the right of access to financing by the European Development Fund to non-State organizations, to stop the 'classic delirium' of aid conditionality by replacing it with performance obligations. The principles of free trade inspire EPAs. They represent a fundamental break in the relationship between Europe and Africa. The reasonable time limit for upgrading, which is the abolition of trade preferences, is 12 years. At the end of that transition period, the opening will be 80% for ACP countries and 100% for EU countries (Bellora, 2006).

Fisheries Agreements

The European Union is one of the major importers of seafood. An average of 240,000 tones leave the African coast each year, mainly from Morocco, Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, and Angola. There have been three generations of agreements in the region; many African countries (Senegal, Morocco, Mauritania. Guinea-Bissau, and Namibia) intend to better protect their sea food interests by signing new agreements based on the principles of sustainable management, including as a priority the conservation of marine ecosystems and fish stocks and measures to promote the local fleet and industry. The balance sheet of these agreements still needs to be more balanced compared to the declared aims and especially the registered results. This is due to the overexploitation of fish stocks, decline of the local fishing industries, decrease in fishermen's income, and aggravation of the economic dependence of African countries on Europe - both for their exports and for State revenue (Aboville, 2010). Nevertheless, fisheries partnership agreements have the merit to exist and constitute a form of organization and regulation of fishing activities, however imperfect they may be. Their place must be consolidated by strengthening their integrated approach to co-development

Cooperation for security in the Gulf of Guinea

In 2014, the European Union adopted a Strategy for the Gulf of Guinea which is based on an integrated approach. The strategy focuses on four specific objectives:

i. reach, among countries in the region and the international community, a consensus on the extent of the security threats in the Gulf of Guinea;

ii. assist governments in the region in setting up institutions and strong maritime administrations to ensure security and the rule of law along the coasts;

iii. foster the emergence of prosperous economies in the region to create jobs and help vulnerable communities become more resilient and able to resist criminal or violent activities;

iv. Strengthen cooperation among the region's, countries and regional organisations to enable them to take the measures needed to mitigate threats at sea and on land (Dufau & Souare 2011). The strategy also aims to support the resolutions of the Yaounde Summit of Heads of State, which resulted in:

a. the adoption of the ‘Code of Conduct’ relating to the prevention and repression of acts of piracy against ships and illegal maritime activities in West and Central Africa;
b. the adoption of a memorandum of understanding on safety and security in the maritime space of Central Africa and West Africa, signed by the ECCAS, ECOWAS and GGC leaders, which includes the development of an action plan to follow up the implementation of the code of conduct (Luntumbue, 2011).

Dialogue on migration themes

The issue of migration is among the policy priorities of the European Union. The Arab Spring has confirmed the need for the European Union to develop a coherent policy on migration. A comprehensive approach was adopted in 2005, organized around three themes: promotion of mobility and legal migration, prevention and fight against illegal immigration, and optimization of the link between migration and development. It is based on searching for a partnership with developing countries. It covers all of the issues relating to migration in a comprehensive and balanced way (legal migration, the fight against illegal immigration, the relationship between migration and development, and the external dimension of asylum). The 2007 Lisbon Summit and the adoption of the JAES mark the intensification of dialogue and cooperation between the two continents in the fields of migration, mobility, and employment.

Within that framework, the partnership on migration, mobility, and employment (MME) is a key element for developing African and European migration policies. The MME partnership aims to strengthen dialogue between the various stakeholders around common objectives. For its implementation, the European Union relies on regional processes (mainly the Rabat process with West Africa and the Prague process with East Africa) and various instruments, of which a flagship project is the partnership for mobility. Since 2006, the Rabat process has brought together 57 European and African countries from North, West, and Central Africa, as well as the European Commission and ECOWAS, to respond to and deal with migration issues. This intergovernmental dialogue provides a framework of consultation and coordination to origin, transit, and destination countries for sharing a common vision for a rational, balanced, and effective management of migratory flows from and through West and Central Africa. The Rabat process was followed by four ministerial conferences, which allowed for implementing concrete projects at the bilateral, regional, and multilateral levels. The latest Rome Conference centreed on two thematic priorities to focus efforts, on the one hand, on strengthening the link between migration and development, and, on the other, on the prevention and fight against irregular migration with special attention paid to the management of borders and to return policies, including voluntary returns, as well as readmission in full respect for human rights.

Benefits of Africa-EU Relations to African Economies

Asymmetric market access in favor of West Africa: The EU has committed itself to open its market to all West African products as soon as the agreement enters into force. In exchange, the EU has accepted a partial and gradual opening of the West African market. The agreement fully considers the differences in the level of development between the two regions. **Safeguards:** Under the terms of the agreement, West Africa continues to be able to protect its sensitive products from European competition either by keeping tariffs in place or, if necessary, by imposing safeguard measures. The EU has also agreed not to subsidize any of its agricultural exports to West Africa to support local agricultural production.

Flexible rules of origin: West African companies also have more flexibility in using foreign components while benefitting from free EU market access. Cumulation of origin is allowed with many developing countries (including ACP countries engaged in EPAs) to foster West Africa's integration into regional and global value chains. **Development:** The EU complements the market opening effort of the West African partners with a substantial development assistance package. On 17 March 2014, the EU Foreign Affairs Council confirmed EU support of at least €6.5 billion for West Africa during the first period of 2015-2020 (European Parliament, 2014). The Economic Partnership Agreement Development Programme (EPADP) is crucial in ensuring that the EPA promotes trade and attracts investment to West African countries.

Utilized properly, this will contribute to development, sustainable growth, and reduce poverty.

Negative Impacts of Africa - EU Relations on African Economies

There is a common perception among Africans that the relationship between Europe and Africa is not a partnership between equals. There is an awareness that the EU defines the agenda and the rules of the game. In reality, Europe is divided; it does not speak with one voice; several EU member states have their bilateral policies, sometimes in contradiction with EU-African policies. The Euro-African agreements are characterized by a striking inequality in the ratio of power, mainly because of African countries' dependence on Europe. A dependence was formed when most African states were in the throes of colonial rule and were integrated into the international capitalist system, designed to apportion fair benefits. The complimentary international organizations were also created without consultations with Africans. This implies that African states were birthed into an already exploitative international economic system. All interactive structures (international organizations, bilateral agreements), especially on finance, technology, trade, and even political ones, are skewed to the benefit of Europe rather than Africa. Processes were developed to create and maintain a relationship based on structural dependence.

Relations between African countries and Europe are old. They are based on a heavy colonial history, important cultural and commercial exchanges, and obvious economic and political links. Many scholars have argued that Africa-EU relations are based on Europe's desire to maintain domination of the African continent. Africa has gained independence, but her unequal relations with Europe have ensured her continued dependence on Europe. These relations point to Europe's economic, political, and imperialistic control of Africa. The earlier phase of EU-Africa relations was initiated because certain member states wished to retain formal links with former colonial dependencies to ensure continued access to raw materials and natural resources and to protect economic investment already made or being contemplated in newly independent states. Contemporary EU-Africa relations indicate continuity in the pursuit of national interests by the EU and its member states. This situation has been perpetuated due to the asymmetric bargaining strengths of both partners.

Africa’s case is further compounded by countries' perceived lack of autonomy over their trade strategies owing to donor dependence. The fact that the EU and its member states are the largest donors by some margin emits confusing signals and renders the EPA negotiating process even more problematic. The fact that the EU holds all the cards in the form of market access to the common market; financial power in the form of development assistance; and negotiating muscle due to the expertise and experience further confounds the negotiation process. It is the frustration experienced with the EU that Africa has embraced the East and China in particular. African countries embrace China on the principle that it does not dictate their development priorities to African leaders, it does not insist on democracy and good governance, and it provides money in the form of grants and loans freely and quickly. The EPA negotiates with a narrow trade approach, treating the EPAs as any other free trade agreement'. Hence, the EU is perceived as a self-interested actor that utilizes its superior power to further its own - mercantilist interests. Another aspect of trade between the EU and Africa is the incidence of fluctuating trade balances. This is illustrated in the table below:

Trade Balances between the EU and Africa 2008-2018

Year	Exports € billion	Imports € billion	Balance € billion
2008	120	161	-41
2009	108	112	-3
2010	126	137	-11
2011	137	152	-15
2012	150	187	-37
2013	153	168	-15
2014	153	156	-3
2015	154	133	21
2016	144	117	28
2017	149	131	18
2018	152	151	1

Source: ec.europa.eu/eu.africa.trade.statistics (2019)

From the EU’s perspective, the volume of imports from Africa was more than exports to Africa from 2008 to 2015. Arguably, the figures above indicate a better trade balance for Africa. The situation is more convoluted. The general trade between the EU and Africa is disproportionate due to the products exchanged. The EU’s trade volume for Africa stood at

$47billion in 1990 and was 44% of the continent’s total exports. As significant as this is for Africa, it is deceptive because the EU supplies Africa with manufactures while Africa supplies raw, unprocessed agricultural and natural materials. The EU buys a lot of this at discounted prices due to its unprocessed state, covers the same to manufacturers, and resells it back to Africa. Since the 1960s, over 70% of Africa’s imports have been from Europe, while less than 10% of Africa exports to the EU. This underscores the unequal trade situations alluded to earlier. Since 2015, there has been a decline as the EU has continually posted surplus trade balances against Africa. This is considering the EPA, especially North, West, East, and Southern Africa. To shore up purchasing power, the EU in 2020 increased lending platforms for African businesses by 50% and consolidated the Loan Fund by almost €5billion. The total trade assets of the EU with Africa in 2020 stood at €280billion while that of Africa was €1billion (European Commission, 2020). Thus, while the EU’s trade volume was 72%, Africa’s was 28%. Therefore, the reward of access to Europe’s markets has been marginal. It is these types of trade interactions and the consequences that reinforce the belief that the EU/Africa relationship is exploitative against Africa.

The granting of free access to the vast EU market is lauded as a coup for the continued economic progress of African nations. While there is no reason to believe the motivations of the European Union are anything but sincere, it is still unclear whether it will have the intended effect. The EU has showcased the rationale of the agreement as a tool to spur economic growth. The argument goes that removing duty on "intermediate goods" - such as automotive parts and electronics used in manufacturing more specialized consumer goods - can now be imported cheaply.

The EU claims that the agreement will protect African production activities from liberalization, allowing domestic industries the time to mature. The textile industry has garnered particular interest, where South African labor unions have been very vocal against further trade liberalization. Countries such as Ethiopia and Kenya - both showing promise of becoming established textile-producing hubs - are also grappling with various hurdles from European customers who are perceived as more demanding with respect to lead times, order sizes, and quality (Kotsopoulos & Mattheis, 2018).

Kotsopoulos & Mattheis (2018) further observe that an influx of cheaper, higher-quality products, such as textiles from the EU, is likely to reduce trade between African nations, prevent manufacturers from making more diverse products, and limit industrialization. Despite boasting a more established and sophisticated industry, South Africa's inter-regional textile exports represent a mere 12% to 14% of total exports.

Giving European imports the duty-free treatment will leave African producers struggling; local businesses will be unable to sell their wares at competitive prices, while the agreement will limit the whole continent's efforts to move up the industrial value chain and produce a greater quantity of final consumption goods. As a result, Africa will remain, contrary to the envisaged ambitions of the EPA, a perpetual supplier of raw materials with a poorly diversified economy.

Lopes (2019) notes that signatory countries are also at risk of destabilizing their fragile economies by losing the ability to collect duties on imported goods. Botswana, according to the latest World Bank figures, relies on such tariffs to fill 47% of its state coffers, Namibia for 22%. At the same time, Lesotho, a landlocked country within a country (South Africa), earns nearly 70% of its total tax revenue at its borders.

The Wilson Centre, a US think tank, supports the criticism of the EPA, claiming the agreement is inherently flawed because of EU envoys' "divide and conquer" tactics when negotiating with African countries. As part of this approach, EU negotiators trigger the fear of losing preferential access to the EU market in their counterparts, which forces the African states to the table under the assumption that they are left with no choice but to participate in EPA talks. This strategy can be seen in the behavior of the European Commission towards other African nations. Recently, the Commission announced that Kenya, on the cusp of being declared a “middle-income” country, would lose tariff-free access to the EU market if it did not ratify the East Africa EPA. Tanzania faces a similar predicament if its status as a developing nation is reviewed. Instead of pursuing unhelpful trade deals, Europe should work to help address the African continent's deepest structural problems.

The fishing industry in Mozambique serves as a poignant example. The country, proportionately reliant on its fisheries for both foreign reserve income and feeding its citizenry, is losing up to US$65 million from its economy every year because of illegal fishing. Carbone (2013) states that, through a series of deals in 2013, Mozambique undertook major investments to upgrade its previously inadequate maritime surveillance powers and safeguard the country's coastlines. The government bought patrol vessels and improved monitoring, training, and technology capabilities. But it is now facing criticism over how the deal was secretly financed and further questioning why it fails to put the new fleet to good use.

An EPA offers little hope of alleviating the plight of fisheries, especially in light of research that shows that fisheries agreements conducted between the EU and island nations in the Pacific during the 1990s generated seven times more value for European states than for the island nations, (Carbone, 2013). However, a joint initiative on fishing would instead have the potential to increase export revenue and serve as a catalyst for job generation. A concerted effort between the EU and host nations on the issue of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing alone could add 300,000 jobs and generate US$3.3 billion in revenue. It could also boost income from selling foreign rights by a factor of eight.

The EU's incessant pursuit of EPAs is uncreative and may prove inadequate in promoting African economic self-reliance. The most likely scenario for the agreement signed with the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) is that the African countries involved will become dumping sites for European goods of superior quality to domestic products. Local consumers will favor these relatively cheaper goods over locally produced ones. This will have a direct effect on local trade and manufacturing prowess.

Conclusion

The Africa-EU partnership originates in the legacy of the colonial rule in Africa. It is unsurprising that, despite an apparent evolution, there remains a strong colonial undertone in the successive cooperation and trade agreements between the EU and African countries (Akokpari, 2017).

Signed in 2002, the Cotonou Agreement is the EU's most comprehensive development cooperation partnership with any region worldwide. Its core objectives are poverty reduction and the gradual integration of African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries into the world economy. While, in theory, the agreement is based on the principle of equal partnership, the relationship between the EU and developing countries continues to be deeply unequal, with African countries being placed in a subordinate position.

This inequality appears most strongly in applying political conditionality and the European Partnership Agreements (EPAs) negotiation process (Gerrit, 2011). The agreement stresses that both partners must promote democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and good governance (Draper, 2007). However, in case of violating one of these essential elements, only the EU can control ACP countries by restricting trade or aid. Furthermore, the EU did not hesitate to use its superior position to coerce three ACP countries into the EPAs. Several African countries, supported by local civil society groups, openly opposed the EPAs because they contain detrimental policies for their local markets and industries. However, to speed up the process, the EU threatened to withdraw foreign aid and end the preferential access to European markets for existing exports. In this new era and given the recent global dynamics, European countries should stop with their patronizing development discourse and outdated trade and partnership models. Ultimately, Africa's transformation will come from internal policy clarity.

It can be argued that Europe's relevance to Africa is diminishing; in recent years, countries like China, Brazil, and the Gulf states have assumed a relevant role in Africa by increasing cooperation and investment in African states (Forysinski & Emmanuel, 2023). Europe, however, remains a key partner for Africa. Therefore, Africa must redefine its relationship with Europe based on her terms (Fattibene, 2022). Africa must find a way of negotiating better deals in future relations with Europe to change the present relationship between them.

Internally, African countries must show more concern for development. The most pressing challenge for African countries today is thus to clearly define the type of development they want based on their vision and priority for the future. Economically, Africa can integrate into the world economy without help. They must avoid skewed international trade agreements that keep them dependent on raw materials export. Africa's priority should be deepening regional integration and boosting intra-African trade before opening domestic markets to the pressure of more developed competitors (Jones, Keijzer, Friesen, and Veron, 2020). The EU has tried to reciprocate, but their sponsor options bring more benefits to their domestic economies than to Africa as corroborative trade partners, especially at the 6th EU-AU Summit held in Brussels from 17-18 February 2022. It reiterated the Joint Africa EU Strategy initially adopted in 2007. The EU describes Africa as its "Global Gateway" and has far-reaching interventions in financial aid, digital economy, green economy, electricity production, market integration, and climate change (European Commission, 2022).

The latest deliberations Treating Africa as an equal and valuable partner and respecting its policy space are the only way forward for countries that want to preserve their relations with the continent in the future. A mutually beneficial partnership might seem scary for countries that have long benefited from such an unfair and unequal relationship. However, this is the best option for everyone in the long run. After all, an economically strong and politically stable Africa is not only good for Africa. It is good for the world. Not only will it solve security and migration threats, which are the main concerns of European countries, but it will also give other regions a credible trade partner with an ever-growing consumer market.

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