

**Report on Conference on:
Beyond Lomé IV: Challenges and Options
(7 to 11 September 1998)**

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The meeting was held at Wilton Park Conference Center, Steyning, West Sussex, England from 7 to 11 September 1998 on the theme "Beyond Lomé IV: Challenges and Options". It was attended by about 80 participants drawn from a wide representation of scholars, development administrators, policy-makers and representatives of the civil society to brain-storm as to the options of future relations between ACP and the European Union. The Conference benefitted from presentations made by a select group of personalities to kick-off the debate, which was open and frank. No background documentation was presented, the idea probably was to avoid influencing or constraining the debate in any direction. Among the personalities who addressed the gathering was Mrs. Glenys Kinnock, Member of the European Parliament, Vice-Chairman, ACP-EU Joint Assembly, Brussels who made the keynote address, for which she chose as the title, "ACP-EU: A Future Partnership?" The meeting was also addressed by Sir Shridath Ramphal, Caribbean Chief Negotiator, on the issue of "Trade Liberalization, the WTO, and the ACP: What issues and options?". His presentation reflected, to a large extent, the central concerns of the ACP group particularly those of the Caribbean Group. Among the speakers was Mr. Philip Lowe, Director General for Development, European Commission who focused on what could be taken as the position of the Secretariat of the European Union on the issue of "The Future of the European Union's Development Programme". A perspective reflecting the main concerns of ACP countries and the broader group of the Least Developed Countries was made by Mr. Christian Friis Bach, Assistant Professor, University of Copenhagen, Chairman, MS-Denmark (Danish Association for International Co-operation), who focused on the issue of how best to assist LDCs. There were also presentations

providing essentially information, NGO perspectives and business community concerns.

The meeting, as noted-above, was primarily intended to brainstorm, rather than being an occasion for a debate between the Europeans and their development partners; it was a journey in the minds of the participants in an attempt to inform the final perspectives underpinning the negotiations for a successor agreement to the Lomé IV Convention. These negotiations will start on 30th of September 1998 in Brussels, Belgium, to which ECA is invited. The ACP Secretariat has already submitted "Draft Guidelines for a Negotiating Mandate" prepared by the ACP African Group in Brussels, for which it invited comments.

The meeting agreed that at the center of the debate on the successor arrangements is the question of how best the new arrangements will reflect a true partnership between the ACP and the European Union. To reflect such attitude, it was opined that the new arrangements should be seen by both parties as distinctly superior to Lomé IV agreements in terms of development focus, resource magnitudes, equity among beneficiaries, compatibility with WTO agreements, compensatory arrangements, trade and investment flows and political solidarity. This obviously involves agreements on policy issues as well as on the substance of what should be done and how best to do it. It was also recognized that globalization has resented the ACP Group with real paradoxes that both unite as well as divide.

The main issues debated by the meeting can be clustered as follows:

1. The goals of the successor arrangements to Lomé IV
2. The range of ACP-EU co-operation and priorities
3. How to establish a balance between the (differentiated)

needs of the ACP Group and the perspectives of the European Union on international co-operation

4. Situating ACP-EU co-operation within the framework of the WTO agreements
5. The role of the international institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank and even some United Nations Organizations such as ILO in ensuring the viability of these arrangements
6. How should ACP countries approach the negotiations for a successor arrangement, due to start on 30th September 1998 in Brussels.

The predominant view in the meeting was that the over-arching goal of the successor arrangements to Lomé IV should be the alleviation and ultimate eradication of poverty. The question then is as how to imbue the new arrangements with a poverty alleviation focus. It was also felt that the targets and the modalities to fulfil them, within the context of international co-operation, should be indicated as vital tools. Agreement on these parameters is deemed important for the efficacy of these arrangements in addressing the development problems of the ACP countries.

With the development focus, the ultimate concern of ACP countries should then be as to how best to use the successor arrangements as a vehicle to effectively and equitably integrate into the world trading system. Trade preferences, which are the hallmark of Lomé IV, should not be ends in themselves, but should be utilized to graduate ACP countries into the world trading system as viable partners. In other words, the limitations of the preferences system should be ameliorated, as in fact only a few countries, and indeed in the case of few commodities, that ACP countries were able to fulfill the promise of these preferences.

It was felt that with the objectives of future arrangements realigned to development, a renegotiation of some elements of the

WTO agreements would be required. As a collalary to this, the role of the IMF and other international organizations such as ILO should be revisited. For example, it was observed that the WTO arrangements are incompatible with the regime of fairness between developed and developing countries. In fact, this revision process has already started with the first WTO Ministerial Meeting in Singapore. It was held that WTO should not be the instrument of the few. However, nobody doubted that ultimately, and with the special constraints of the LDCs were taken into account, the declared goals of WTO should serve as the point of reference for achieving a level-playing field for world trade.

The compatibility of Free Trade Areas and regional co-operation arrangements with WTO agreements was an area of lively debate. Closely related to this is the issue of reciprocity which is insisted on by the European Union. It was noted that Free Trade Areas merit serious reflection, but in so doing it should be recognized that there is need to go beyond mere trade promotion parameters to addressing the issues of production and supporting infrastructure particularly road networks, strengthening of the private sector, information flow.. etc. Hence the importance of strengthening regional integration. But in requesting recognition and support for Free Trade Areas, ACP countries were reminded that they must appreciate and accept their responsibilities. An issue that merited further reflection is how to made Free Trade Areas compatible with WTO rules which, some insisted, should not be used to protect present patterns of production in the world.

It was urged that policy within the successor arrangement should recognize development aid as a right not as a gift as the right to development should be seen as a component of human rights. There is, therefore, need to rethink aid. Some ideas were provided, for example, linking aid to the achievement of the goals of the World Social Summit held in Copenhagen, as part of a genuine

partnership; in conflict prevention; and in broadening the concept of partnership to include the private sector and NGOs.

The ACP Secretariat outlined what it perceived as ACP priorities in future negotiations. It insisted that the new arrangements should reflect a common vision focusing on the primacy of development. These elements together with the priorities were elaborated in the Declaration of the ACP Summit held in Livreville in November 1997. (See the Declaration for details).

The question of how ACP countries should approach the forthcoming negotiations was raised, but not fully answered. In this regard reference was made to the various preparatory meetings organized to prepare common or subregional positions on the thrust of the successor arrangements, goals, range of activities, resource magnitudes,... etc. Here, reference was also made to the meetings held by the Caribbean Group; the Declaration of the Conference of Ministers on the Future Relations between African, Caribbean and Pacific Groups of States (ACP) and the European Union (EU), adopted by the ACP Summit on the ACP-EU future relations in November 1997 in Livreville; and the Draft Guidelines for a Negotiating Mandate, produced by the ACP Committee of Ambassadors in Brussels, and presented by the ACP Secretariat as a framework for the forthcoming negotiations. The agreed positions among the ACP Group are likely to be reflected in their opening statements at the launching session of the negotiations on 30th September 1998. Most likely, ACP will insist on one set of negotiations leading to an overall agreement. In other words, nothing is agreed unless everything is agreed upon. The issue of transition to WTO arrangements and to make it more functional is likely to feature prominently in the presentations of ACP countries.

Within the context of the meeting, breakup sessions deliberated on: Regional Considerations for Africa; the Caribbean;

the Pacific; Incorporation of the Gender Dimension: How?; Small Island States: A Special Case?; Political Dialogue for Democratic Development: What Does this Entail?.

The Draft Report of the meeting will be sent to the participants as soon as it was prepared. The above, therefore, is my assessment of the outcome of the brain-storming session held at Wilton Park.