

## INTERVIEW SPECIAL: "Endless options" for ACP future, says new Chair of the ACP Committee of Ambassadors

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**Brussels, 3 February 2012/ ECDPM:** On the 1<sup>st</sup> of February H.E. Shirley Skerritt-Andrew, Ambassador of Saint Lucia, took over as Chairperson of the ACP Committee of Ambassadors. She will preside the group for the coming 6 months. In an interview with [ECDPM](#) [1], Skerritt-Andrew talks about the challenges and opportunities for the ACP Group in 2012 and beyond.

*Disclaimer: HE. Shirley Skerritt-Andrew, Ambassador of Saint Lucia is Head of the Joint Eastern Caribbean States Mission (representing the Commonwealth of Dominica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines) to the EU in Brussels. The responses provided to the questions above are the strictly the views of the Ambassador of Saint Lucia and in no way represent the views of the ACP Group of States.*

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**European Centre for Development and Policy Management:** *In the global development context, fundamental shifts are under way at the moment. They will change the character international cooperation will have in the future. The development agenda now – in addition to the principal objective of eradicating poverty – embraces multiple global public goods. Further, emerging economies are establishing themselves as global players. In this context, what are the main concerns of the ACP countries and how can the ACP Group deal with any differences of views that may emerge?*

**Shirley Skerritt-Andrew:** Shifts in international paradigms are not new. Such changes are inevitable, but can be overcome with strategic change management. This involves reinforcing the mutually beneficial partnership the ACP has had with the EU over the past decades. The ACP Group has always been aware that there would be intractable changes in the EU's development policy and, as such, has always been ready to make known its support or concern to its European partner. Both sides have been reflecting on the requisite changes and improvements necessary to ensure a smoother transition and adequate response to the challenges ahead.

One of the main concerns of the ACP is what development cooperation will look like in the next decade. ACP countries are reassured by the reference made in the Lisbon Treaty to the eradication of poverty as an overall objective of EU external action, though some are concerned about the diminution of the special relationship with Europe, particularly in view of the rising prominence of other regions. A pivotal part of the dialogue we will continue to have with the EU is focused on the positive nature of our relationship and how we can best maximise its advantages. The ACP and EU have a model relationship. As the strongest "north-south" partnership, there are mechanisms that allow for ACP countries to conduct frank dialogue with the EU, whether it is through the Joint Parliamentary Assembly or Council of Ministers, we have invested heavily in fora that promote trust and understanding. These will continue to serve the partnership well. Another fundamental component is the role of non-state actors.

**ECDPM:** *The World Bank and the United Nations predict that global economic growth will continue to slow sharply in 2012 and warn of another severe downturn. What are the implications of the international financial and economic crisis for ACP-EU relations?*

**Shirley Skerritt-Andrew:** The implications of the international financial and economic crisis are diverse. For Small Island Developing States, such as St. Lucia and the Member States of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, the effects can be dire. Any decrease in development finance will come up against the need for additional resources in ACP countries and

raise concerns around the effectiveness of aid. EU Member States are seeking greater accountability and are reorienting their support towards the poorest of the poor countries, rather than the poor within countries. There is a danger that the EU may adopt simplistic approaches and use discredited indicators of development in its graduation or differentiation policies, rather than a rigorous analysis of the needs of individual countries. This could trap some states in a category that prevents them from benefitting from assistance and could reverse acquired development gains.

The ACP can and should use its numerical power in international fora to insist on the establishment of global level coordination mechanisms. Further, it should call relevant countries to the table on their implementation of such mechanisms.

***ECDPM:** EU external and development policies are undergoing a reorientation. A key event will be the negotiations on how the EU's financial instruments, including the European Development Fund (EDF), will be designed and implemented in the next years. What efforts will the ACP Group make to ensure that ACP countries' concerns are not sidelined in these discussions?*

**Shirley Skerritt-Andrew:** The ACP Group is mindful of the importance of EU consultation processes as a means to contribute to and influence EU decision-making. The Group has participated in the past and will continue this trend. As regards the discussions surrounding the 11<sup>th</sup> EDF, it is in ACP Member States' interest – especially taking the current international financial conjuncture into account – to mobilize their input towards negotiating these financial perspectives so that they are more efficient. Thus, the Group will meet with relevant EU counterparts at all levels to ensure that its positions are taken into account. The Group will reflect on the means of involving all stakeholders in this debate, which may be the last one ever on the EDF. The involvement of National and Regional Authorising Officers and Regional Economic Communities will be indispensable.

We are encouraged by the fact that the EU put out its recent development policy papers for wide consultation. There is evidence that the positions of ACP States on critical issues such as budget support were taken on board. We hope that this approach will be continued in future.

***ECDPM:** The ACP-EU partnership will expire in its current form by 2020, and both sides have started discussions on what can follow after. In your view, what are the potential options for the future, how can relations evolve into a more dynamic and proactive relationship?*

**Shirley Skerritt-Andrew:** The ACP-EU framework is well poised to address future challenges and both partners must work towards further strengthening this joint framework.

Suggestions for options on how a future framework could look are still being formulated and these are taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of this partnership, but also the comparative advantage of the Group. If one takes into consideration the benefits that the ACP Group represents for its largest development partner, such as the fact that the ACP is the largest trans-regional intergovernmental organization of developing countries, then the potential that can be derived from its collective strength and solidarity would be dizzying. Based on that statement, the options for the future become endless.

On the ACP side, some structural changes need to take place that allow the Group to take advantage of its unique position and work towards determining for itself its role on the international scene, and with regard to its longstanding European partner. The results of our internal work will provide ample response to the questions of what, how and when. Simply put, to ensure that the ACP as a group, premised on the spirit of solidarity, engage in effective change management and remain relevant in light of the current bi-regional scenarios and the global context, it must enlarge its reach, expand its ambition and embrace its uniqueness.

***ECDPM:** How will the ACP Group build bridges with European partners willing to support endogenous ACP processes and 'home-grown' reforms?*

**Shirley Skerritt-Andrew:** Bridges already exist between the two entities and they craft the terms of their partnership jointly. ACP Member States, in their relations with the local EU delegations, have an opportunity to promote homegrown, nationally motivated reforms. The ACP must insist on the legitimacy of these plans and both sides should commit to supporting processes that ensure support to these.

The joint preparation of Country Strategy Papers allows countries to determine their own focal sector and builds bridges through accountability, ownership and co-management of processes. And both ACP and EU Member States endorse international principles of aid effectiveness that encourage homegrown solutions to development. Additionally, the European Commission's communication on modernizing EU Development Policy shows that the EU is willing to support these endogenous processes. Another example is the Non-State Actors Forum established in each ACP country which is indicative of the ACP and EU desire to support grass-roots initiatives and have their input in national processes that promote sustainable development.

**ECDPM:** *In the area of trade, the controversial Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations between the EU and 6 separate ACP Regional Economic Communities and sub-regions are still ongoing. This regional split-up has undermined the ACP cohesion. What can the ACP as a group do to ensure that regional integration and EPAs are aligned with national and regional development objectives?*

**Shirley Skerritt-Andrew:** Trade is just one aspect of ACP relations with the EU. I do not agree that the ACP has been split up, but rather this represents a call to further consolidate the Group, keeping in mind the other areas where the Group has consistently maintained unified positions.

The Caribbean EPA is in the process of being implemented, with just as many hiccups as can be expected in an asymmetrical partnership of this magnitude, where substantially all trade is involved. Some African and Pacific countries are still negotiating their Agreement with the EU and the same "contentious" issues that have been on the table since the beginning of negotiations remain. These include the Most-Favoured Nation Clause, the development aspects of the EPA, product coverage, transition periods and administrative issues. ACP countries, through their regional configurations and integration processes, ensure that the ACP Group's objectives of poverty eradication, sustainable development and solidarity are taken into account. And the fact that the ACP Secretariat organizes meetings of ACP regional groupings to discuss EPAs and other trade issues is evidence of the willingness to exchange information and experiences and come up with joint positions with regard to their trade negotiations with the EU, among others.

**ECDPM:** *What are the ACP Group's plans in relation to the Rio+20 summit where Small Island Developing States, landlocked and low-lying country issues will be debated? How will the ACP Group manage interests of different countries, i.e. those affected heavily by climate change and these less affected?*

**Shirley Skerritt-Andrew:** This Summit will be dealing with issues that concern all ACP countries, whose future lies in the scales. As the Ambassador from a sub-region that is being affected by the blight of climate change, we remain keenly attuned and active in matters relating to climate change and the environment. It goes without saying that we will be working toward building consensus with our ACP brothers and sisters. This will further epitomize the strength and solidarity of the ACP Group. Moreover, the ACP Group has set up a Working Group on Rio+20 that will be tasked with analyzing the issues to be debated and will come up with jointly debated and consensual positions that the Group will take forward to Rio. This is not a new process for the ACP Group and in this case their heterogeneity in terms of Small Islands States, low-lying countries or land-locked countries dissipates in the face of climate change and its impact that will spare neither man, nor nation.

- ECDPM

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Tags: [News articles](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

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