

AFFORD/ Africa Europe Platform Submission to the DfID BoC Review

Executive Summary

This submission was drafted by AFFORD and other diaspora organisation delivery partners on the EC-funded 'Africa-Europe Platform' initiative (AEP). It draws on views from African diaspora organisations and individuals based in the EU that are involved in African development. It argues that:

- EU aid has provided a useful framework for global development efforts, and is generally considered to be effective and offer value for money.
- Although the current aid framework is problematic in many respects, it does provide a basis on which to develop more effective targets, goals, and indicators.
- In a time of resource scarcity, sharing development resources brings significant advantages.
- The perceived greater neutrality of EU aid and development programming also offer the UK advantages in regions where the UK is not represented and/or where there is significant distrust of the UK.

General comments

The Africa Europe Platform (AEP) is an African diaspora development platform for African diaspora organisations based in Europe that are involved in (co-) development, funded by the EC, the German GIZ, the Foreign Ministry of the Netherlands, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Five diaspora organisations are involved in delivering AEP: African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC, Netherlands); African Foundation for Development (AFFORD, UK); Coordination Générale des Migrants pour le Développement (CGMD, Belgium); Forum des Organisations de Solidarité Internationale issues des Migrations (FORIM, France); and International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD, Austria/ Belgium). The aim of the platform is to increase the diaspora's contribution to Africa's development by promoting dialogue and engagement between Africans based in the EU who involved in development on the one hand, and policy makers on the other, in order ultimately to inform EU development debates and policy. As such it provides a platform for several hundred African diaspora organisations across Europe.

This submission has been drafted by AEP delivery partners, and draws both on input from diaspora organisations involved in AEP, and on a process of engagement and consultation with the African diaspora through the Africa-UK programme, a national UK policy engagement initiative funded by DFID and Comic Relief through the Common Ground Initiative (CGI).

QUESTION 1: What are the comparative advantages or disadvantages in these areas of the UK working through the EU, rather than working independently or through other international organisations?

Leaving aside the issue of ‘impact on national interest’, which can be interpreted in a number of different ways, AFFORD and AEP argue that in terms of work to achieve the MDGs the EU offers the UK a number of advantages in terms of its development and humanitarian relief programming. and projects that support achievement of the MDGs:

- The EC was, in 2011, the largest multilateral aid donor in the world. However, in the current economic climate both the UK and Eurozone countries are facing severe financial challenges, and are likely to do so for some years to come. Therefore pooling resources for development is both fiscally prudent and arguably more cost effective. Moreover, by working through the EU, the UK is able to influence allocation of resources and the effectiveness thereof.
- UK interests are represented on the ground by the EU in developing countries where the UK has no established presence.
- By extension, in an African context the EC is considered to be more neutral than bilateral donors, particularly those with difficult colonial legacies such as France, Belgium, and the UK. Just as the EEAS enjoys a more neutral reputation than individual member states’ ministries of foreign affairs, EU development programming has the potential to lead on sensitive issues such as good governance or human rights.
- The relevance of colonial history and ongoing negative perceptions of the UK’s foreign policy initiatives should not be underestimated in the developing world. This is especially true of Africa, where these represent a very mixed blessing for the UK. Examples would include most of North Africa, where the war on terror and the Iraq war have shattered what little respect there was for UK institutions and foreign policy. Although EU and UK support for regime change in Libya has had local support, this is not unanimous by any means (c.f. Abdul Hakim Belhajj and Sa’adi cases, not to mention concern about overspill into neighbouring countries). Other examples would include Uganda and northern Nigeria. Therefore, participation in EU development programming is of very real benefit to the UK’s national interest. An important consideration is that development work contracted to private companies, while funded by the UK and the EU, would not necessarily bring the negative political connotations of programs run by the national governments of former colonial powers.

AFFORD is very aware that there are disadvantages as well as advantages to the UK’s involvement in EU aid and development programming, an obvious example of which would be less control exercised by the UK. However, AFFORD and AEP believe these disadvantages are far outweighed by the factors listed above.

QUESTION 2: What is the impact of the current system of parallel competences on policy making and implementation in these areas, especially in terms of:

- a) efficiency, effectiveness and value for money;**
b) transparency (including checks against fraud and corruption); and
c) working with other international partner organisations (e.g. UN, World Bank etc.)?

- In terms of reporting burdens, EU aid and development funding is reasonably rigorous without being overly cumbersome. For small diaspora organisations like AEP's members, submitting reports to multiple funders has significant capacity implications. Reporting to a single funder is therefore preferred to reporting to a number of member-state funders.
- AEP and AFFORD's partners in Europe and in Africa consider the EU as being more effective in working with African institutions, such as African governments, the African Union, regional groupings such as ECOWAS, as well as think-tanks and businesses. The Cotonou agreement provides a ready example of this. There is also a strong perception amongst our African partners that the EU is more open to African partners' own priorities than are DfID and FCO.

QUESTION 3: How far do EU development policies complement and reinforce policies in areas such as trade, security, stability, human rights, environment, climate change etc., and vice versa?

- Working through the EU arguably gives greater potential scope for Policy Coherence for Development (PCD). Although PCD remains something of a holy grail in development terms, given the EU's interests and bargaining power across a range of domains – trade, energy, security – it does provide greater scope for a multiplier effect in terms of PCD than the UK's own development programming alone.

QUESTION 4: Bearing in mind the UK's policy objectives and international commitments, how might the UK benefit from the EU taking more or less action in these areas, or from more action being taken at the regional, national or international (e.g. UN, OECD, G20) level – either in addition or as an alternative to action at EU level?

- In terms of its participation in EU aid and development programming, the UK is well-placed to influence EU development policy in a way that it cannot do from the outside. Development paradigms are changing rapidly, and support and investment from BRIC economies is of increasing interest to developing nations, especially in Africa. The risk – and challenge - to Britain and the EU is that, as African nations seek to move from aid to trade, we will get left behind both in terms of development effectiveness and also trade. This has a potentially huge future economic impact to both the UK and the EU in terms of trade. The UK therefore has an important role to play in ensuring EU development and other policy areas – trade in particular – maximise these opportunities.

- For large-scale infrastructure development projects, in which the private sector competes for contracts, an EU-wide bidding process opens the door to increased competition. This can lower costs while increasing benefits as firms across Europe vie to be the most attractive. These benefits would be far more limited if the UK sought to advance these policies by itself.
- AFFORD's own view is that liberalisation of trade, combined with judicious and measured use of aid financing, would have greater impact in terms of poverty reduction than current development models. Unlike many NGOs, we are therefore not campaigning for maintaining budget commitments to aid in the UK or the EU. At the same time, African nations are increasingly less interested in bilateral trade agreements (such as Economic Protection Agreements or EPAs) than they are in supporting regional fora and reducing regional barriers to trade. The UK is well placed to advocate for such changes in policy – but it would be less well-placed if it were less involved in EU aid.

QUESTION 7: Are there any general points on competence you wish to make which are not captured above?

- It is important to stress how the debate on the BoC is perceived by AFFORD's partners in Europe and Africa, who find the tone and tenor of the debate both frustrating (especially in terms of the accuracy of media reporting) and of rather limited and parochial relevance (inasmuch as the debate is perceived as serving quite narrow party political ends).