

THE PLAN AFRICA: LIMITS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF SPANISH DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

This document is a FOROAOD comment and refers to the FRIDE backgrounder and the presentations of the virtual room 'Sub-Saharan Africa'.

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Although its presentation seems to have been speeded up by the 'Cayucos crisis', the 2006-2008 Plan Africa of the Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MAEC) is part of the reform of Spanish development cooperation.

When analysing the value, scope and operating capacity of the Plan devised specifically for sub-Saharan Africa, it is convenient not to lose sight of the new ongoing processes in Spanish development cooperation. In this context – undoubtedly very different from that at the beginning of the decade – the following aspects, among others, have been influential:

- a significant increase in funds, not only by the MAEC but also by decentralised development cooperation;¹
- an effort to promote participative planning amongst the most significant development cooperation actors in Spain;²
- a change in discourse towards terms such as 'coordination and harmonisation', 'aid effectiveness', 'co-development', among others; and
- a slow but tangible institutional and funds management reorganisation.³

Thus, the Plan Africa is integrated in a process of important changes in the field of Spanish development cooperation - many of which are half-implemented and far from being consolidated.

On the other hand, the unique characteristics of the Plan Africa also reflect the advances and challenges of the reform, and, unquestionably, entail the risk of

¹ For example, the [Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation increased its funds by 230 percent between 2004 y 2006](#) and the [Autonomous Community of Madrid boosted its international assistance funds fourfold between 2002 y 2006](#), reaching 44 million Euros and 30.2 million Euros, respectively. Despite the fact that, in absolute terms, these are modest contributions when compared to the sum of 2,423 million Euros the [General Administration of the State allocated in 2006](#) to Official Development Assistance (a 22 percent increase compared to the sum of 1,984 Euros in 2004 of the State General Budgets), the quantitative leap made by the Autonomous Communities and municipalities in terms of development cooperation is worth mentioning. This favourably affects the almost certain achievement at the end of this legislature of devoting 0.5 percent of the Spanish Gross Domestic Product to international solidarity.

² In the last few years, there have been several planning processes which are - at least, in theory – participative, including the [2005-2008 Master Plan of Spanish Development Cooperation](#), the [2003-2006 Master Plan for Development Cooperation of the Government of Catalonia](#), the [2005-2008 Master Plan for Development Cooperation of the Community of Madrid](#) or the [2004-2007 Master Plan for Development Cooperation of the Community of Valencia](#). In addition, some municipalities have begun to define strategic lines of action, seemingly in harmony with the decentralised nature of development cooperation in Spain, including, among others, the [2006-2009 Master Plan for Development Cooperation of the Municipality of Bilbao](#) or the [2005-2008 Master Plan of the Municipality of Madrid](#).

³ For example, the [Development NGO qualifying procedure](#) in the new funding system of the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI) and the creation of regional development cooperation agencies by the Government of Catalonia and the Community of Madrid can be mentioned.

improvements in Spanish development cooperation becoming trapped in good intentions, political pragmatism and pressure from commercial and investment interests.

Given the considerable increase in public funds in this area, a lack of concrete results in the fight against poverty could weaken the strong support⁴ development cooperation receives from the Spanish society, especially, if a management capable of fulfilling numerous social claims were not consolidated.⁵

Following on FRIDE's backgrounder and HEGOA's (Institute for Development and International Cooperation Studies) contribution, the following aspects of the current state of Spanish development cooperation can be identified:

- The distance to the European context seems to be an obstacle Spanish development cooperation still finds difficult to overcome. Most of the Plan Africa leaves out the spirit, goals and contents of the European Consensus on Development and the EU Strategy for Africa, though both are mentioned in passing. It constitutes more of a defensive approach to irregular migration and the terrorist threat,⁶ whereas the main actors and multilateral organisations express almost unusual optimism in view of the future of the African continent.⁷
- The lack of a common vision of development cooperation in Spain constrains the coordination and complementarity among the actions carried out by the MAEC, the actors of the decentralised system (The Canary Islands, especially) and the private sector (business and religious). The Plan Africa refers only superficially to the possibilities of embracing the philosophy of the Paris Declaration in Spain (coordination and harmonisation among donors). It seems unlikely that operation and management costs - traditionally very high in a sector extremely divided into a great number of institutions loosely related to one another - could be reduced in this way.

⁴ The Eurobarometre on the attitude of European citizens towards development cooperation, [published in February, 2005](#), reveals that almost all Spaniards support international solidarity. Ninety-six percent of the Spaniards surveyed consider that development assistance is very or fairly important; hence, Spaniards are the third most supportive society among 25 European countries (Denmark and Cyprus hold the first and second positions, respectively). Another interesting piece of information is that 58 percent of the Spanish population surveyed thinks that the assistance provided by the government is 'too limited'; therefore, in no other European society (the second one is Great Britain with 38 percent) is there such a widespread support to boosting government funds.

⁵ Among the most important campaigns are the [Alianza Española contra la Pobreza](#) (Spanish Alliance Against Poverty) and the [Pobreza Cero \(Zero Poverty\) campaign](#), which can mobilise hundreds of thousands of people. In view of the high degree of sensitivity of the Spanish society before the need for Official Development Assistance (ODA), it seems obvious that claims not only refer to the financial aspect of the assistance but also to specific results, quantified and clearly attributable to the fight against poverty in Southern countries.

⁶ Thus, the introduction of the document highlights that the new image of Africa (according to the authors, in the Spanish public opinion) is also marked by 'disorganised migratory flows from Africa to the Spanish coast' and by the fact that 'African countries [are perceived] as temporary places for drug-dealing or refuges for organised crime networks or for the establishment of terrorist support and recruiting structures in African countries', p.11.

⁷ In addition to those included in the texts of FRIDE and HEGOA, the recent study on African economic forecasts made by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the [African Economic Outlook 2005/2006](#) reveals that 'the prospects for most of Africa have been the best for many years now'. According to [a recent press release](#), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) agrees on this positive assessment, claiming that 'this is a moment of great opportunity for Africa (...) to create a virtuous circle of reform and faster growth, paving the way for sustained poverty reduction'. Even according to the [2006 Corruption Perception Index](#), published by Transparency International at the beginning of November, the trend is positive. As compared to last year, most African countries have improved their score (though in a fairly discreet way) and, for the first time in many years, no African country holds the first three positions on the list of most corrupt countries in the world.

- The little political independence of development cooperation in Spain raises doubts over the ultimate purpose of aid. An analysis of the Plan Africa easily reveals the influence exerted by the interests of other ministries (especially, the ministries of Economy, Finance and Interior), in addition to the already traditional subordination to foreign policy geo-strategic interests. Thanks to its 'honesty', it also allows studying the different allocations of the actual calculation of Official Development Assistance (ODA),⁸ not always linked to the fight against poverty.
- These fresh dynamics seem, in addition, not to follow the same path and instead to ignore the lessons learnt. Hence, the Plan Africa omits, mostly, the activities of the religious congregations, many of which have been present in the most conflicting regions of the African continent for decades. It seems obvious that the experience gained by these Spanish groups has an added value in many respects (networks, knowledge, languages, and logistics), although it is necessary to distinguish assistance actions from missionary actions, which, on many occasions - but not always - are diluted into the work of religious collaborators.
- Immersed in a process of change, the Spanish development cooperation sector tends to adopt an attitude of little integration towards the South. Most of the goals of the Plan Africa are not in line with the demands, needs and priorities expressed by African governments and societies. Nonetheless, there is widespread concern for purely Spanish interests (immigration, access to energy and fishing resources, for example) and for Spanish diplomacy and cooperation capacities.
- This develops also into a certain extremely ambitious activism which has neither a follow-up and results-assessment system nor effect and impact indicators. The lack of a clear outcome of the Plan Africa, in terms of human development, can pose a serious obstacle to formulate and adjust coherent and effective actions.

This problem should not lead to pessimism with respect to the ability of Spanish development cooperation actors to promote African human development. In addition to the geographic proximity, there is a baggage of experience, values and interconnections which are extremely favourable for a true commitment to sub-Saharan Africa if coordinated in an effective and organised way.

To face the complex conditions of sub-Saharan Africa in a constructive and solid way, the following processes could be accelerated and strengthened:

- To provide the Plan Africa with a sectoral planning, especially in relation to the most relevant objectives - fight against poverty and contribution to the development agenda.⁹ This should clearly define the desired effects and impacts, establishing a battery of indicators consistent, at least, with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), within a special commitment to basic needs. With this, the inconsistency between the Plan Africa and the Master Plan can also be reduced, as long as the geographical priorities of the sectoral plan to fight against poverty are consistent with the stipulations of the Master Plan.

⁸ This calculation is defined by the [guidelines on statistical reports](#) of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD.

⁹ The Plan Africa itself acknowledges that 'the essential pillar of the commitment to sub-Saharan Africa is development cooperation', p. 11, translation by the author.

- To take advantage of the creation of the Board for Africa (*Mesa para África*) not only to call on civil society to participate but also to seek the involvement of and coordination with the decentralised development cooperation; and to promote, within the existing constraints, the complementarity of the actions of the Autonomous Communities and municipalities with the strategies of the General Administration, paying special attention to coordination with the Canary Islands.
- To seek coordination, connection and permanent debate with actors of European and international development cooperation, beyond the financial participation in multilateral funds or the presence of Spanish officials in different organisations. In this sense, it would be convenient to readopt the initiative of holding an international summit on development cooperation with Africa proposed by the Spanish parliament a few months ago.¹⁰ Europe is aware of how Spain is affected by Africa's proximity, but has little knowledge of the constructive initiatives of development cooperation envisaged within the framework of the Plan Africa.
- To systematise the experience gained by different development cooperation actors in the last few decades, with a 'photograph' of the existing capacities in relation to the fight against poverty in sub-Saharan Africa (experience in the implementation of projects and programmes, local actors agendas);¹¹ and to take advantage of the valuable information made available to Spanish organisations that belong to international organisations or federations active and/or deeply rooted in sub-Saharan Africa.
- To open an active and permanent dialogue with African organisations, above all, with those on the field, but also with those present in Spain; to expand the vision of African problems and potentials through the experience of the very societies to which the assistance is directed - one of the key moments could be the Second Meeting of African and Spanish Women to be held in May 2007;¹² and to promote the articulation of the 'African voice' in Spain through platforms shared by groups and institutions of both countries.¹³
- To promote research and studies, especially academic,¹⁴ in order to build a sound foundation to analyse the enormous complexity of the African continent, preferably in coordination with other European institutions.¹⁵

¹⁰ At a [plenary session held on 28 June 2006](#), a few days prior to the presentation of the Plan Africa, the parliamentary group *Coalición Canaria* (Canarian Coalition) asked the Spanish Prime Minister that the Central Government coordinate a 'top-level' international summit on development cooperation with Africa in order to 'better streamline all the efforts'.

¹¹ In this sense, it would be convenient to update and increase the amount of information contained in the [Country Strategy Papers](#) (CSP), whose description of current and future Spanish actors is still incomplete and/or superficial.

¹² It was agreed to be held through the [Mozambique Declaration on Women and Development](#) of May 2006, during the official visit of the Spanish Vice-Prime Minister and the State Secretary for International Development Cooperation for Kenya and Mozambique.

¹³ There are certain antecedents promoted mainly by the Canary Islands. [africa-infomarket](#) is a portal dedicated to the management of information on investments, development cooperation and cultural relations mainly with Western Africa. This resource is managed, among others, by the Canarian Government. [afrol news](#) is a news agency dedicated exclusively to Africa offering updated political, economic and social information both in English and Spanish. On the other hand, [afro mix](#), French in origin and focused on Africa and the Caribbean, features plenty of cultural contents and news (it has a section in Spanish). As to portals in English, the South African agency [Pambazuka News](#) is a good example of 'African voices' that deal with development, culture, conflicts, human rights and new technologies.

¹⁴ For example, the [Grupo de Estudios Africanos](#), GEA, (African Study Group) of the Autonomous University of Madrid and the [Centre d'Estudis Africans](#), CEA, (African Study Centre) of the University of

- To provide an in-depth analysis of the complex and not always beneficial link between migration and development; to overcome the superficial and disorganised approach adopted by most current co-development initiatives; to devote research efforts to this link;¹⁶ to involve African groups living in Spain; and, based on this, to design strategies adapted to each local and national context such as those proposed by the European Union Strategy for Africa.¹⁷

In sum, a more optimistic vision favouring creativity and acknowledging the existing abilities of Spain and the potential of sub-Saharan Africa could result in specific strategies impacting on African human development positively.

Spanish development cooperation should take advantage of favourable aspects such as involvement, flexibility and the lack of a significant colonial past in Africa to promote human development consistent with the demands, priorities and needs of recipient countries.

FRIDE organised the project **“Spanish Development Aid - Mid-term Review and a Proposal for a Participative Consultation”** between June 2006 and April 2007. This project aims to develop a consultation process about the current Spanish government’s development cooperation policy. We have created a forum for participation and debate, in order to assess the Spanish development cooperation reform agenda and to identify the main achievements and shortcomings in operationalising the initiatives based on the principle of “More Aid, Better Aid”. A set of recommendation guidelines were developed, through participative methods, with the objective of putting into practice the aspirations of the Spanish development cooperation policy.

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Barcelona are initiatives designed to research into and provide information on the realities of Africa in Spain.

¹⁵ The [Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies](#) (AEGIS) is a Euro-African platform dedicated to African studies, founded in 1991, to which the CEA of the University of Barcelona belongs. Its second international conference on African studies will be held in the Netherlands in mid-July 2007.

¹⁶ In June 2006, the OECD published two base documents on the academic debate over this link. [Effects of Migration on Sending Countries: What Do We Know?](#) analyses possible favourable scenarios for both countries (donor and recipient) within the European context and puts forward some recommendations with regards to the creation of synergies between migration and development cooperation. Reviewing many studies on these interconnections, [Migration Policy and Its Interactions With Aid, Trade and Foreign Direct Investment Policies: A Background Paper](#) chooses an approach focused mainly on the financial aspect (remittances).

¹⁷ As already mentioned by the HEGOA document, the EU has the objective of ‘transforming migration into a positive driving force in the process of development’ ([EU Strategy for Africa](#), p. 38) based on different strategies outlined in the press release by the Commission entitled [El nexo entre migración y desarrollo: algunas orientaciones concretas para la cooperación entre la UE y los países en vías de desarrollo](#) (The Link Between Migration and Development: Specific Orientation for the Cooperation between the EU and Developing Countries), September 2005.