



Center for European
Integration Studies

**Ablam Benjamin Akoutou,
Rike Sohn, Matthias Vogl,
Daniel Yeboah**

**The Future of the
Africa-EU Partnership:
Learning to think about
Opportunities**

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Ablam Benjamin Akoutou, Rike Sohn, Matthias Vogl, Daniel Yeboah

The four authors of this WAI-ZEI Paper coordinate the research and outreach activities of the West Africa Institute (WAI) and the Center for European Integration Studies (ZEI) in the framework of their joint research cooperation on „Sustainable Regional Integration in West Africa and Europe“. In the years 2012-2016, the project brings together researchers from West Africa and Europe to discuss pressing problems of regional integration from a political, economic and legal perspective taking into account a comparative approach.

The following reflections grew out of the Mid-Term Conference of the WAI-ZEI Research Cooperation on “Sustainable Regional Integration in West Africa and Europe”, held in Praia on 21-22 October 2013. The conference gathered researchers and practitioners from West Africa and Europe in order to discuss obstacles to and opportunities of sustainable regional integration. During the reflections, participants came to the conclusion that it is in the interest of the regional groupings in West Africa (ECOWAS, WAEMU and the Mano River Union) and of the European Union to further strengthen their cooperation in light of the challenges of globalization and the new policy approaches required.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not reflect the official policy or position of WAI, ZEI or the BMBF.

*Ablam Benjamin Akoutou, Rike Sohn, Matthias Vogl,
Daniel Yeboah*

The Future of the Africa-EU Partnership: Learning to think about Opportunities

Introduction

With the end of the colonial era, nation states in West Africa and Europe emancipated themselves by cooperating and integrating on a regional level. In the context of globalization and a changing world order, the idea of partnership has established itself at the core of African-European relations. However, given the global challenges ahead, the level of mutual political and economic exchange can still be further improved. Against the background of the upcoming Africa-EU Summit in Brussels, in April 2014, the team of coordinators of the WAI-ZEI research cooperation offers these reflections to advance the debate.

Acknowledging their different starting points and perspectives, Africa and Europe share common interests in areas which are likely to form the core of their future cooperation. Focusing on these areas is the basis for a pragmatic and manageable partnership, also for West African-European relations in particular:

1. Peace and security. Democracy, governance and human rights

Although the situation has improved compared to the devastating civil wars of the 1990s, West Africa is still characterized by fragile democracies which give room to disaffection among the population and create a breeding ground for rebel and terrorist movements, as well as organized crime such as human trafficking, arms and drugs trafficking, money laundering and counterfeiting.

Drivers and mechanisms of a common approach:

- In the past West African conflicts have worsened because of a misunderstanding of their root causes and a lack of timely and comprehensive response on the basis of political will, as well as a lack of right conceptual approaches. Therefore, a deeper understanding of West African conflicts will contribute to creating a common interest in long-term solutions by identifying the crucial determinants and by applying a more holistic approach with regards to means and actors.
- Linked to this, there is a need for long-term cooperation in the area of peace and security that takes into account the nexus between security, governance and development in addition to short-term conflict management measures. This nexus should be reflected in the existing governance systems on a local, national and regional level in both West Africa and Europe.

Proposed projects on a bi-regional level

Promotion of a “West African-European Research Network on Comprehensive Security”:

Bringing expertise from West African and European universities and research institutes together with civil society networks and political stakeholders from both regions and from various levels (regional, national, local), will combine research based insights on the root causes of conflict and the role of actors, with the practical experience of decision-makers and interest groups. Both perspectives can fertilize each other in order to provide a realistic assessment. Through this mechanism, dialogue will be enhanced and practical recommendations will be formulated. Finding out what the necessary measures for specific conflict situations are and suggesting actions that match existing realities would be a task of this network. As the security links are transcontinental, the network should also be. The network can work permanently in combined virtual and physical form. With thematic sub-working groups and with access to political stakeholders on both sides and a capacity for ad-hoc missions to provide expertise in potential conflict hotspots. The network should cooperate or integrate with existing structures in this sector, publish its outcomes and consult with decision-makers on a regular basis.

2. Sustainable and inclusive development. Economic growth and regional integration

The West African region has experienced unprecedented growth and investment rates over recent years due to the rise in commodity prices, the discovery of new natural resources and a certain level of political stability. The region also has a high renewable energy potential, the supply of water and arable land, as well as a young and growing population. However, growth has not impacted social and economic development in a way that has led to an improvement of intra-regional trade, employment opportunities or the general welfare of the population. Coupled with the illusion of a brighter future abroad, the young West African workforce migrate inside or outside of Africa.

Drivers and mechanisms of a common approach:

- Wide-ranging access to knowledge and competency in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are the most essential tools to overcome difficulties of infrastructure, allowing more regular exchange within West Africa and between the two regions. Therefore, improving African ICT knowledge should be a priority in order to spread information and to help unlock the potentials of the continent, particularly regarding the increasingly technically versatile young population.
- Open exchange should be enhanced on the level of regional organizations on both sides but particularly also on a Member State level. One task is to create interest for deeper engagement of Member States that have no colonial past and to streamline existing national development cooperation into the existing frameworks and treaties. In this context, the relationship between West Africa and Europe should further support contact between the private sectors of both regions. Regular exchange between representatives of these groups can not only improve their mutual understanding but may also create opportunities for cooperation and investment.

Proposed projects on a bi-regional level

Elaborate initiatives to foster the regional integration of national research and science policies in West Africa

Research, science and innovation are drivers of economic development and prerequisites to tackling global and Africa-specific problems. However in West Africa, science policies are lacking not only structures and funding on a national level, they are also mostly disconnected from each other on a regional level. Researchers rather stay in their own environment or choose to go to a non-African country. There are few opportunities for short and longer-term research projects on a shared basis where qualified scholars from different West African countries can meet to conduct research. West Africa therefore needs a regional research council or research agency to enable regional research projects by issuing regional calls and supporting their implementation with regard to management and administration. The regional integration of national science policies would allow added value to the research landscape and also to the economies of West Africa.

Establishing a regional agency for development cooperation

Setting-up a regional development agency for West Africa may increase local capacities for the implementation of development projects by pooling, further developing and disseminating existing expertise and resources within this field. Acting as a local clearing house and training center, the agency could support non-governmental and civil society organisations, increase local ownership and mutual understanding between development partners in West Africa and Europe. Furthermore, such an agency may facilitate the involvement of the diaspora.

3. Tackling global issues and capacity development

With the rise of emerging economies and the associated change towards a multi-polar world order, the economic and (geo-) political role of West Africa is increasing while the dominant role of Europe is more and more challenged. Thus, both have to redefine their global position and interests, not only in general but also towards each other. While power relations are shifting internationally, challenges associated with global public goods (such as climate change, international trade and finance, etc.) need even more coordination and cooperation at a global level.

Drivers and mechanisms for a common approach:

- There is still a scarcity of European knowledge about Africa and a missing sense for African sensitivities. If Europe wants to overcome its historical burden, it has to engage in a dialogue which is not only on an equal level in terms of actors but also in terms of equal thinking, creating win-win situations for both sides.
- The building and development of qualified human capacities remains crucial for the future of both regions. However, on the one hand capacity development has to be provided in Africa itself and on the other hand it has to be linked to the most current state of affairs in international research. Therefore, Africa and Europe have to forge innovative ways of cooperating, which strengthen the structural basis in the African education sector, which let African researchers share views with European researchers in a more permanent way and which open doors not only for African students to come to Europe but also to encourage European students' interest in the dynamics of a rising continent in their neighborhood.
- As global development partnerships are diversifying, development cooperation mechanisms should do so as well. Sharing best-practice and lessons learned is an open and flexible way to exchange experiences using a two-way street from Africa to Europe and vice versa. In order to avoid duplication and increasing complexity, existing structures on a local level should be further supported and streamlined with other platforms and actors.

Proposed projects on a bi-regional level

Create and support initiatives to facilitate the establishment of new and interdisciplinary West African Study Programs.

Innovative initiatives might bring African students to Europe not only to study but also to find good examples of specialized study programs that could be later installed in Africa. Their establishment could be implemented in parallel to an exchange of academics whose research can form a sound basis for a new education cycle. Furthermore, initiatives to increase the number of West African exchange students in Europe and European exchange students in Africa should be supported, e.g. through the establishment of an “Erasmus” program with a special African focus. The WAI-ZEI Cooperation is a good example of this type of cooperation. Existing bilateral university cooperation could be supported through the creation of joint platforms for mutual exchange and research and for the sharing of best practices. Double and joint degree programs are another option.

Creating a bi-regional database of best-practices and lessons learned focusing on local, national and regional solutions for global problems.

This database aims at sharing European experiences and approaches to climate change, energy, migration, demographic change and other global issues that might be particularly apt for West Africa and West African experiences which might be helpful for creating an interest in Europe, but also to foster regular dialogue and create new partnerships on a local level. These kinds of platforms need to be integrated within existing structures or be established as umbrellas.

Creating trilateral research partnerships

As global power shifts it also creates the opportunity for new coalition building. Trilateral partnerships between developing, developed and emerging nations can be a valuable addition to existing relations. These partnerships might again particularly make sense in the field of research and education on global issues as they foster mutual exchange and understanding and enable an environment in which it might be easier to join forces to tackle these problems.

The **West Africa Institute (WAI)** is a research center offering research, capacity-development and social dialogue on regional integration in West Africa. WAI is promoted by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), ECOBANK and the Government of Cape Verde. WAI is based in Praia Cape Verde.

The **Center for European Integration Studies (ZEI)** is an interdisciplinary research and further education institute at the University of Bonn.

WAI-ZEI Papers are published in the framework of the research cooperation both institutes conduct on “Sustainable regional integration in West Africa and Europe” in the years 2013-2016. They are intended to stimulate discussion about regional integration processes in West Africa and Europe from a comparative perspective and about the development of European-West African relations in the political and economic sector. Papers express the personal opinion of the authors.

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West Africa Institute

Avenida da Liberdade e Democracia,
Nº 9 – 5º andar Praia
Achada Santo António

BP 396- A
Cape Verde

Phone: +238-(0)262-40-59
www.westafricainstitute.org



Rheinische
Friedrich-Wilhelms-
Universität Bonn



Center for European
Integration Studies

Walter Flex-Straße 3
53113 Bonn

Phone: +49-(0)228-73-1810
www.zei.uni-bonn.de

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