
The conditionality of the European Union development aid to the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries

Industrialized countries have always been involved in development aid towards developing countries. However, a shift in such assistance happened after the Cold War with such development aid found to be embedded in a world system.

According to the world system theory, the world exists as a socioeconomic system. This system is characterized by a specific economic structure including a core, a periphery, and a semi-periphery with a certain hierarchy in power that reflects the unequal exchange of labor and resources (Coccia, 2019). The core of the system is made by dominant industrialized economic powers that receive cheap primary resources from the periphery and semi-periphery and transform them into high profit manufactured products. The periphery is made of dependent poor countries that rely on exporting cheap primary goods to the core and buy high profit manufactured products from the core. The semi-Periphery is made of countries that have both characteristics, meaning they act as periphery to the core and core to the periphery (Coccia, 2019).

A focus on the European Economic Community (EEC)'s development aid policy illustrates how the world system works. In the 1970s, the Lomé I Convention, a pact dealing with cooperation and development between the EEC and the countries of Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific (ACP) was signed. Its principal goal was to support ACP economically and socially while also strengthening political and economic relations with the EEC, through actions such as fostering trade and economic aid. This pact was characterized by a philosophy based on solidarity and equality (Sebahara, 1999; Balleix, 2005). The 1970s also concord with the oil crisis which had a huge impact on the ACP countries, resulting in their accumulation of debts, thus the need for development aid.

At the end of the Cold War, in 1989, with the downfall of the Soviet bloc, a new world order began (Gijs and Migani, 2019). The Western bloc became hegemonic and started to diffuse economic neoliberalism and liberal democracy. Economically, European countries behaved according to the Washington Consensus, with the European Development Fund evolving accordingly: Initially thought to help reduce poverty and stimulate development as an autonomous agency, it became turned into an instrument to assist ACP countries in implementing International Monetary Fund and World Bank-mandated structural reforms. Politically, developed countries conditioned aid to the implementation of democratic values such as free elections and respect for human rights. This shift translated into the Lomé IV Convention adopted in 1989 (Sebahara, 1999; Gijs and Migani, 2019).

From Lomé IV bis, in 1995, new rules appeared regarding development aid. The ACP countries could receive the funds only progressively, with a mid-term evaluation conditioning future payments. The shift meant that the development cooperation became increasingly aligned with the ACPs' performances rather than with their needs (Gijs and Migani, 2019).

The implementation of such a neoliberal philosophy provoked the reduction of public services and the increasing economic competition within and among developing countries, resulting in economic and political instability. Because of already critical situations of extreme unemployment and poverty, political and public opposition to governments were already common in the ACP countries. As a result, these countries often failed to follow the fundamental standards set by Western powers, failures that could be sanctioned by aid suspension (Sebahara, 1999; Gijs and Migani, 2019).

Aid conditionality, aid suspension, and its threat of use ultimately favored a world system dynamic stabilizing the status quo in terms of development inequalities: the ACP countries have continued to export cheap raw materials to the European market and the European States have continued to export more expensive manufactured products to the ACP countries (Balleix, 2005). As such, the world system keeps the ACP countries in the periphery, as they are too busy to compete for the European market (core), instead of emancipating from it (Langan 2018; Coccia, 2019).

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