

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

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Summary

The final years of the twentieth century have been marked by deep and overwhelming changes in the international political, economic, social and ecological systems. The end of the “cold war,” that polarized the East and the West has drastically transformed the international political scene. At the same time, the development gap between the developed/industrialized nations and the developing countries and those with economies in transition has increased considerably. The development situation of the African countries has particularly become more precarious. It is important to emphasize that these problems do not stop at the borders of African states. In other words, the problems that afflict the continent will invariably over time affect the rest of the world, especially the developed countries. An important instrument for alleviating such human sufferings in Africa and avoiding their propagation in the world is international cooperation and solidarity. Capacity building at the human, institutional, and community levels is proposed as an effective mechanism or instrument for improving international cooperation, and ensuring sustainable development in Africa.

1. Introduction

Most African countries are beset by major socio-economic crises such as acute poverty, famine, increasing environmental disasters and disease epidemics, massive displacement of populations, disintegrating educational systems and drug trafficking. The World Bank has used the standard of US\$370 per capita annual income, or about US\$1 per day, as the threshold of extreme poverty. Based on this standard, it is estimated that 30% of the population in developing countries, or some 1.3 billion people live in extreme poverty, and that their numbers are increasing, especially in Africa. Most African countries are saddled by huge debts and an unfavorable world trade regime. In particular, the spread of drought, desertification and the aids epidemic are the biggest threats to the lives of millions of Africans, many of whom will be compelled to search for greener pastures in the developed countries

This chapter is devoted to an examination of international cooperation and its effectiveness in assisting the African countries to eliminate undue human sufferings and to promote sustainable development. The concept, the importance and the objectives of international cooperation are first described. This is followed by an analysis of the justification for such cooperation and its different forms. The principal actors involved in international cooperation activities are also described. Finally, in order to facilitate an accelerated sustainable development process in Africa, the paper argues for linking international cooperation and capacity building programs.

1.1. Description of International Cooperation

Historically, international cooperation probably dates back to the post World War Two period, with the introduction of the Marshall Plan in 1947 to assist the reconstruction of Europe, the creation of the United Nations Organization (UNO) and the Bretton Woods institutions (the International Monetary Fund, IMF, and the World Bank Group, WB). International cooperation has therefore come to be strongly linked to aid; they are even often are treated as exchangeable terms. Aid, properly speaking, refers only to those parts of capital inflows, which normal market incentives do not provide (Reyes, 1993). However, the term is now used to mean the flow of long-term official financial resources between developed and developing countries.

International cooperation may simply be described as the global teamwork by the countries of the world towards joint action in areas of mutual interest and sustainable development. The international community has a responsibility to support the efforts of developing countries and the countries with economies in transition to solve their grave economic and social problems through the creation of an enabling international economic environment. Such a support may go a long way to help to transform international relations, reduce international political tensions and thereby facilitate the integration of the developing nations and countries with economies in transition into the world economy. To achieve a high degree of international cooperation in Africa requires that all the countries of the world play their respective roles effectively. On the other hand, although the developed countries need to assist African countries to revamp their shattered economies, the latter must also be more responsible for their own economic policies and development programs, which should be dovetailed to their specific situations and the needs of their population.

2. Objectives of International Cooperation

A drive towards the realization of desirable economic, social, political, and environmental objectives may be said to be at the heart of international cooperation efforts. For example, cooperation between the developed countries and African countries seeks to expand their mutual interests and values and to facilitate an effective co-management of existing and potential problems that respect no national frontiers. These interests include fighting environmental degradation and migration, drugs and epidemic diseases and natural disasters as the unexpected floods in Mozambique and Madagascar in March 2000 vividly illustrated. More recently, the concepts of democracy, good governance, and economic reforms involving the liberalization and privatization of national and regional economies, have become key objectives of international cooperation in Africa.

International cooperation policies and programs of the UN and its agencies, the international financial institutions such as the WB, the IMF and other international and regional organizations have greatly influenced the evolving spirit of multilateralism in the world. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1997), the objectives of international cooperation include the following:

2.1. Promotion of Economic Well-Being

International cooperation seeks to reduce by one-half the proportion of people living in

extreme poverty by 2010. For example, the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration and Program of Action set forth the goal of eradicating poverty in the world, through decisive national actions and international cooperation “as an ethical, social, political, and economic imperative of humankind”.

2.2. Integration of Developing Countries into the World Economy

Developing countries, and especially those of Africa, are facing severe difficulties in selling their produce in the international markets. They are marginalized and their problems are not often taken into account during decision-making at international forums. The serious protests mounted by the developing countries against the attempts by the World Trade Organization (WTO) to impose an unacceptable trade regime during the Seattle and Bangkok summits in February and March, 2000 are excellent manifestations of the frustration of developing countries for being sidelined in the world decision-making process.

Also, the results of the discussions during the Africa Development Forum which was organized at New York in March 2000 and the ongoing critique of the attitude and conditional ties of the IMF and the WB with regard to the developing countries, especially Africa, are further indications of the inefficacy of international cooperation to promote sustainable development of the world, and Africa in particular.

2.3. Ensuring Social Development

International cooperation also aims at attaining a number of important social goals. For example, it seeks to promote universal primary education in all countries by 2010. Furthermore, many international bodies are working towards gender equality and the empowerment of women by eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2010. The reduction of mortality rates for infants and children under the age of 5, and a reduction by $\frac{3}{4}$ in mortality by 2020 are other social goals being pursued through international cooperation.

2.4. Environmental Regeneration and Sustainable Development

Following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992, national strategies for sustainable development are to be implemented in all countries by 2010. This is to ensure that current trends in the loss of environmental resources— forests, fisheries, fresh water, climate, soils, bio-diversity, stratospheric ozone, the accumulation of hazardous substances, desertification, and other major negative impacts are effectively reversed at both global and national levels by 2015.

Cooperation between developing countries and donor nations and agencies in capacity building programs also seek to facilitate a better understanding of global environmental problems as well as defining and enforcing best global solutions. For example, member countries of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD spend about US\$60 billion on official development assistance or cooperation (OECD, 1996).

3. The Justification for International Cooperation

Since no one country neither in Africa nor in any of the other developing countries has adequate resources and skills to enable the attainment of sustainable development, international cooperation efforts aimed at mitigating this situation have assumed paramount importance in recent times in Africa. International cooperation has been recognized as a critical element in assisting individuals, organizations, groups, nations and states to acquire the required resources and skills to enable them to solve their own problems. However, foreign aid as a tool for international cooperation is being called to question because of poor performance in terms of sustainable impacts, national ownership and transfer of appropriate technologies (OECD, 1996).

Four principal motivations are often cited to justify international cooperation:

- **Economic justification:** Economic justification for international cooperation derives from the inability by developing countries, and Africa in particular, to generate enough domestic savings to finance investment and imports required for national development during their early stages of development.
- **Humanitarian reasons:** International cooperation is also a response to the extreme poverty that still afflicts one fifth of the world population. They live in poverty and lack access to clean water, adequate health facilities, and adequate nutrition levels and cannot therefore lead productive lives. Many do not even possess basic literacy and numerical skills (OECD, 1996). It is therefore right to enhance cooperative efforts among countries, organizations and donors so as to provide these populations ample opportunities to improve their quality of life.
- **“Enlightened self-interest”:** Development assistance does not only benefit the poor but also the donor countries. Clearly, increased prosperity in developing countries will expand markets for goods and services produced by the industrialized countries. Also, increased human security and satisfaction of the basic needs of the people of the South will reduce pressures to migrate to the developed countries. In other words, ensuring political stability and social cohesion (enabling environment) in the developing countries may help to reduce the attraction by the populations of these countries to migrate to the developed countries. This will help to avoid the potential economic, social and environmental pressures that such population movements are likely to cause in the North (OECD, 1996).

Besides, the developed countries derive a number of direct benefits from international cooperation. The results of a study undertaken in Belgium on the financial flows generated through development aid between 1994 and 1996 is very illustrative of the benefits the donor countries get from assisting the South. The payback of such development aid flows is estimated at 88%. In other words, the funds invested by Belgium in developing countries does not only benefit the local population; 88% of these resources are used to pay Belgian staff, Belgian NGOs and/or Universities, Belgian goods, etc. It is also estimated that the payback of multilateral cooperation funds is 94% (BADC, 1999). This is the well-known phenomenon of giving assistance with the left hand and taking it back immediately with the right hand. This window-dressing international cooperation cannot help Africa to achieve sustainable

development.

(d) Interdependence factor: In the rapidly globalizing world, all distinctions between “north,” and “south,” as well as “east,” and “west,” are, strictly speaking, no longer valid. Therefore, issues can no longer be divided purely into domestic and international. Globalization and environmental issues are the main factors catalyzing this trend. The justification for international cooperation and solidarity is therefore self-evident in the rapidly emerging global village.

4. Forms of International Cooperation, Policies, and the Principal Actors

This section briefly examines the different forms of international cooperation, the key policies driving cooperation activities and the principal players.

4.1. Forms of International Cooperation

International cooperation is practiced at two main levels: at the bilateral and multilateral levels. Bilateral international cooperation basically involves two individual countries that agree to cooperate in order to realize specified mutual objectives. International cooperation in Africa has always been linked to colonial history. Each of the former colonial masters established international cooperation agencies that basically direct their attention and operations to their respective former colonies. This attitude has helped to divide Africa further: the so-called “Anglophones,” “Francophones,” and “Luzophones.” The true African identity has disappeared and most African governments tend to seek the advice of their former colonial masters before taking decisions pertaining to Africa.

Multilateral cooperation, on the other hand, refers to the activities of international organizations, which aim at ensuring peace and development in the world, especially in the developing countries and the countries with economies in transition. As is discussed in section 4.3, a number of established organizations and agencies are involved in conceptualizing and operationalizing international cooperation.

Most of the bilateral international development cooperation agencies have elaborated policies that prioritize poverty reduction, promotion of sustainable livelihoods, social equity, the rights of women and progress in general. Some campaign for the respect of human rights in the countries to which they provide official development assistance, along with attempts to promote democracy, good governance, and popular participation in the political process, while others explicitly seek to promote peace through aid.

The UN, at 0.7% of their Gross Domestic Products (GDP), has pegged the advanced countries’ contribution to international cooperation activities. However, with the exception of the Nordic countries and a few others like The Netherlands, the contribution of most of the industrialized countries is very far from this target. In fact, with the end of the cold war, most African countries are anxious about the diversion of development assistance meant for the continent to Central and Eastern Europe.

4.2. International Cooperation Policies

A number of policy objectives have been designed to encourage all nations to participate in international cooperation activities at their own levels of development. Some of the key policies are:

- Reactivation of economic growth and development. The coordination of macro-economic policies should take full account of the interest of all countries, particularly the developing countries and the countries with economies in transition.
- An open and credible multilateral trading system is essential for the promotion of growth and sustainable development.
- Scientific and technological capability is increasingly important in the development of developing countries. The international community should therefore support the efforts of developing countries to create and develop endogenous scientific and technological capability.
- The necessity to respond to the need for satisfying the basic needs (food, health, education, and housing, etc.) of all members of society.
- Substantial resources are called for to enable developing countries, especially the least developed, to cope with the objectives and operations of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).
- The threat of human activities to the environment is a common concern of all countries. Economic policies should therefore have as their ultimate objective the betterment of human living conditions and ensuring sustainable development.

Since the 1980s and particularly after the Rio de Janeiro Summit of 1992, almost all countries have added an explicit commitment to environmental protection and sustainable development to their international cooperation policies and objectives. Unfortunately however there was a lack of a real will to commit adequate resources to facilitate the implementation of these policies and objectives. Both the bilateral and multilateral cooperation organizations and agencies have started re-examining their development cooperation policies and strategies with a view to making them more efficient. For example, in 1989, the World Bank, taking into account the grave economic crisis that faced Africa, decided to modify the way it grants aid to this continent (World Bank, 1989). (An example of the winds of change at the bilateral cooperation level is provided in Box 1).

In early 1990 the Norwegian government introduced two major shifts in its bilateral aid policies: (a) institutional development was made a central means of promoting long-term, sustainable growth and (b) institutional collaboration of Norwegian public directorates, universities private companies and non governmental organizations with like-minded southern partners as the dominant role mode of technical cooperation. From 1993 onwards, the so-called Norway axis was officially established and systematically pursued, linking institutions in the South with like-minded partners in Norway. While institutional development was perceived as the goal, cooperation among public, cultural, and research institutions, private companies and non-governmental organization become the means.

The new strategy was also based on a critical rethinking of previous modes of technical cooperation. Traditional technical assistance was strongly critiqued by developing countries for being ineffective in building institutions or creating capacity; as too costly at both macro and micro levels for being donor-driven for distorting national labor markets and for ignoring the dramatic change in the level of skills, knowledge and confidence among educated citizens in developing countries. An institutional approach emerged as alternative.

The following figures illustrate significant changes:

The number of long-term Norwegian experts was reduced from 250 in 1985 to 50 in 1993

35 public institutions are currently involved over 100 institutional development projects.

More than 80m NGO support approximately 1,000 large and small projects on three continents.

80 private Norwegian companies interact with an increasing number of companies in the south.

Source: Kruse, S., (1998), "Development through institutions: a review of institutional development strategies in Norwegian bilateral aid", in African Development Bank and World Bank (eds.), *Evaluation capacity development in Africa. Selected proceedings from a seminar in Abidjan*.

Box 1. Changes in Norwegian Cooperation Policy

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Emmanuel Kwesi Boon (1954) is an expert in Management and Environmental Management. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts in Economics and Geography from the University of Ghana in 1979. He also has a Master's Degree in Industrial Location and Development from the Free University of Brussels (VUB). After studying for an M.B.A. Degree from the University of Antwerp (UFSIA) in 1983, he earned a Ph.D. in Economic Sciences from the VUB in 1986. Currently, he lectures management studies at the School of Administration of University of Ghana in Accra and environmental management at the VUB. He is also a Visiting Professor to many universities and institutions in Africa, Asia, Europe and South America. He is very actively involved in research and consultancy projects.