The EU’s Role in Global Development:
Still Calling the Tune in Africa?

Fredrik Söderbaum

School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden &
United Nations University—Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS)
E-mail: fredrik.soderbaum@globalstudies.gu.se

WORK IN PROGRESS — PLEASE DO NOT QUOTE

Abstract

This paper focuses on the EU’s role and capacity to drive a policy for “global development” and sketch out collaborative agreements with other international organisations and third countries in this field. Particular emphasis is placed on the EU’s role in Africa. The main objective of the “European Consensus on Development” is said to be the eradication of poverty in the context of sustainable development, including the pursuit of the MDGs. The paper shows how intimately related the EU’s internal dimensions are with its capacity to act externally (actorness). Although many European politicians and policymakers frequently emphasise that the EU is the world’s biggest aid player, this can often be understood in terms of “presence” rather than a capacity to act. While, on the one hand, the EU plays a role in the international policy discussion in multilateral fora and on global development policy (e.g. Paris Agenda, MDG, budget support etc), on the other hand, the EU is not acting as one ‘on the ground’ in the developing countries. In fact, in contrast to its official policy the EU is not a unified actor in global development, at least when focus is placed on development cooperation in Africa. In practice the European Commission often acts as “the 28th member state, conducting its own aid policies, rather than serving as the hub for donor coordination within the EU as a whole. The European Consensus is, as one donor official in an EU member state put it, “ice thin.” The fragmented administrative responsibility within the EU’s “foreign policy complex” is another factor that severely limits the EU’s actorness in this field.
1. Introduction

Differing views abound about what type of political animal the EU is and about the nature and impact of its external relations. In the last few years the literature about Europe as a global actor has grown enormously. Sceptics argue that the EU has diffuse and ineffective foreign policies, and that it is divided between the interests of its member states, implying that the EU is seen merely as a potential actor in world politics. Even more positive observers have varying views about the EU as a global actor, and the logic behind its external relations. In short, the EU is often perceived as an ambiguous polity and its foreign policy profile appears to be a moving target.

This paper analyses the EU’s ambitions and experiences as a global actor with special reference to the field of “global development” and with a focus on its relations with Africa. The emphasis on Africa can be justified for a variety of reasons, the most important being the historical relationship and the fact that the EU and its member states are the dominating “partners” in development. The study starts out, in the next section, with a conceptual discussion about EU as a “regional actor”. Key emphasis is given to the concept of actorship, which is not specifically related to the EU as a global actor but is meant to serve as a comparative analytical framework in studying the transformation of any region from object to subject, that is with a certain actor capacity in its external relations. The third section discusses the notion of “global development” and the EU’s general policy in this field. The fourth section discusses the EU’s general development policy towards Africa, as formulated within broad frameworks such as the Cotonou Agreement and the Joint Africa-EU strategy (JAES). The fifth section analyses the EU’s development policy on the country level in Africa, with particular emphasis on the case of Tanzania. The paper concludes by summarising the main empirical results and also attempts a theoretically based explanation of this pattern.

2. Regional actorship

Regional agency is a new and underresearched phenomenon, which has come to life due to the transformation of the EU from being mainly an instrument for economic cooperation to being a political actor with broadly defined objectives trying to shape external conditions. In order to gain legitimacy as a global actor, in member states and the international community, the EU must acquire actorship. Actorship brings attention to the close relationship between the EU’s internal development and its external policies. This link is evident in the EU’s official policy documents and treaties, which repeatedly stress that without a unified, coherent, consistent and coordinated external policy the legitimacy of the EU as a global actor will be called into question.

\[1\] This section draws on extensive collaboration with Björn Hettne, who also coined the concepts of regional actorship as well as regionness.
The concept of regional actorship is meant to include subjective, institutional, historical and structural dimensions in order to give a comprehensive view on regional agency as distinct from state action.

A multidimensional approach to the study of regionally based actorship is built around three interacting components:

• **regionness**: internal (objective) integration and (subjective) identity-formation,
• **international presence**: in terms of size, economic strength, military power etcetera,
• **actorness**: the capacity to act purposively to shape outcomes in the external world.

External action thus depends on internal cohesiveness, which includes *identity* as an important but hard-to-define component. Identity is what brings people together to form a “we”. If there is a consolidated internal actor identity, some sort of external actorship should also follow. The impact depends on the strength of regionness, presence and actorness in various policy areas and in relation to various counterparts. The question is to what extent the EU’s strong international presence is actually transformed into a purposive capacity to shape the external environment by influencing other actors and ultimately the world order. This potential depends upon our definition of a region. Normally a region is not associated with actorship but rather is seen as an “arena” or “level” of action. Not so here. Here regions are understood as processes; they are not geographical or administrative objects but potential subjects, and thereby actors in the making.

### 2.1. Regionness

Regionalism is usually seen as the ideology and project of region-building, while the concept of regionalisation is reserved for more spontaneous processes of region formation by different actors – state or non-state. When different processes of regionalisation intensify and converge within the same geographical area, the cohesion and thereby the distinctiveness of the region in the making increases. A regional actor takes shape. This process of regionalisation can be described in terms of levels of *regionness* (Hettne 1993, 2003; Hettne and Söderbaum 2000). The levels of regionness refer to different historical contexts of varying cohesion, not to a single variable. However the choice of concept signifying the particular levels is mostly inspired by security theory and the categorisation of security arrangements.

In general and abstract terms one can speak of five levels of regionness:

1. **Regional social space**
2. **Regional social system**
3. **Regional international society**
4. **Regional community**, and
5. **Regional institutionalised polity**.

*Regional social space* is a geographic area, delimited generally by natural, physical barriers and populated by largely non-related local groups of people. The region is thus objectively rooted in territory; in social terms the region is organised by human inhabitants, at first in relatively isolated communities, and later constituting some kind of translocal relationship which can result from demographic change or changes in transport technology. The regional space is ultimately filled up with a growing population.
This increased density of contacts, implying more durable relations, is what creates a \textit{regional social system}. This precarious security situation, characterised by competing political units, has in history often led to an empire, or even more often to pendulum movements between a centralised and a more or less decentralised order. The point is that the centralised system achieves order by being coercive, which is different from today’s voluntary regionalism emerging from decentralised state systems.

The region as an \textit{international society} implies a set of rules that makes interstate relations less anarchic, more enduring and predictable, and thus more peaceful, or at least less violent. It can be either organised (\textit{de jure}) or more spontaneous (\textit{de facto}). In the case of a more institutionalised cooperation, the region is constituted by the members of the regional organisation.

The region as a \textit{community} takes shape when an enduring organisational framework (formal or less formal) facilitates and promotes social communication and the convergence of values, norms and behaviour throughout the region, which implies identity formation at the regional level. Thus a transnational civil society emerges, characterised by social trust at this level.

Finally, region as an \textit{institutionalised polity} has a more fixed and permanent structure of decision-making and therefore stronger acting capability or actorship. Such a regional polity does not have to be characterised by the normal terminology used to describe political systems but can be \textit{sui generis}, as in the case of Europe, or Europolity. No other regions in the world can at present be described in these terms.

The approach of seeing a region as process implies an evolution of deepening regionalism, not necessarily following the idealised, staged model presented above, which mainly serves a heuristic purpose. Since regionalism is a political project, created by human actors, it may move not only in different directions but might indeed also fail, just as a nation-state project as we have seen in too many cases. Seen from this perspective, decline would mean fragmentation and decreasing regionness and dilution of identity.

\textbf{2.2. Presence}

Europe as an external actor is more than the EU’s foreign policy, and more even than the aggregate of the EU’s policies across all areas of its activity. Simply by existing, and due to its relative weight (demographically, economically, militarily and ideologically), the Union has an impact on the rest of the world. Its footprints are seen everywhere. It is the largest donor in the world and the size of its economy is comparable to that of the US. It is also building a military capacity meant to be used outside the region. This provokes reactions and creates expectations from the outside. The concept of presence is often used to signify this phenomenon, constituting the bridge between endogenous and exogenous factors. A stronger presence implies a greater capacity to act, unless we are dealing with a sleeping giant (who must anyhow wake up sooner or later). The actor must be subjectively conscious about its presence and prepared to make use of it in order to achieve actorness. In the “near abroad” presence is particularly strong, and can develop into the outright absorption of new territory (enlargement). To the extent that an enlarged region can retain the same level of actorness, its
presence will increase because of its sheer size. The original European Economic Community (EEC) had a population of 185 million, compared with today’s number in excess of 450 million. Presence is a complex and comprehensive material variable, depending on the size of the actor, the scope of its external activities, the relative importance of different issue areas, and the relative dependence of various regions upon the European market. A stronger presence means more repercussions and reactions and thereby a pressure to act. In the absence of such action, presence itself will diminish.

2.3. Actorness

Actorness implies a scope of action and room for manoeuvre, in some cases even a legal personality, which is however rare in the case of regions. In the EU, actorness is closely related to the controversial issue of “competencies” (who has the right to decide what?), ultimately determined by the Member States. Actorness suggests a growing capacity to act that follows from the strengthened presence of the regional unit in different contexts, as well as from the actions that follow the interaction between the actor and its external environment. Actorness with reference to the outside world is thus not only a simple function of regionness, but also an outcome of a dialectic process between endogenous and exogenous forces.

Bretherton and Vogler (2006: 30) identify four requirements for actorness with reference to the EU:

1. shared commitment to a set of overarching shared values and principles;
2. domestic legitimation of decision processes, and priorities, relating to external policy;
3. the ability to identify policy priorities and to formulate consistent and coherent policies; and
4. the availability of, and capacity to utilize, policy instruments (diplomacy, economic tools and military means).

Obviously, these requirements are fulfilled to different degrees in different EU foreign policy relations and in different foreign policy issue areas: from the “near abroad” to far away regions; and from the areas of trade—in which the EU is a strong actor—to security—where the competence given to the EU is contested and highly controversial. In other words, actorness is shifting over time, between issue areas and between foreign policy relations. This has to do with the peculiar nature of the EU as an actor and the complexity of its foreign policy machinery.

The unique feature of regional actorness is that it must be created by voluntary processes and therefore depends more on dialogue and consensus building than on coercion. This process is the model Europe holds out as the preferred world order, since this is the way the new Europe (as organised by the EU) has developed in its more recent peaceful evolution, in contrast with its historically more violent development. With increased levels of actorness in different fields of action and different parts of the world, Europe will be able to influence the world order towards its own preferred model of civilian power: dialogue, respect for different interests within an interregional, pluralist framework based on democracy, social justice and equality, multilateralism and international law (Telò 2006).
2.4. Regional actorship

The concept of regional actorship is not specifically related to the EU as a global actor but is meant to serve as an analytical framework in studying the transformation of any region from object to subject, that is with a certain actor capacity in its external relations. These components can compensate for each other’s weaknesses. A weak presence can for instance be compensated for by stronger internal cohesion or effectively organised actorness. Even the ACP countries, a “region” completely constructed by the EU, have been able to exercise some leverage in negotiations with the EU. On the other hand a strong presence does not necessarily lead to regional actorship. North America as organised in NAFTA for instance is strong in terms of presence but weak in terms of regionness and actorness. In fact NAFTA cannot be considered a regional actor since it is lacking an external dimension. The Southeast Asia region as organised by ASEAN, and increasingly East Asia organised in ASEAN Plus Three (APT), as well as the Southern Cone of Latin America organised in Mercosur are increasing their actorship. Other regions completely lack actorship, for instance the Mediterranean, which is a construction by the EU Neighbourhood Policy, and Central Asia, which can be described as a “pre-region”.

3. The EU and global development

During the 1980s and into the 1990s, development became, in accordance with the Washington Consensus, more or less synonymous with globalisation. However, after increasing social turbulence, collapsing states and “new wars” in the second half of the 1990s, came the realisation that the global poverty problem would not be solved by itself, and with the shocking news of immediate climate change, the understanding of development became more complex once again. At the start of the new millennium the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were announced at a major UN conference. Development became a demanding policy area referred to as “sustainable development” or “global development”. Sustainable Development was defined by the Brundtland Commission as development that “meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). This definition is more about intergenerational justice than about what sort of development is desirable, and to the ecological dimension have been added economic, social and political dimensions as well as an emphasis on cultural diversity, which make the concept more comprehensive. For a comprehensive analysis, interdisciplinary approaches are necessary. Since nobody wants unsustainable development the concept of development will do. Nevertheless, the concept of sustainable development continues to be in use, not least in the EU’s development thinking. Sustainable development was introduced as a central goal in the Amsterdam Treaty and a strategy was proposed during the Swedish Presidency (at the June 2001 Summit). The strategy (2005-2010) was reviewed and confirmed in 2005. “Sustainable development offers the European Union a positive long-term vision of a society that is more prosperous and more just, and which promises a cleaner, safer, healthier environment — a society which delivers a better quality of life for us, for our children, and
for our grandchildren” (European Commission 2001a: 2). The security situation was mentioned as one reason for the review of the strategy, since new security threats, such as terrorism, natural disasters and health scares had led to a heightened sense of vulnerability.

Global development can in its most general sense be defined as an improvement in the quality of international relations, which traditionally are described as “anarchic”. Global development implies that standards applied in most domestic systems are taken as norms in the international system as well. Global Development (a central concept in the UN as well as in Swedish development policy) or Sustainable Development (which seems to be the preferred concept in the EU development policy) constitutes a comprehensive policy field containing a number of more concrete policies: trade and economic cooperation, international development cooperation, foreign and security policy, and environmental policy.

The EU’s Development policy is rooted in the historical colonial relations of its member states. Development policy was formally introduced as an area with (complementary) EU competence with the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. Following nearly a decade of dubious performance in this area, negotiations between the Council and the Commission resulted in a joint policy statement in 2000 stipulating the principles and objectives of the EU’s development policy. After the European Parliament was brought into discussions, these principles and objectives were revised in 2005—also reflecting external events such as the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York in September 2001, and the adoption by state leaders of the Millennium Development Goals—and referred to as the “European Consensus on Development” (European Union 2000, 2005).

Hence the EU’s objective to become a global development actor have been spurred on as much by efforts to consolidate the EU internally (the endogenous factor) as by global and multilateral developments (the exogenous factor). In fact, the two are closely related. Attempts to move toward a coordinated and coherent EU development policy need to be understood within the context of a more general discussion of coherence of aid and aid effectiveness. A number of mechanisms for aid coordination in Africa are already in place, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Paris Agenda, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), and a variety of budget support mechanisms and Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPs).

The European Commission’s official brief is to systematically and constructively exploit the potential for complementarity and synergy within the EU and to assist the member states in developing their own aid systems and the Union’s joint position in the international aid architecture. The EU coordination arrangements should include a common framework for aid delivery, including analytical work, planning, and implementation (European Commission 2004; European Union 2000, 2005). The debate over the common EU development policy carries a particular emphasis on the delineation of roles between the EU and member states. The “value added” of the Commission is an important, but also contested, element in the discussion about the EU’s development policy. According to the Commission, “Community action is more neutral than action by the Member States, which have their own history and are bound by a specific legal system. Community solidarity and the Community’s integrated approach to cooperation are undoubtedly major assets” (European Commission 2000b: 4). Moreover, the size of Community aid provides leverage to increase coherence between
disparate policy areas, such as humanitarian aid, trade, and security. The Commission also claims to provide “added value” through its ability to formulate and defend a common European position globally (European Commission 2004c: 7).

From this picture emerges the Commission’s priority of promoting a common European position within global and multilateral coordination initiatives, such as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the MDGs. The EU’s official view is that it should strive toward being a single unified actor at all “levels of governance” in the development community (multilateral, interregional, regional, and country level). The argument raised here is that the role of the EU and the Commission is undeniably ambiguous. This paper looks at this issue with regard to Africa.

4. The EU’s development policy in Africa

Historically, the EU’s partnership with ACP has emphasized humanitarian issues and trading relationships with former colonies, but it is now being redefined in a variety of ways. The EU-ACP relations are now being described by EU policy-makers in more symmetric terms, as ‘partnerships’, and as cooperation between equal partners, trying to achieve a common agenda. There is also a stronger emphasis on for example, reciprocal trade, supporting regional based economic cooperation and integration, human rights, democracy and good governance. We are facing a major transformation of a historical relationship, of interregionalism, although the outcome still lacks concrete shape.

The EU’s official policy on Africa, through the Cotonou Agreement and the more recent Joint Africa-EU Strategy, is designed to promote Africa’s development and to eradicate poverty on the African continent (European Union 2005). The new Cotonou Agreement has three pillars: development cooperation, economic and trade cooperation, and the political dimension. The CPA differs from earlier cooperation frameworks at least in terms of the following (Brolin 2007):

1. More emphasis on political dialogue, including on matters such as conflict and peace building, human rights, good governance and rule of law;
2. A more participatory approach, searching to include civil society and private sector actors in dialogue and implementation to a larger extent;
3. A strengthened focus on poverty reduction;
4. A new framework for economic trade cooperation, through the regional negotiation of Partnership Agreements with increasing emphasis on reciprocity and the full integration of ACP countries into the world economy in conformity with WTO provisions;
5. A reform of financial cooperation, decentralising parts of the administrative and financial responsibilities towards the receiving countries, and introducing performance-based criteria into development cooperation.

The European Development Fund (EDF) is the main funding instrument for development cooperation under the Cotonou Agreement, although ACP states are also eligible for DCI thematic instrument funding. The EDF is in turn funded by the EU Member States (it is not “budgetised” within the EC). The 10th EDF covers the 2008-2013 period, with a total
of €22.7 million (a substantial increase compared with the 9th EDF, with its initial allocation of €13.8 for 2000-2007). Regional integration is an increasingly important goal of EU-ACP cooperation. Under the 10th EDF, the regional cooperation envelope almost doubled to €1.78 billion. In terms of regional integration among ACP countries, the Commission has called on the EU to support the five priorities of strengthening regional institutions; building regional integrated markets; supporting business development; connecting regional infrastructure networks; and developing regional policies for sustainable development (CEC 2008d; see also CEC 2008a and 2008e).

Over the last few years, intercontinental dialogue and cooperation between the EU and the AU have become increasingly important. An important step in this development was the EU’s own Strategy for Africa (CEC 2005d). This strategy was criticised for its European bias by African leaders, who were concerned that they had not been properly consulted on it. This led to the initiation in February 2007 of talks on a joint strategy, to be developed and owned by both continents. The resulting JAES was adopted at the second EU–Africa Summit in Lisbon in December 2007, and now serves as the overarching policy framework for intercontinental relations, complementing rather than replacing other frameworks such as the CPA and the Union for the Mediterranean (former Euro-Mediterranean Partnership). The AU and its commission has a central role in the strategy, and this is the first time that the EU takes part to a framework dealing with Africa as a single continent.

The JAES is, in terms of declared principles, based on a shared vision, aiming to “move away from a traditional relationship and forge a real partnership characterised by equality and the pursuit of common objectives” (point 9a). The JAES is significant in its intention to create a more overtly political relationship between the two continents. The strategy focuses on eight thematic so-called strategic partnerships, which reach well beyond the traditional spheres of aid and development. These are:

- Peace and Security;
- Democratic Governance and Human Rights;
- Trade, Regional Integration and Infrastructure;
- Millennium Development Goals;
- Energy;
- Climate Change;
- Migration, Mobility and Employment; and
- Science, Information Society and Space.

Each of the partnerships comes with a specific, jointly agreed Action Plan attached for the period 2008-2010. These list concrete, measurable actions to be taken jointly by the EU–Africa Summit in Sirte, Libya in 2010. The JAES also has an elaborate institutional architecture that is designed to involve a wide range of stakeholders (parliaments, civil society and the private sector) on both continents in its governance and implementation, although there remains substantial lack of clarity as regards the exact modalities of their engagement.

More than two years into the JAES, it is still early days, but it is nevertheless clear that one challenge is in implementation. The initial work has mainly been about setting up the joint structures necessary to make the strategy work. It remains to see to what extent it will deliver. A problem in this context is the fact that the JAES suffers from “a critical lack of
awareness of its existence, let alone its substance, architecture, processes and recent achievements” among key stakeholders (Tywushik and Sherriff 2009). The strategy also remains underfunded, and key institutions remain reluctant to prioritise it as long as this is the case. The JAES is funded by previously existing instruments that were not set up for this specific purpose (EDF, DCI, ENPI, IFS), which may lead to synergy problems.

5. The EU’s development policy on the country level in Africa

Countries are still the most important counterparts in international development cooperation. This section draws on a general overview from a number of countries in Eastern and Southern Africa and then analyzes ongoing processes of donor coordination (or the lack of such coordination) in Tanzania. The Tanzanian case is often referred to as a success story for donor coordination, and it is therefore relevant to analyze the EU’s role in this process. The focus on countries is motivated by the fact that we need to know to what extent EU acts as “one” on country level.

Although the trend is towards increased donor coordination on country-levels throughout many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, it is a process marked by significant problems, many of which of can be attributed to the EU and the European Commission. It is widely recognized that there are tensions between the EU member states and the Commission, as well as between individual EU member states. Dearden “identifies the conflicting objectives for development policy amongst the member states as lying at the heart of the EU’s development policy problems” (Dearden 2003: 105). Similarly, a recent review by the Commission shows the weak progress of donor coordination within the EU. In fact only about 30 per cent of member states use the EU’s Common Framework for Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) as a tool for bilateral programming (half of the old EU-15 use CSPs). As an indication of the prevailing challenges, only around half of the member states (13 of EU-25, 6 of EU-15) have indicated a willingness to use one common EU multi-annual strategic programming document per partner country (European Commission 2004e). Notable among the EU member states not giving an affirmative response to the Commission’s call for coordination were France, the UK and the Netherlands (European Commission 2004e).

This picture of a low degree of coordination within the EU is sustained in a comparison of the policy declarations coming out of the Commission and EU capitals with the role attributed to the EU in the authors’ interviews with field officers in Eastern and Southern Africa. The official aspiration of the EU is that:

> the Delegation should work closely with the diplomatic missions of the EU Member States, particularly the one representing the EU Presidency… [The Delegation is] a natural point of contact between the EU and the Mozambican authorities as well as others in this country. (European Commission 2006b)

---

2 See http://europafica.net/jointstrategy/#financing
The situation “on the ground”, however, tells a different story. Rather than performing as a platform for coordination between EU member states, the role of the Delegations is concisely summarized by the Head of Delegation of the European Commission in Kenya, who describes the Commission as “just another donor” (interview, Nairobi, 2004). Notwithstanding some scattered examples of the EU Troika and the Council President acting as a coordination mechanism, interviewees further assert that the EU does not function as a hub for coordination between EU member state initiatives and the Commission. Indeed, tensions are apparent between Brussels and the EU member states, and also between Brussels and the Commission delegations in the field (interviews with EU donor representatives in Southern and Eastern Africa, 2004).

The lack of EU-driven coordination on the country level should not distract from the general trend towards increased donor coordination in Eastern and Southern Africa, and large parts of Africa as a whole. These coordination processes are not centred around the EU or the European Commission, but instead revolve around a series of other mostly multilateral and sometimes loosely organized coordination mechanisms, such as the Paris Agenda, the MDGs, the PRSPs, country-based mechanisms for budget support and SWAPs. Just like any other large donor, the Commission occasionally takes on the role as “lead donor” in a particular sector under a SWAP, but it typically falls short of its declared commitment to be involved and push for EU-based coordination. As a senior official of the Delegation of the European Commission in Mozambique points out, describing the Commissions’s role in the field of HIV/AIDS:

> The Commission is almost a Byzantine bureaucracy in certain respects... All the others harmonize including the Norwegians, the Dutch, the Irish. And they ask me that as we have agreed in principle on some many things, why can’t you also take part in this? I try to tell them that it is not because we don’t want to, but we have rules. But I know they still think this is an odd position. (Interview in Maputo, Mozambique, February 2005)

This problematic role of the European Commission is shared by other bilateral donors. One donor representative described the Delegation of the European Commission as “probably the most difficult donor to cooperate with because of its unique and bureaucratic administrative routines and funding mechanisms” (Interview, Maputo, February 2005). Another EU member state representative described the Commission as “someone who likes to go his own ways and always follows the dictates from Brussels instead of supporting existing coordination efforts” (interview, Maputo, February 2005). Addressing the reasons for the lack of coordination this interviewee also suggested that many donor officials regard coordination as “an extra burden that takes away focus from the ordinary work [and from] their own programmes” (interview, Maputo, February 2005).
5.1. The Case of Tanzania

For a number of years Tanzania has been a testing ground for various coordination attempts and it is often held out as a success case for donor coordination and alignment. It is one of a relatively small number of recipient countries for which an action plan for coordination has been completed, and its implementation is underway (OECD/DAC 2005b).

The European Commission’s program, together with the individual EU member states, account for over half of the external aid to Tanzania (European Commission 2006c: 1). The European Commission runs its own program of support to Tanzania and eleven EU member states have bilateral programs. Tanzania is seen as one of the prime countries targeted by the Commission for an increase in EU coordination (Lehtinen 2003). One of the Commission’s official aims is to coordinate “closely with the Embassies of the EU Member States in Dar es Salaam, to ensure that European Aid makes a coherent and effective contribution to Tanzania’s development efforts” (European Commission 2006c: 1).

Efforts to increase coordination in Tanzania dates back at least to the mid 1990s, when the Tanzanian government and some of its longest standing partners from the Nordic countries established a National Poverty Eradication Strategy, which was to provide a common platform for identifying and prioritizing action, formulating policy and conducting joint evaluation and monitoring missions. The Tanzanian government also presented a number of key documents—in particular the Tanzania Assistance Strategy (TAS) and the Development Vision 2005—indicating its commitment to poverty reduction, which donors were invited to support. During the late 1990s a number of European donors (Denmark, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK) jointly contributed more than US$85 million for establishing a Multilateral Debt Relief Fund (MDF). The funds were disbursed into a special account, and payments were made when debt obligations were due. The stated aim was to create a budget surplus to be used in the social sector, and to qualify Tanzania as a Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC).

According to Lehtinen (2003) the coordination efforts put in place during the 1990s were beginning to show some progress when they were “interrupted” by the Bretton Woods institutions in the late 1990s, when the PRSP was introduced as the main platform for donor coordination. Lehtinen argues that there was a lack of compatibility regarding both process and content between earlier initiatives and the PRSP. Nevertheless multilateral and bilateral donors rapidly lined up behind the PRSP initiative and, following the adoption of a full PRSP in October 2000, this has served as the main platform for coordination in Tanzania.

As a result of the priority accorded to the PRSP and the HIPC, in 2001 the European Commission joined forces with other donors in an effort to transform the MDF into a Poverty Reduction Budget Support (PRBS). The aim of the PRBS was to support sectoral budgets with strong links to poverty reduction and at the same time increase both the predictability of donor flows and the level of ownership by the recipient. To this end donors began providing budget support either directly to the national budget (through the Ministry of Finance) or earmarked to specific sector baskets within the framework of different SWAPs.

Progress in the use of budget support as a means to increase coordination was reported in a review undertaken jointly by the Tanzanian government and a group of development
partners (Government of Tanzania and Development Partners 2004). The report recognized increasing “trust and continued dialogue” between Tanzania and the donors, which is important in furthering aid effectiveness. There was also genuine progress in donor coordination and alignment. For example, recent reforms have considerably raised the level of predictability of aid procurements. Increased cooperation between donors has resulted in a project to develop a common calendar of project cycles to be synchronized with the government’s budget system, which will provide the Tanzanian government with periods of “quiet times” to enable it to focus on budgetary processes rather than engaging with donors.

In parallel to the increasing use of budget support, a series of mechanisms and institutions for donor coordination have been initiated. The hub within this structure is the Tanzania Development Partners Group (DPG), which comprises over thirty bilateral and multilateral agencies, including the European Commission and all EU member states active in Tanzania (DPG 2007). Voluntary consensus is the basis of the DPG’s work, and explicit goals are to identify common positions on certain policy issues and to entrust a “lead donor” to be the main voice in relations with the Tanzanian government in most fields of development cooperation, such as agriculture, private sector development, financial sector, transport, energy, education, health, governance, legal sector, local government, public services, hiv/aids, environment, water and sanitation.

Linked to the DPG are a number of SWAP groups that address technical sectoral (or thematic) issues, and then report back to the DPG. Efforts are made to link up sectoral initiatives to key processes at the national level (such as budget planning) and to encourage the use of joint reviews and information sharing. The success of coordination varies across sectors and themes. The Commission is active in some of the SWAPs where most progress has been observed; for instance in primary education, where the Commission cooperates with Canada, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden through a system of pooled funding (GDPRD 2005: 57). The Commission is also engaged, together with Denmark, Japan, Ireland and the World Bank, in setting up a SWAP in agriculture.

There are therefore a number of donor coordination initiatives at the country level in Tanzania. However, despite the European Commission’s stated ambition of forging a common and coordinated EU development policy, where the Commission is a hub for coordination among the EU member states, there is little or no evidence of this in situ. As the Tanzanian case shows, this situation does not reflect a lack of demand for donor coordination, but rather reflects the lack of effectiveness and legitimacy of the EU in these processes. One donor official in Tanzania makes a similar statement as the aforementioned Kenyan Head of Delegation: “the European Commission representation is just like any other bilateral or multilateral donor agency acting on policy issues” (e-mail correspondence, 13 January 2003). In some cases the European Commission representative or acting EU Chairman could act as chairman in donor meetings on practical issues where the EU member states try to act together, but “the European Commission does not have a bigger influence than any of the member states in these discussions” (e-mail correspondence 13 January 2003).
6. Conclusion

According to the analysis carried out in this paper there is no strong evidence that the EU is a consistent/coordinated actor in the field of “global development” in Africa. The institutions of the EU (the Council, the Commission, and the Parliament) have been largely unsuccessful in developing a common EU development policy, representing the member states and the EU as a whole. The European Consensus on Development is, as one donor official in an EU member state put it, “ice thin.” Since aid and development policy is one of the areas of EU action subject to shared competence, individual EU member states can and do continue to conduct international development policy according to national priorities and preferences.

Due to the coexistence of EU development cooperation policy and policies pursued by the individual EU member states, there is a significant contrast between the EU’s official policy discourse and the logic of development cooperation taking place in practice, especially on the ground in recipient countries in Africa. A complete communitarization of international development cooperation is not politically desirable for many EU member states and would presumably be of questionable value for a number of developing countries (Grimm, 2010).

This study highlights the ambiguous nature of the EU as an actor within this policy field. Donor coordination is rapidly improving at the country level, but these processes are usually centred upon a variety of largely multilateral or ad hoc country-based mechanisms rather than the EU. Indeed, the EU does not function as a platform for coordination between the member states. In fact, arguably, the European Commission can in this capacity be regarded as “just another donor” or “the twenty-eighth” EU member state, and the Union as a whole is not “acting as one”. The Commission conducts its own aid policies, rather than serves as the hub for donor coordination within the EU as a whole, resulting in that the EU demonstrates weak actorship in this policy field in Africa.

The evidence presented in this paper suggests that the much-vaunted “value added” aspect of the Commission’s development policy is ambiguous in countries and regions where there is a history of engagement by the EU member states (especially in Africa). The Commission has listed nine specific sectoral areas in which it claims to have a comparative advantage over other development actors (these include trade and regional development, environment, infrastructure development, and democracy and human rights). This list is clearly motivated by reference to the EU’s own historical genesis in terms of peace and welfare, rather than by its track record in developing coherent policy towards the South. In my view, the rhetoric represented by the European Consensus appears to be, above all, a device to boost the Commission’s legitimacy.

The fragmented administrative responsibility within the EU’s institutions is another factor that severely limits the EU’s actorship. The geographical division of responsibilities for external relations within the EU Commission is indeed problematic with an unsustainable overlap between the mandates of DG Development and DG External Relations (Grimm 2010). Furthermore, interviewees from various member states with practical experience working with the Commission testify to its inflexible bureaucracy and a lack of willingness to cooperate with other agencies and EU member countries, indicating a lack of commitment to representing a unified EU.
How should we understand these developments? I contend that the EU has failed to enact its officially desired role within the field of development cooperation in large parts of Africa as a result of its inappropriate balancing between two elements in pursuing its policies: functionalism and identity (Söderbaum and Stålgren, 2010). As already noted, there is a strong emphasis in the donor community on aid effectiveness, donor coordination, and joint and functional problem solving. Functional coordination can be seen as a response to prevailing resource ineffectiveness and duplication of aid. The predicted outcome for actors engaged in a functionalist mode of collaboration is increased specialization and a functional division of labor, whereby each donor gives up its engagement in some areas in order to focus on specific sectors or programs where it has a comparative advantage (for example, roads, urban water management, legal sector reform). In these selected issue areas, donors coordinate their efforts and engage in joint missions based on shared goals, hoping to achieve economies of scale and increased effectiveness through mutual learning and specialization. Functionalism thus helps to explain the general trend toward donor coordination as part of the Paris Agenda for aid effectiveness and donor coordination around the MDGs. It also prevails in much of the policy discourse around the European Consensus on Development, particularly in the search for comparative advantage by the Commission and the EU member states.

Although a functionalist perspective underpins much of the policy debate and official proclamations of how EU policy should look, it does not, however, explain the general lack of donor coordination occurring on the ground, where it is really needed. This chapter shows that the EU’s largely ineffective region-building and coordination strategies in Africa have not been primarily driven by a concern to increase aid effectiveness according to a functional dynamic but are instead driven by political and identity concerns. When policies are driven by identities rather than by functional objectives, the opportunities for compromise and for reaching common ground are reduced. A donor’s identity is strengthened by increased visibility in development cooperation (including symbols, “status,” and flag-waving) (Stålgren 2006). As one donor official put it: “A donor who does not give is not a donor.” (interview, Harare, 2001). Functionally oriented actors trying to solve concrete problems often consider coordination as a “win-win” situation. In contrast, a donor driven by the need to manifest its own identity tends to see coordination as a “zero-sum game,” at least to the extent that the increased visibility and profile of one donor comes at the direct expense of the profiles of other donors. This pattern tends to reinforce a conventional nation-state logic and prevent a post-Westphalian tendency toward interregionalism and increased coordination.

The analysis in this paper suggests that the EU’s ambition in development relations with Africa is not only driven by the effort to increase aid effectiveness but also to build the EU’s identity and reputation as a global actor. In fact much of what the Commission does is ultimately aimed at consolidating the EU as a global actor, establishing presence and building actorness. A senior policy advisor of a EU member state concurred: “Development policy is a tool for the Commission to build the EU as a global actor” (interview, Stockholm January 2007). The Commission seeks presence not simply as “just another donor”, but as a collective and global actor, thereby representing both the EU as a regional polity as well as the EU member states. The Commission’s failure to achieve this goal in the field of development cooperation (beyond the Commission’s own aid programs) reflects its inability to present to
EU member states its comparative advantage and a coherent “value added” proposition relative to other coordination mechanisms or national programmes.

From a functional perspective it is not clear what the EU can do more effectively than other donors and coordination mechanisms, or why it should take on a leading role in development cooperation. At the same time, the field of development cooperation remains a scene for the manifestation of international identities, not only for the Commission but for most donors. This explains why most member states are not overly enthusiastic about a common EU development policy: it simply competes with their identity as donors. To increase its actoriness, the Commission must embark on the double mission of convincingly demonstrating its comparative advantage to functionally oriented actors and of creating a European donor identity that breaks the present zero-sum logic as donors pursue their “nationalistic” self-manifestation in Africa.
References (incomplete)


European Union (2000), The European Community’s Development Policy, Statement by the Council and the Commission, Brussels, 10 November.


Lehtinen, Terhi (2003), The Coordination of European Development Cooperation in the Field: Myth or Reality?, ECDPM: 19.


OECD/DAC (2005b), Survey on Harmonisation and Alignment—Progress in Implementing Harmonisation and Alignment in 14 Partner Countries, Fourth Draft: OECD/DAC.


Regional consultancy to improve donor coordination (2004) Fixa andreas Soul City 2004
