

The EU as a norm-maker in resilience and aid delivery: from aid effectiveness to effective cooperation for sustainable development

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Abstract

The European Union (EU) is considered to be a norm-setter in building resilience and aid delivery, acting as a transformative actor in the international development arena (both modus vivendi and modus operandi). As development and resilience can improve the quality of life and well-being in different environments at the global level, it is important to replace disruption and societal vulnerability with effective cooperation mechanisms. Hence, the central aim of this paper is to examine to what extent the motivation to provide aid will place the EU in a favourable position of a norm-maker or, à contrario, as a norm-taker. In this context, this study will also focus on the EU's ambition to move forward with a vision for development as well as with a coherent policy for aid-delivery for less developed countries.

Keywords: European Union, resilience, norm-setting, aid, cooperation

Introduction

Development and cooperation are part of the EU's foreign policy and plays an important role globally, specifically in developing and emerging countries. Over time, the EU's foreign policy (including its security layer) has been intensively promoted through different channels, but the EU's role in development started to become more and more prominent once development goals at the United Nations (UN) level were adopted.

Development is very complex and includes various daily life aspects that need urgent solutions. It also involves the demographic shifts in the context of the economic, social and environmental changes. Considering that the global population is growing and 70% of the world population will live in cities by 2050, addressing needs such as education and employment represents one of the future challenges (European Commission, 2016, p.5). And this is just an example to highlight the speed

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and changing environment, as well as the variety of challenges that require solutions and innovations.

In this context, resilience and aid delivery represent two instruments that could make a difference in achieving sustainable development. The EU is confronted with new threats and paradigms, therefore aid effectiveness starts with effective decisions. It is essential to find consensus among Member States, as building resilient communities and providing coordinated aid will lead to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. Thus, the eradication of poverty needs more practical involvement on the territory, not only coordination from Brussels' offices, but rather a more strategic approach in order to understand the local context and to effectively respond to local needs.

Starting from the Paris Declaration on 'aid effectiveness' and continuing with the transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the EU became progressively focused on investing more in substance, with precise and detailed targets at sectorial level. However, the EU is not alone in this endeavour, therefore it is important that bilateral and multilateral donors (national agencies, international organisations, NGOs, etc.) harmonise their development standards, speak on a single voice and carry out complementary activities to make aid delivery more efficient for the beneficiary countries.

While the EU's foreign policy has been intensively discussed in international fora and academic environments, the EU's role in development aid has not so far represented one of the main topics of interest for the public opinion. For that reason, the current paper aims to introduce and familiarise the reader with the reality of the international development arena where the EU is playing an active role in trying to reach effective cooperation for sustainable development. This will be reflected in the content of this paper which is structured on four main pillars: (i) the first part will address the conceptual and methodological framework, including the research design and tools that were used in the construction of the present paper, (ii) the second part will identify and critically assess the perception of the EU's foreign policy in development, if it is a process or a goal, (iii) the third part will analyse the norm-setting circumstances in development, considering a debate regarding the conditionality, charity and moral duty, (iv) while the fourth part will be focused on the motivation to provide aid and the importance of aid coordination in order to create a framework for resilient policy-building and aid-delivery for less developed countries.

1. Setting the scene: research design and methodological framework

Following the introduction of the major themes approached by this study, we can now turn to a more detailed presentation of the main concepts on which this paper is built, as well as to introducing the theoretical framework and the

methodology that have been used. Development is also strongly linked to different theories; therefore, we will use different lenses to better understand how theoretical framework opens a door for concrete impact on the ground.

To begin with, it is useful to firstly explore the grassroots development theory and the grounded theory approach in order to assess the EU's policy in achieving the SDG's by 2030. The aid effectiveness leads to an effective cooperation when the process of development starts with an identification of the needs on the ground (i.e.: bottom-up approach reflected through the grassroots development approach and the grounded theory approach). In this regard, development is not related to goods and services, but mostly to principles, values and ethics, trying "to defend the primacy of being over having" (Goulet, 2006, p. 34). Sustainable development can contribute to social change by covering the basic needs for the population, and by reducing the social inequalities among vulnerable groups.

In 2002, Mercer presented the grassroots development as a way of community mobilisation in filling the gaps following the incomplete provision of services from national authorities (Mercer, 2002, p. 18). Later, Gasteyer and Herman defined the grassroots development as "a process of intentional social change that privileges local organizing, visioning and decision making" (2013). Considering that the world changed over the past years, but also needs change in this period, it is important to connect with communities, to identify and map their needs, and then to create room for change in terms of policy and decision making.

In addition, this study is also based on the grounded theory approach, including collected data resulted from semi-structured interviews. As "grounded theory research process begins with focusing on some area of study – a phenomenon, circumstance, trend, or behaviour" (McNabb, 2015, p. 262), this paper will provide a reflection on the EU's foreign policy in development regarding its capacity and tools to build resilience and deliver aid to beneficiary countries.

Having looked at the main theories that will guide us throughout this study, we are now ready to introduce the research design of this paper, starting from the research question and having an overview on the context, aim, objectives and methods of analysis. In terms of the research design, this paper will try to answer to a very important research question: *To what extent will the motivation to provide aid (either bilateral or multilateral) place the EU in a favourable position of a norm-maker? Or rather a norm-taker sometimes?* In the context of the current overlapped and interconnected crises, the efficiency of aid development is mostly affected by the use of "cardboard policies" designed in Brussels offices, rather than by finding adequate solutions for the real problems on the ground (i.e.: either geographical or sectorial approach).

In this light, the research goal of this paper will contribute to understanding the role played by the EU on the international stage: on one side, as a norm-maker able to spread moral norms regarding values such as human rights, multilateralism,

and clear form of normative power; on the other side, as a norm-taker as it sometimes lacks internal coherence and external coordination with development stakeholders.

In terms of methodology, the current paper will be based on qualitative research methods, including books and articles, EU official documents and interviews. The semi-structured interviews are an important tool as they directly engage with the people on the field, creating space for the voices to be heard. They also provide “a clear set of instructions for interviewers and can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data [being] often preceded by observation, informal and unstructured interviewing in order to allow there searchers to develop a keen understanding of the topic of interest necessary for developing relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions”¹.

While acknowledging the limits of the study, it is important to highlight the importance of this paper, as the topic raises the issue of how the EU and its Member States are adapting and transforming their methods of resilience and aid delivery to meet new challenges, changing understandings, and expanding opportunities.

2. The EU’s foreign policy in development: a process rather than a goal

Development represents a sector where the EU has a major comparative advantage over other international donors, including assets related to “size, wealth, accumulated expertise and legitimacy” (Ganzle *et al.*, 2012, p. 90). Development encompasses important ingredients and positive synergies, with a strong focus on “poverty reduction (especially on education, health, water and sanitation, and agriculture); sustainable growth (emphasizing especially infrastructure, trade and investment); addressing global issues (environment, infectious diseases, population, food, energy, natural disaster, terrorism, drugs, organized crime); and peace-building” (Riddell, 2007, p. 60).

In the transition from development to sustainable development, the concept of sustainable development was for the first time used, in an official manner, in 1987, for the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development entitled “Our Common Future”. In this report, the concept of sustainable development was defined as “the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UN, 1987, p. 15).

Sustainable development is expected to have an impact because it challenges both researchers and policy-makers to become involved in debates for finding solutions (Elliott, 2013, p. 15). At the same time, “promoting sustainable development involves multi-dimensional actions: international diplomacy and governance regimes, engagement of multi-levels of government, participation of civil society and economic actors, use of new policy instruments, behavioural and

¹Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2006), Semi-Structured Interviews, citation from Cohen, D. and Crabtree, B., in “Qualitative Research Guideline Project”.

value changes” (Baker, 2006, p. 214). Furthermore, sustainable development also addresses the issue of eradicating poverty “in all its forms and dimensions, combating inequality within and among countries, preserving the planet, creating sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and fostering social inclusion are linked to each other and are interdependent” (UNGA, 2015, p. 5).

By trying to make the distinction among development as a process and development as a goal, development can also be defined as “a socio-political as well as economic phenomenon that triggers international effects” (Ganzle *et al.*, 2012, p.2). Moreover, development is targeting not only countries, but also communities, representing “a process that distributes economic, political and social costs and benefits unevenly across societies” (Ganzle *et al.*, 2012, p. 3). In this regard, considering that development is a complex concept, the perspective of development as a goal and development as a process is not easy to be established. While the EU representatives consider development as a process in itself (Subject 1), civil society members understand development as a goal within a process (Subject 2).

It is equally important to see development in connection with the overall EU’s external action which is guided by the EU’s Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy. As “security is the first condition for development” (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 2), the European Commission highlighted that security and development have to be seen as complementary fields in reaching a common goal such as “creating a secure environment and breaking the vicious circle of poverty, war, environmental degradation and failing economic, social and political structures” (European Commission, 2005, p. 5). A modern way of looking at development is also through the link between development and security, development and migration, development and energy, and many policies that are not necessarily only development policies: “there cannot be sustainable development without peace and security, and that without development and poverty eradication there will be no sustainable peace” (DG DEVCO, 2017).

In this process, policy is important and consultations with relevant stakeholders should be initiated (e.g.: policy building dialogue). But the most important problem concerns the remaining poor that live in fragile countries: “we will not be able to leave them out of poverty unless we manage to solve the conflicts and crisis problems; this is the area where we made less progress in the past, so the big challenge is to address these problems if we want to really achieve the objective of eradicating poverty” (Subject 9).

The elimination of poverty remains a major objective of the EU’s development policy, and consensus is very important in order to set-up the right direction and to implement the correct policies (Subject 4). At this moment, poverty in middle-income countries is easier to be eradicated, while the most extreme level of poverty is more difficult to be addressed for the population which is further behind the poverty line (Subject 9).

There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ policy in development. The context, environment, political factors represent only some aspects related to the potential success of development in fighting poverty and vulnerability at different levels. Development, as a process, should lead to capacity building and resilient communities, able to “unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time” (Riddell, 2007, p. 207).

Furthermore, in order to improve livelihoods in beneficiary countries, a strategy related to qualitative outcomes and efficient measures should be drafted. The main aim of this initiative should tackle the local infrastructure and its services: “the capacity of different households to cope, adapt and survive in changing circumstances basically depends on access to resources or assets, including social and political assets” (Hout, 2007, p. 70).

In terms of legal framework, starting from the implementation of the Cotonou Agreement, “the political element has been explicitly recognized, enhanced, and turned from a vice into a virtue” (Mold, 2007, p. 6). But development is not only a process, it is also a target, and the mobilisation of domestic resources is highly required in fighting corruption, ensuring transparency, creating accountable environments and consistent domestic policies (Subject 5).

The political dialogue is based on article 8 from the Cotonou Agreement, being a step forward in ensuring sustainable development, both as a process and as a goal. Each country needs to apply a development model and to engage within sustainable projects as “foreign aid continued (and continues to this day) to be a predominant source of financial resources for much of the continent [Africa]” (Moyo, 2009, p. 25). Thus, it becomes important to have an integrated view on the development policy rather than being seen through the lenses of fragmentation or isolation, especially as everything is inter-connected and trans-disciplinary.

3. The EU as a norm-maker in development

The responsibility for development starts by exposing principles and values in order to achieve impact through actions, outputs and outcomes. In this light, the EU is perceived as a norm-maker on the international development scene, able “to spread moral norms regarding values such as human rights, and multilateralism, and clear form of normative power” (Holden, 2009, p. 9). Furthermore, the EU is “well placed to assume a leading role in the pursuit of global sustainable development. It is the world’s largest donor of development aid, the world’s biggest trading partner, and a major source of direct private investments” (European Commission, 2002, p. 6). The shared size of the EU and its proactive approach in international fora such as the UN or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), is a proof of the impact that the EU has on all main development policy issues (Subject 6).

However, development on its own is not sufficient, as “the cornerstone of development is an economically responsible and accountable government” (Moyo, 2009, p. 57) and “governance generally is the most fundamental enabler of development” (European Union, 2015, p. 167). Beside any kind of norms and conditionality, “governance remains at the heart of aid today” (Moyo, 2009, p. 23) and “good governance is a condition of cooperation” (Riddell, 2009, p. 67). In this way, promotion and awareness of development should be done at all levels within the beneficiary countries.

Thus, the role played by the EU in the development field is not only complex, but also full of responsibility in trying “to promote the EU’s identity as a force for progress and solidarity in the world [...] as a partner and a teacher” (Holden, 2009, pp.18-19).

3.1. Norms and conditionality for sustainable development

In the literature, there are many opinions and assertions with regards to the EU’s role in development aid, if it can be considered a leader or rather a follower, a player or a payer, as well as on its capacity to promote norms or to impose conditionality.

The EU’s most powerful tool is its predictability, but also its targeted capacity to reach sectorial and political dialogue with the partner countries. When we analyse the role played by the EU on the international stage, “it can be easily considered a player based on its regional influence and legitimacy in proposing sustainable development strategies on the ground”. However, once we analyse the other side of the coin, especially related to “its involvement in financing projects and programmes, the EU is usually considered a payer taking into account its efforts are difficult to be quantified or to be sustainable on the long term” (Manea, 2020, p. 126).

The coherence of the EU’s development policies, both inside and outside the Union, represents an important step towards increasing the efficiency of external aid and management of development activities. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can be seen as a tool for policy coherence and sustainable development as it involves sharing of knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, and it encourages and promotes effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships.

The idea of “the EU as a powerful attractor” (Mold, 2007, p. 6) comes from “the normative power Europe [which] is a force for good [having] key principles that make up the normative core inclusive of human rights, democracy and the rule of law” (Sjursen, 2006, pp.171-235). When we speak about human rights, this issue is not only related to the rights of individuals, but also to the property rights in order to avoid land grabbing, which happens quite often in Africa because of the lack of a legal framework in this sense.

In this respect, the EU can be considered “an efficient and legitimate global actor across different fields of foreign policy” (Carbone, 2013, p. 26). This automatically implies the EU’s capacity “to maintain its own internal political coherence by the consensus of the member states, and to articulate its strategy for a norm-based global multilateral to an increasingly globalized, yet fragmented, global community” (Ganzle *et al.*, 2012, p. 243). Moving on, it is also necessary to take into consideration a process that includes harmonisation of policies and principles among different donors in order to promote a single, unified and strong voice within the development sector.

The EU is working to identify tools and channels to monitor the aid effectiveness, to avoid aid fragmentation and to promote country ownership, together with the other international actors in development. At the same time, the majority of the EU Member States are part of the OECD DAC Group, a norm-making body in terms of development, so the EU can be easily defined as a norm-maker in this field (Subject 8). Although the EU is defined as a soft power, the EU is setting norms both through the individual actions and collective involvement within the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), where the Commission, and the Union, is a full member (Subject 4).

In this regard, not only in Africa, but also worldwide, the EU can be considered as a norm-maker based on its “internal coherence and external legitimacy” (Carbone, 2013, p. 25), able to act as a powerful actor in the development sector. Based on the legal framework, especially on the Cotonou Agreement, the EU became a respected actor in global development, being able to impose political conditionality as the main ingredient in democracy enforcement. Dialogue is part of all EU actions and activities in the field of development, either formal or informal, based on values and norms, and including the relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, the EU soft power tools can be used in order to reach “development aid, trade preferences and other ‘carrots’ to push its agenda and interests, and the (threat of) withdrawal of these as ‘sticks’” (Ganzle *et al.*, 2012, p. 247).

A contrario, there are several opinions reflecting a weak position for the EU as a norm-maker. Rather than being considered a norm-maker, “the EU is more an opinion maker, not able to set a proper standard when we look, for instance, at the migration crisis” (Subject 2). But even if norm-maker is not always considered to be the right term to describe the EU’s position in beneficiary countries, through the 2006 European Consensus on Development, the EU managed to establish a new framework for its Member States, indicating the objectives, its goals and targets that need to be applied in development processes and cooperation mechanisms (Subject 9). Therefore, it was a step forward in trying to set a joint approach for the EU’s framework of development cooperation beyond the institutions.

3.2. Foreign aid: charity or moral duty?

If foreign aid primarily constitutes charity or a moral duty, a legitimate answer to the following questions is required: Is there a responsibility to provide aid? If yes, based on what obligations and norms? Do international organisations and international NGOs have more obligations in providing aid to the countries in need?

If we start the analysis from a narrow realist perspective, “governments only have moral obligations to their own citizens. From this perspective, governments do not have moral obligations or responsibilities to provide aid [...] this doesn’t mean that governments may not provide aid, [but] their aid-giving is thus entirely voluntary” (Riddell, 2007, p.143). In contrast, some other actors involved along the development process consider that both charity and moral duty need to be taken into consideration, as former colonizers have the obligation for a balanced approach on the development within the international arena (Subject 7). This implies concrete actions such as reviewing standards and monitoring the expected results.

However, speaking about charity or moral duty is also linked to a question of geopolitical interest (e.g.: climate change, migration, globalisation etc.). Solidarity is one of the European values and this is an important element of the development policy that will definitely remain in the EU treaties. When it comes to the EU’s aid policy, “charity is not the correct word, it is about solidarity, it is also in our self-interest, and solidarity is not in contradiction with our self-interest. Having a stronger world around us is definitely in the EU’s interest and this can be seen quite clearly within the Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy” (Subject 9), which highlights the importance of having a resilient world, resilient countries and resilient communities.

Development policy can be seen as “a major EU external policy and development is an intrinsically political concept, implying a transformation of society beyond economic growth” (Holden, 2009, p.16). However, the EU should continue to find its “vertical coherence – between European institutions and member states’ policies, and horizontal coherence – among different donors” (Ganzle *et al.*, 2012, p.10), as well as to find its single voice in order to promote the EU model of international development (Carbone, 2007, p.130).

Certainly, among European citizens, the concept of charity – or simply the help of the poor – is very strong but, at the same time, all European governments recognise that investing in the development of ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific countries) countries, or other poor countries, can be a factor of stability and prosperity for the European continent (Subject 8). However, the EU needs “more coherence [that] requires more than consistency; it implies an outcome that advances an identifiable European interest [in order to avoid] to lose friends without being able to influence people” (Carbone, 2013, pp.175-184). The main objective should be to promote the economic development and welfare of beneficiary countries. Politically speaking, it is significant to show that the EU remains an important donor

within the bilateral, multilateral and European context, but also an actor that establishes the framework for norms, principles and values.

4. Motivation to provide aid through bilateral and multilateral channels

Political dialogue remains very important through the Cotonou Agreement (Official Journal of the European Communities, 2010, pp. 12-13). The main purpose of the Cotonou Agreement was to enhance the cooperation between the EU and the ACP countries, based on free trade agreement and political dialogue (according to the article 8 of the document). Following-up the adoption of the Cotonou Agreement, the relationship between the EU and ACP group of countries was described “as symmetric partnership between equal partners trying to achieve a common agenda” (Carbone, 2013, p. 25). It is fundamental to understand the process of development, from its definition to its application, including possible changes and adaptations to new contexts and environments.

If we touch upon the purpose of aid provided by the developed countries to the beneficiary countries, its purpose is seen in different ways. While for some developed countries this may come as a responsibility following the process of decolonisation, for others it comes as an intention to assist them in order to preserve the global stability (Kingsbury *et al.*, 2014, p. 67). There are various methods to provide aid: firstly, aid can be provided directly into the government’s budgets of beneficiary countries by direct injection of funds. The second option is that “aid transfer via foreign NGOs is preferable, especially in conflict zones, where the governments concerned do not provide sufficient guarantees that the donations will be correctly used” (Manea, 2017, p. 160). There is also the possibility to work with the local civil society, mostly with NGOs on the field, which can lead to a local development based on the needs of the population.

Development aid is given with a certain purpose, whatever the motivation is. Normally, the donor and the beneficiary country agree and set up an objective based on a contract. If the objectives are decided by the country in need and not by the donor, the relationship among them will be healthier and the money will be spent in a predictable manner. The external influence is similar to the dependency, which is not always bad, but it involves risks that can affect the partnership.

Poverty is caused “not merely by a shortage of assets, skills and basic services, but by structures, institutions, policies and processes which marginalize poor people [...] restricting the development and expansion of core capabilities” (Riddell, 2007, p. 262). The EU main instrument in fighting poverty is represented by its aid, in different forms, either through funds injection in building resilience and good governance at the local level, or through supplying medicines and food aid, or providing goods and services. However, most of these initiatives takes time in order to be implemented, being needed “to train the teachers, nurses and engineers, to build

the roads, schools and hospitals; to grow the small and large businesses able to create the jobs and income needed” (Easterly, 2008, p.7).

4.1. The importance of Official Development Assistance (ODA) as operating mode in development

Policy initiation, policy formulation and policy adoption are important parts of a joint institutional set-up. Both poverty eradication and sustainable development are inter-connected as it is reflected in the EEAS and EC (European Commission) official documents. Moreover, fighting against poverty has created new opportunities, but also a set of new responsibilities and challenges, taking into account the context and the other actors involved in this process. From this perspective, “combating global poverty is not only a moral obligation; it will also help build a more stable, peaceful, prosperous and equitable world, reflecting the interdependency of its richer and poorer countries” (Official Journal of the European Union, 2006, p.1).

The wealth of a country is measured in terms of GDP, meaning the addition of the wealth produced over a period of time, which makes it possible to rank the countries. One of the OECD tasks is to be active in terms of development aid through its DAC, which basically represents “a factory of ideas for development aid” (Béchet, 2014). On its turn, “the European Commission does not simply wait passively for an opportunity to take action, but it generates new opportunities” (Carbone, 2007, p. 23). When we speak about developed or emerging countries, we think of many elements such as their level of democracy and transparency, good governance, freedom of expression, wealth, education, health, food security etc.

But what does development mean more specifically in this context? In simple words, it is a transfer of resources from a donor to a beneficiary country. However, there is sometimes too much focus on the donor – beneficiary relationship, and we tend to forget that the main resources are coming from the beneficiary country itself. The beneficiary country is in charge of its own development, starting from State resources, continuing with private investments, or even remittances from their immigrant workers (Béchet, 2014). Moreover, even in that situation, official aid remains “the most important component of aid, accounting today for over 70% of all development and emergency aid. At its simplest, official aid is made up of two elements, bilateral and multilateral aid. Bilateral aid is provided directly by governments, through their official aid agencies, to an aid-recipient country. Multilateral aid is provided to the recipient by an international organisation active in development. About $\frac{3}{4}$ of ODA consists of bilateral aid [...] this is because the largest and most important multilateral agencies are themselves funded by the large donor countries” (Riddell, 2007, p. 51).

The EU is also a beneficiary in terms of financial support for its own development activities and programmes considering that aid funds come from the

EU Member States, and that those funds are administered at the Commission's level. In its capacity, "as an intergovernmental agency, in most ways, the Commission acts like a bilateral aid donor, even though its aid (ODA) is classified by the OECD/DAC as part of multilateral aid" (Riddell, 2007, p. 67). The use of the EU's development policy, despite the fact that it remains much attached to the notion of the ODA, is trying to emphasise the role of leverage of the ODA; on one side, to stimulate more private sector activities and to generate investments; on the other side, to use part of this assistance for security issues (e.g.: African Peace Facility which is trying to have a tool to move beyond the ODA money).

The EU is constantly looking at how to increase its efficiency, one important issue being the so-called 'joint programming', a major policy process initiative in order to reduce inefficiency. Since the development policy is a shared policy, and the Member States also have their own development policies, the idea of joint programming to see how common resources can be put together by both the EU and its Member States in order to make aid more efficient was born (Subject 4). The other major initiative is that the EU is visibly shifting its management model from activity management to results' management.

The money flow's need to respect their dossier, field and targeted goals, in order to bring an added value to the development process; otherwise, money risks to be lost and the impact almost non-existent in the field.

4.2. Aid coordination: link between donors and beneficiary countries

Policy coherence on development and more coordination between the actors involved in various cross-cutting sectors of development, as well as between the EU and its Member States, might lead to a positive change in time. Thus, "soft factors such as governance, the rule of law, institutional quality, play a critical role in achieving economic prosperity and putting countries on a strong development path" (Moyo, 2009, p. 58). Therefore, development activities need "harmonization, coherence and consistency in aid programmes, as well as recipient-country ownership, in order to achieve a more sustainable impact" (Riddell, 2007, p. 74).

However, the main problem is represented by the large number of agencies that can provide aid, as well as their different ways to analyse the final decision on how to allocate aid (agreement, contract, open call for project application etc.). This decision regarding the allocation of aid is based on the donors' motivation and their priorities concerning the local development of the respective beneficiary country (Riddell, 2007, p. 57). Over time, donors have acknowledged the need for cooperation and coordination among themselves in order "to ensure that the project aid they provide is relevant to the needs of recipients, that it is sustainable, and that decisions on projects should be harmonized to avoid duplication and overlap" (Riddell, 2007, p. 188). However, this ambition remains more related to the political

decision and the society's willingness to be involved, as cohesion and hard work are compulsory for sustainable development (Subject 5).

In this context, "aid policy itself is a direct form of intervention" (Holden, 2009, p. 5). But aid effectiveness is not only about results, it is also about various principles such as ownership, accountability, transparency (according to Busan Declaration), so the EU has its trajectory very much driven by these concepts. Moreover, the EU implemented a system of joint programming and control which offered good results and good appreciation by the partner countries: (i) the EU and its Member States put together their resources (joint programming) in a coordinated and complementary way, in order to better serve the needs of the partner country; and (ii) the control over projects and activities through monitoring, evaluation and audit on the EU funding, in order to identify possible gaps and to provide adequate solutions for the partner country (Subject 8).

We can translate the definition of development aid by taking into consideration facts such as poor people from rich countries that give money to rich people from poor countries. Hence, the relation between donors and beneficiary countries is characterised by (i) dependency, (ii) responsibility and (iii) external influence. When we talk about donors and beneficiary countries, there is a financial transfer that might create dependency. When we talk about partners, the notion of equality is introduced in this relationship, as the donor - beneficiary relationship is, by definition, unequal.

Aid dependency creates a transfer of responsibility from beneficiary countries to the donors; however, developed countries claim that they are not the only ones responsible for the level of development, mainly considering that the beneficiary country can decide on its level of engagement and on the kind of policies to follow. In this way, the beneficiary country should take on responsibility for what happens on the ground, while the donors should provide consistent support and avoid driving all development initiatives.

Some donors choose their partners and try to build a long-lasting relationship through multi-annual programmes. This is a classic situation for small donors interested in quality, and therefore, it is important that partners are chosen based on their performance indicators. However, by choosing its partner, inequality occurs, as the donor will always have the freedom to change its requirements and even to stop working with that partner (Béchet, 2014). The relationship between the donor and the beneficiary country is established within a framework. This framework can provide the conditions, targets and goals for the right direction of the cooperation, and all these criteria entail various forms of conditionality, as development aid is governed by conditionality:

- a) conditions directly related to the project when the EU – for instance – wants to build roads in Africa and, in return, the roads must be maintained, the legislation should be appropriated (i.e.: to establish the maximum weight of trucks, to design additional infrastructure etc.);

- b) conditions related to the sustainability of the project in order to ensure the effectiveness of the project and to avoid money wasted, as the main goal of each project financed by the EU should reach the maximum impact on the ground. Dealing with media is also important in order to present the evolution of the project and its importance for the local community.

Sometimes, the competition among donors is very intense and might cause problems to the beneficiary countries. This competition usually highlights aspects that are very well sold from a political point of view (i.e.: building hospitals and schools rather than roads). In this particular case, health and education are more sensitive than infrastructure, for instance. However, there might be the case when education and health sectors are saturated, having more offers than needs on the table, and this situation of competition among donors has as a main consequence the conditionality reduction for the beneficiary countries. Otherwise, the beneficiary country will do its projects with another counterpart (either country or organisation), so it is important to reach a harmonisation of interests among donors within the development field.

Moreover, the competition among donors sometimes leads to projects being financed several times, and this affects cost-effectiveness and the number of development projects. More donors involved do not mean more aid (in all its forms) for the partner country: “there is no clear relationship between number of donors and the overall amount of aid provided. But it certainly does mean having to devote more resources to overseeing an even more complex array of aid programmes and projects” (Riddell, 2007, p. 52).

4.3. How to achieve resilience in the development sector?

In order to be resilient and to deal with concerns related to extreme poverty, good governance, management of natural resources, environment protection, the EU has the necessary resources to lead the development process: “the EU represents 7% of the world’s population, but at the same time the EU accounts for 55% of the volume of aid (including the EU and its Member States). At the same time, the EU and EC are operating together somewhere between 20 to 25% of the development aid” (Subject 1), being in coherence with its values such as solidarity, social protection, promoting good governance and freedom of expression.

The EU can be considered a norm-maker especially in relation with the civil society and local authorities. In Busan, the EU has been pushed to include the civil society as an actor of governance and this was something new at that time. In the past, civil society was considered mostly an implementer (bringing some funds, mainly from charity), for both the EU and other donors. In this regard, CSOs (Civil Society Organisations) – in particular local NGOs – evolved over time and were even used to implement the EU’s agenda, being more effective and innovative in the field (Subject 1). By being resilient, this also includes ownership, political dialogue and

cooperation with civil society organisations in the development process (Carbone, 2007, p. 130).

Therefore, with a reliable diagnosis of the partner country's context, priorities can be identified and the focus can be put on specific areas for intervention. There are responsibilities and challenges, so it is recommended to avoid investing money without a strategic plan for development, clear objectives and key performance indicators (Subject 9). This is because criticism of aid programmes and shifting emphasis in development has not fallen on deaf ears. On its turn, the EU reviews its performance regularly and is unafraid to adjust its strategies as necessary, but the impact is not always according to expectations. Recognising the need for financial accountability on the part of aid-receiving countries, the European Commission has incorporated monitoring instruments trying to continuously improve its way of action; however, the EU still lacks post-project monitoring tools.

Most importantly, the EU has addressed the growing need of policy coherence which places foreign policy coordination “on an equal footing with other EU external relations policies” (Ganzle *et al.*, 2012, pp. 10-11). Its development policy aims to eradicate extreme poverty and constitutes an important factor of the EU's external relations in international development arena. Over the years, the EU has proven itself to be steadfast in its support of development, and there is no reason to believe this will change anytime soon. By traditional standards of financial aid, the EU is the top donor. Its ability to learn and implement oversight wisely, however, has meant the money it gives has not gone to waste – which basically means the EU is not simply a forlorn payer, but a player opened to dialogue and a norm-maker looking to set the right framework for development processes. Moreover, the Union has come to understand that policy coherence for development is not just “a nice feature of progressive donors, but rather a key requirement for successful policy for development” (Ganzle *et al.*, 2012, p. 3).

Conclusions

In international fora, the EU is a strong supporter of development, being committed to sustainable development and poverty eradication, and aspiring to act as a leader in the field (Ganzle *et al.*, 2012, p. 153). From this point of view, the EU can be seen as having three main roles in development: firstly, it is an experienced and qualified development donor on the ground; second, it is a coordinator of development aid at the European level; and third, it is a norm-maker in development at global level (Ganzle *et al.*, 2012, p. 153).

Development – at all levels – is based on resilient policies and action plans designed to accelerate growth and to establish a strategy for short, medium and long term. Moreover, development is a work of patience, including a deep commitment to fundamental rights, dialogue and interaction among stakeholders. At the same time, development is a process that takes time, a mirror that reflects trust, where the

verb ‘to be’ is more important than the verb ‘to have’. Development also implies the responsibility of building resilient communities and reducing vulnerability, based on the EU’s engagement, its positive synergies and participatory approach.

As a norm-maker in development, also including the peace and security layer, the EU operates as a transformational actor in the international development arena. However, the context is very important considering a lot of disruption is going on, and the increasing complexity pressure in unstable environments leads to societal vulnerability. It is essential to understand these dynamics, to be flexible and to allow adaptation, especially the capacity of the State in front of pressure to maintain its core functions; moreover, the adaptability of States, societies and institutions, in order to anticipate risks at different levels are equally important.

On the other side, the EU may be seen as a norm-taker in development considering the constant need to reinforce its actions in order to continuously improve its efficiency in terms of resilience and aid delivery. But the right term to better describe this approach is “opinion-taker” as the EU collects insights from the ground while engaging with local actors, donors’ community and the EU Member States.

The EU and its Member States are adapting and transforming their methods of assistance to meet new challenges, changing understandings, and expanding opportunities. Furthermore, the EU has a role of liaison recognised by local and international institutions, being also involved in advocacy and various dossiers of public and social interest. Communication towards all relevant stakeholders is paramount in order to bring everyone on board and to find a complementarity between the projects/programmes’ requirements and the reality from the field. Moreover, the engagement and communication processes should highlight the EU principles vis-à-vis its partners, such as consistency, universal values, credibility and diplomacy, as the Union is a soft power that can open doors that no one else is able to open.

The partnership between the EU and its partner countries is considered to be consistent and flexible, taking into consideration evolving aspects such as climate change, human development, democracy and good governance: “the commitments are very important for the whole humanity. If we do nothing, it is a catastrophe; if we continue, it reduces the damage” (Subject 10). Thus, the EU is more oriented towards moral duty, but in the sense of the Union’s interest in how the world can develop in mirror with its principles, values and ethics. Development can only happen in a democratic environment, and the main goal is the well-being of individuals and human security.

As shown in the current paper, good governance and human rights are important in the EU’s eyes as they set the norms in aid delivery. In practice, aid delivery starts from addressing the more immediate needs, to emergency situations and humanitarian aid, in order to save lives in affected and vulnerable countries. On the other side, the effective cooperation for sustainable development should be based

on both thematic and geographic approaches, but also on norms such as good governance, transparency, ownership and accountability. Finally, the concept of resilience encloses a combination of political and development approaches, highlighting all features and capacities along the transition from sustainability to resilience itself, including elements related to security, stability, democratisation or social economy.

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APPENDIX

Guiding protocol interview

- Subject 1, Representative of DG DEVCO, Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities Unit, European Commission, interview held on April 28, 2017, Brussels, Belgium.
- Subject 2, Member of the European Parliament, Delegation to the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, interview held on May 4, 2017, Brussels, Belgium.
- Subject 3, Representative of DG DEVCO, Financing and Effectiveness Unit, European Commission, interview held on February 23, 2017, Brussels, Belgium.
- Subject 4, Representative of DG DEVCO, Project Monitoring and Results Framework Unit, European Commission, interview held on February 23, 2017, Brussels, Belgium.
- Subject 5, Representative of the ACP Secretariat in Brussels, interview held on February 23, 2017, Brussels, Belgium.
- Subject 6, Representative of DG DEVCO, Policy and Coherence Unit, European Commission, interview held on February 23, 2017, Brussels, Belgium.
- Subject 7, Member of the European Parliament, Committee on Development, interview held on February 22, 2017, Brussels Belgium.
- Subject 8, Representative of the European External Action Service, Division of Development Cooperation Coordination, interview held on February 23, 2017, Brussels, Belgium.
- Subject 9, Representative of the European Development Fund – National Authorising Office Support Unit; Economic, Social and Public Finance Section; interview held on January 22, 2016, Libreville, Gabon.
- Subject 10, Member of ROPAGA Network (Network of Organisations and Associative Projects of Gabon), interview held on January 29, 2016, Libreville, Gabon.