

FAQ

FAQ

What is the ACP Group?

The African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) is an organisation created by the Georgetown Agreement in 1975. It is composed of African, Caribbean and Pacific States signatories to the Georgetown Agreement or the Partnership Agreement between the ACP and the European Union, officially called the "ACP-EC Partnership Agreement" or the "Cotonou Agreement".

What is its purpose?

The ACP Group's main goals are :

- sustainable development of its Member-States and their gradual integration into the global economy, which entails making poverty reduction a matter of priority and establishing a new, fairer, and more equitable world order ;
- coordination of the activities of the ACP Group in the framework of the implementation of ACP-EC Partnership Agreements;
- consolidation of unity and solidarity among ACP States, as well as understanding among their peoples ;
- establishment and consolidation of peace and stability in a free and democratic society.

Who are its members?

The ACP Group consists of 79 Member-States, all of them, save Cuba, signatories to the Cotonou Agreement which binds them to the European Union: 48 countries from Sub-Saharan Africa, 16 from the Caribbean and 15 from the Pacific.

List of ACP Countries

Angola - Antigua and Barbuda - Belize - Cape Verde - Comoros - Bahamas - Barbados - Benin - Botswana - Burkina Faso - Burundi - Cameroon - Central African Republic - Chad - Congo (Brazzaville) - Congo (Kinshasa) - Cook Islands - Cte d'Ivoire - Cuba - Djibouti - Dominica - Dominican Republic - Eritrea - Ethiopia - Fiji - Gabon - Gambia - Ghana - Grenada - Republic of Guinea - Guinea-Bissau - Equatorial Guinea - Guyana - Haiti - Jamaica - Kenya - Kiribati - Lesotho - Liberia - Madagascar - Malawi - Mali - Marshall Islands - Mauritania - Mauritius - Micronesia - Mozambique - Namibia - Nauru - Niger - Nigeria - Niue - Palau - Papua New Guinea - Rwanda - St. Kitts and Nevis - St. Lucia - St. Vincent and the Grenadines - Solomon Islands - Samoa - Sao Tome and Principe - Senegal - Seychelles - Sierra Leone - Somalia - South Africa - Sudan - Suriname - Swaziland - Tanzania - Timor Leste - Togo - Tonga - Trinidad and Tobago - Tuvalu - Uganda - Vanuatu - Zambia - Zimbabwe

Overview

The Group was originally created with the aim of coordinating cooperation between its members and the European Union. Its main objective was to negotiate and implement, together, cooperation agreements with the European Community.

Over the years, the Group extended its range of activities. Since then, cooperation among its members has gone beyond development cooperation with the European Union and covers a variety of fields spanning trade, economics, politics and culture, in diverse international fora such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Beginning of ACP-EU cooperation

Cooperation between the European Union and the ACP Group began in 1975 with the First Lome Convention but the origin of this type of partnership dates back to the birth of Europe itself as an organised regional entity. In fact, as soon as the Treaty of Rome was signed in 1957, it created an avenue for cooperation with the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) of the six signatory countries: Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg and Holland, i.e. essentially West and Central African countries with ties to France.

Regime of Association and the Yaoundé Conventions

A "Regime of Association" was devised in 1957 and endowed with resources from the first European Development Fund (EDF). In 1963 and 1969 18 African States and their six European counterparts signed the First and Second Yaoundé Conventions, supported by resources from the 2nd and 3rd EDF respectively. The agreements were geared mainly towards financial, technical and trade cooperation, primarily in the sectors of economic and social infrastructure.

The United Kingdom's accession to the European Community in 1973 paved the way for the extension of the Europe-Africa cooperation to the Commonwealth countries, whether African, Caribbean, or Pacific. Later on, Spain's accession would also have an impact on the membership of the ACP Group.

The Georgetown Agreement, the Group's fundamental charter, which was signed in 1975 at the time the First Lome Convention came into force, laid down the rules for cooperation between the countries of three continents, the main link being shared aid from the European Community.

The Lome Conventions

With the signature of the first Lome Convention in 1975, the number of signatory countries rose to 46 on the ACP side and 9 on the European side. Lome II was signed by 58 ACP States in 1980 and Lome III by 65 ACP countries and 10 European States in 1985.

These three Conventions, each spanning a five-year period, were accompanied by the 4th, 5th and 6th EDFs. These were implemented until 1990, year in which Lome IV was signed, during the negotiation of which events occurred that would rock Central and Eastern Europe as symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall.

ACP-EU cooperation has been able to keep the lid on non-politicization. The most notable achievement of ACP-EU cooperation is that it introduced a new type of relationship between rich and poor countries based on solidarity and partnership, an independent involvement in political arrangements which can boost bilateral relations.

The Lome conventions granted non-reciprocal trade preferences to ACP countries. They included many more innovations than the Yaoundé Conventions. For example, agricultural sectoral programmes first appeared in the Lome Conventions. In addition, a compensatory mechanism was created under Stabex to offset losses in export earnings due to price fluctuations.

From Lome I to Lome IV

Improvements were added from one convention to the next without causing any major disruptions. Lome II saw the appearance of Sysmin, a mechanism similar to Stabex, but for mining products. The negotiation of that convention, signed in 1984, in the middle of a decade characterised by a quest for viability and efficiency, was marked by the calling into question of the effectiveness of aid. Emphasis was placed on food self-sufficiency for ACP countries.

The expression "political dialogue", or policy dialogue, made its appearance in Lome III, but political dialogue would only really be introduced in Lome IV. Negotiated during the turmoil of 1989, that Convention enshrined respect for Human Rights as a fundamental clause.

In the meantime, the structural adjustment established by the Bretton Woods Institutions had been supported by Europe and was therefore taken on board in Lome IV. The major innovation of that Agreement still remains its duration. Signed for a 10-year period, it included two 5-year Financial Protocols and the 7th and 8th EDFs. Lome IV was signed by 68 ACP countries and 12 EU Member-States.

The negotiation of the second financial protocol led to more changes than had been anticipated. The European public displayed a certain lack of interest in cooperation at the end of the Cold War. The clause on respect for Human Rights and democratic principles was by then an essential aspect of cooperation, and measures for the suspension of aid made their appearance.

Review of Lome IV

Lome IV bis, which was signed in 1995, saw the number of signatory countries move to 70 for the ACP and 15 on the EU side, and distinguished itself by the importance accorded to decentralised cooperation and the role of civil society.

Twenty years of Europe-ACP cooperation and the consolidation of solidarity among ACP countries had forged a cohesive bond which made the breaking up of the ACP bloc or any weakening of the ACP entity quite unthinkable.

The Cotonou Agreement

Negotiation of the Cotonou Agreement was fraught with obstacles and took place in the midst of a period of global orthodoxy. The benefits and opportunities of the liberal economic system are undeniable but the constraints and lack of insight inherent in some economic policies imposed in different places have been counter-productive and resulted in the failure of the World Trade Organisation's Ministerial Conference in Seattle, which enabled all involved to become more aware and to include a social agenda in economic adjustments.

It is in the wake of this transformation that the Cotonou Agreement was signed by 77 ACP countries on 13 June 2000. Cuba, candidate to the Agreement was, unfortunately, unable to sign it. Nonetheless, the ACP Group decided to include Cuba, in the hope that the problems which prevented its accession to the ACP-EU partnership would be resolved in the near future.

The last country to become a member of the ACP Group was Timor Leste. It is affiliated with the Pacific region. It became an

ACP Member-State in 2003, shortly after its independence.

The Cotonou Agreement, by its very existence, represents a significant success for the ACP Group. It was forged from the Group's determination to maintain its solidarity - a solidarity which certainly convinced the ACP States' European partners. In addition, the Agreement, despite not meeting all the ACP demands, took on board their fundamental concerns.

First of all by its duration - twenty years- sufficient time to enable ACP Member-States to get onto the road to development and, especially, to become smoothly integrated into the global market. Indeed, the Agreement envisages the removal of non-reciprocal trade preferences granted ACP countries, but only after a long transition period. In fact, Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) will be negotiated between the European Union and ACP countries between September 2002 and the end of 2007, following which they will come into force.

Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA)

The ACP-EU Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) are supposed to be special trade agreements which, like the Cotonou Agreement that spawned them, aim mainly to ensure the development of ACP countries and their gradual integration into the global economy. They must be compatible with the rules of the World Trade Organisation. In addition to the gradual nature of any trade liberalisation among ACP countries, the EPAs must fulfill a second criterion, i.e. asymmetry, which means that they must take account of the difference in the levels of social and economic development between the European Union and ACP countries. At the same time, the European Union will assist ACP countries and businesses to implement the necessary structural and macro-economic reforms, by building their capacities so as to enable them to better cope with the challenges of competition and globalization.

This transitional phase of ACP-EU trade cooperation from 2000-2007 required the approval of the WTO, which was hard-won. In November 2001, the determination of the ACP countries, bolstered by the unstinting support of the European Union at the 4th WTO Ministerial Conference, enabled them to claim a decisive victory, perhaps for their future: they obtained a WTO waiver for the trade chapter of the Cotonou Agreement.

On that occasion, the ACP Group stood out as one of the emerging Groups from the developing world. It was firm but realistic, opting resolutely for free trade while remaining determined to protect its vital interests.

Innovations of the Cotonou Agreement

Apart from its relatively long duration (20 years instead of 5 years as for Lome I, II and III, and 10 for Lome IV), the main innovations of the Cotonou Agreement derive from the fact that it incorporates civil society and the private sector as new actors on the political level. They will, therefore, no longer be mere beneficiaries of cooperation, but feature among the managers, insofar as permitted by the prerogatives of governments, which are solely responsible for determining the main development policies for their countries.

The major options within the Cotonou Agreement were not imposed on the ACP but constitute a deliberate choice and are part of the ongoing development of the Group's member-countries, be it the choice of economic liberalisation or a stronger affirmation of political dialogue. This involves the democratization of ACP countries and the involvement of new actors in the implementation of cooperation.

Almost all ACP member-countries had already undergone a political renewal prior to the signing of the Cotonou Agreement, and although some countries are still experiencing problems like civil war, they are increasingly few in number. The rise in democracy is seen particularly in the progressive development of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, organ of cooperation between the European Parliament and parliaments of ACP countries, into a true Joint Parliamentary Assembly of democratically-elected parliamentarians, in keeping with the spirit and letter of the Cotonou Agreement.

Government - civil society Partnership

The serious economic crisis at the end of the 80s and 90s which saw civil society in ACP countries playing an increasingly active role in the fight against poverty, gave rise, inter alia, to dialogue between social actors and governments. Governments felt the need to harness the dynamism of all sectors of the society primarily with a view to reducing and ultimately eradicating poverty. As a result, as soon as the Cotonou Agreement was signed, the ACP Group took steps to encourage the organisation and strengthening of civil society and the ACP private sector. An ACP Civil Society Forum and a Private Sector Forum were set up by the ACP Group. These sectors now serve as mechanisms for implementing cooperation.

Twenty-five years of cooperation have demonstrated that, albeit enabling developing countries to survive, aid cannot create development. Trade, by contrast, is a determining factor of development. The Cotonou Agreement promotes the strengthening of real economic partnership through new trade agreements, among other things. The Group has been making tremendous efforts to attract foreign investment and has been trying, therefore, to establish a favourable legal, economic and political environment to achieve that objective.

ACP Summits

Changes on the world scene at the end of the 80s, which saw the end of ideological bipolarisation, the economic problems of that era, and other factors prompted ACP Heads of State and Government to meet, for the first time, in Libreville, Gabon, in November 1997. At that 1st Summit, they laid down the guidelines for strengthening the Group by assigning more specific

roles to the ACP organs and deciding to reform the General Secretariat by transforming it from a mere organ of support to the political bodies into an executive institution. The Group also decided to extend consultations among its member-countries to various fora such as the United Nations Organisation.

The 2nd ACP Summit, held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, in November 1999, gave even more precise directives for intra-ACP cooperation and broadening the scope of the Group which, while maintaining its privileged partnership with the European Union, needed to develop a dialogue with other blocs and make its voice heard in the new economic and geopolitical context. The affirmation of the ACP Group's presence at the Ministerial Conferences of the World Trade Organisation, for example, (Doha, November 2001, and Cancun, September 2003) is the logical consequence of the Summit directives and their subsequent implementation.

The 3rd Summit of ACP Heads of State and Government held in Nadi, Fidji, in July 2002, established guidelines in view of the negotiation of future ACP-EU Economic Partnership Agreements, with a view to positioning the ACP Group in the current economic and geopolitical context.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the ACP Group, as defined by the Georgetown Agreement, are to :

- Promote a new, fairer and more equitable world order ; ;
- Promote and strengthen solidarity among ACP States, and understanding between ACP peoples and governments ;
- Contribute to the development of important and close economic, social and cultural relations among developing countries and develop cooperation among ACP States in the areas of Trade, Science and Technology, Industry, Transport, Education, Training and Research, Information and Communication, the Environment, Demography and Human Resources ;
- Contribute to the promotion of regional, inter-regional, and effective intra-ACP cooperation among ACP States, generally among developing countries, and strengthen the regional organisations of which they are members ;
- Define common positions of ACP States vis-à-vis the EEC in areas covered by the Lome Convention and on relevant issues debated in international fora, which may influence the implementation of the Lome Convention ;
- Ensure achievement of the objectives of the Lome Convention ; and
- Coordinate the activities of ACP States in the framework of the application of the Lome Convention.

IMPORTANT DATES

1957

Signing of the Treaty of Rome which established the European Community, and contains a section on cooperation with Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs).

Creation of the "Regime of Association" with resources from the 1st European Development Fund (EDF).

1963

Signing of the 1st Yaoundé Convention by 18 African States and 6 European countries, supported by resources from the 2nd EDF. That Agreement, like the 2nd Yaoundé Convention, was designed mainly for financial, technical and trade cooperation primarily in the sectors of economic and social infrastructure.

1969

Signing of the 2nd Yaoundé Convention supported by the 3rd EDF.

1973

Accession of the United Kingdom to the European Community opens the way for the extension of Europe-Africa cooperation to Commonwealth countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

1975

Signing of the Georgetown Agreement - the founding Charter of the Group. It defines the rules governing cooperation among the countries of the 3 continents whose main link was the sharing of aid from the European Community.

Entry into force of the Lome Convention - signed by 46 ACP countries and 9 European States - which marks the beginning of cooperation between Europe and the ACP Group. The Convention grants non-reciprocal trade preferences to ACP countries and establishes Stabex: compensatory mechanism for loss of export earnings due to price fluctuations. It is coupled with the 4th EDF.

1980

Signing of the 2nd Lome Convention by 58 ACP countries (coupled with the 5th EDF). Appearance of Sysmin : mechanism similar to Stabex, created for mining products.

1985

Signing of the 3rd Lome Convention by 65 ACP countries and 10 European States, (6th EDF). Emphasis is placed on food self sufficiency in ACP countries.

1990

Signing of the 4th Lome Convention which introduces a political dimension to cooperation.

1995

Signing of the 4th Lome Convention by 70 ACP countries and 15 European countries. The Convention emphasizes the importance of decentralised cooperation and the role of civil society.

November 1997

1st ACP Summit in Libreville, Gabon, to consider how to strengthen the Group.

November 1999

2nd ACP Summit in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, with the theme: "On the road to the 3rd millennium".

23 June 2000

Signing of the Cotonou Agreement by 77 ACP countries, which provides for the abolition of non-reciprocal trade preferences after a transition period of ACP-EU trade cooperation. During that time, from September 2002 to the end of 2007, Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) will be negotiated between the European Union and ACP States.

November 2001

The ACP States obtain a waiver from the rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on the trade chapter of the Cotonou Agreement at the 4th WTO Ministerial Conference.

July 2002

3rd ACP Summit in Nadi, Fiji, with the theme: "ACP Solidarity in a globalized world". The Summit defined guidelines for the Group in view of the negotiations for the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA).

September 2002

Start of negotiations for Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) in Brussels.

June 2003

1st meeting of ACP Ministers of Culture

October 2003

Start of EPA negotiations with the regions of West and Central Africa.

February 2004

Start of EPA negotiations with the regions of East and Southern Africa

Source URL: <http://acp.int/node/7>