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The Globalization Project of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS)

Introduction

Founded on April 5, 2020, the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) is the direct successor to the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States (hereinafter, the ACP Group). The history of the ACP Group reflects the evolution of the external relations of the European Union (EU).¹ At the time of writing, the OACPS has 79 member states, located in sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific.² The ACP Group came into being on June 6, 1975, with the founding Georgetown Agreement setting out their main aims and purpose. This followed the signature of the first Lomé Convention (Lomé I) earlier that year with the EU. An account of the globalization project of the OACPS, therefore, needs situating within the evolution of these important historical foundations.

The ACP Group/OACPS has had two main functions during its existence: first, the coordination of its relationship with the EU and, second, the desire to foster greater cooperation between ACP states and develop wider links across the Global South. Given that “development” has been the stated aim of EU relations with the ACP Group/OACPS, the relationship has evolved as different theories and development strategies have become more or less popular. This focus has played a key role in shaping both the nature of the globalization project of the OACPS and the view of the potential benefits (or downsides) of the engagement of OACPS member states with the global economy.

The academic literature on the ACP Group/OACPS has been dominated by analysis that starts from the perspective of the EU’s external relations. As a result, the agency of ACP states within contemporary processes of globalization has received limited analysis.³ This chapter addresses this lacuna by focusing specifically on the globalization

1 Throughout this chapter, I use EU to represent the European Union and the organization before the Maastricht Treaty, officially referred to as the European Economic Community.

2 In October 2022, South Africa announced its withdrawal from the OACPS, effective from September. The Maldives formally joined the OACPS at the Summit of Heads of State and Government in December 2022.

3 Notable exceptions include Nikki Slocum-Bradley, “Constructing and De-constructing the ACP Group: Actors, Strategies and Consequences for Development,” *Geopolitics* 12, no. 4 (2007): 635–655; Niels Keijzer, “Feigned Ambition: Analysing the Emergence, Evolution and Performance of the ACP Group of States,” *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 1, no. 4 (2016): 508–525; Stephen R. Hurt, “African Agency and EU-ACP Relations Beyond the Cotonou Agreement,” *Journal of Contemporary European*

project of the ACP Group/OACPS and how this has characterized its response to the global condition. At the same time, it acknowledges that its *raison d'être* has always been its relationship with the EU and that this has understandably shaped and constrained its own globalization project.

The next section of the chapter demonstrates how the initial globalization project of the ACP Group was closely aligned with the broader challenge posed by countries across the Global South to the global condition of the 1970s. The call for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) played an important role in shaping both its founding document and the negotiation of its relationship with the EU. I then demonstrate how, since its formation, the increasing heterogeneity of the ACP Group has undermined the realization of this initial globalization project. The next section evaluates the evolution of interregionalism between the EU and the ACP Group. It argues that the globalization project of the EU (see chapter 13, this volume) has taken precedence, resulting in a relationship increasingly reflective of the prevailing neoliberal orthodoxy. Beyond its relationship with the EU, the ACP Group has pursued a number of second-order globalization projects within a range of multilateral fora. The final section concludes that the recent process of organizational transformation will not enable the OACPS to effectively advance an alternative globalization project to that which has governed its relationship with the EU.

Responding to the Global Condition

The creation of the ACP Group represented a response to a global condition that was characterized by a period of decolonization and the establishment of newly independent states across the Global South. During the early 1970s, developing countries felt emboldened by the idea of “commodity power” and were engaged in a contestation of the existing world economic order. It is this global conjuncture that helps explain the ambitions expressed in the founding Georgetown Agreement for a focus on greater cooperation not only between ACP states but also with developing countries more broadly.

The other important aspect of the global condition that was key to the formation of the ACP Group was the EU’s management of its relations with the former colonies of its member states. The original motivation for the EU to create association agreements with what later became the ACP Group was to incorporate the colonial interests of its original member states, particularly France. As Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler note, it was “from these essentially colonial provisions [that] the practices of post-colonial

Research 16, no. 2 (2020): 139–162; Maurizio Carbone, “There is Life Beyond the European Union: Revisiting the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States,” *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 10 (2021): 2451–2468.

association evolved.”⁴ This relationship required an overhaul following the accession of three new member states to the EU in 1973. Membership of the United Kingdom, in particular, resulted in the EU renegotiating its arrangement with what became the ACP Group. The subsequent signing of Lomé I on February 28, 1975, represented a significant change in direction. It also resulted in the formalization of the ACP Group and the creation of the ACP Council of Ministers as the key decision-making body, whose work would be supported by the ACP Committee of Ambassadors and the ACP Secretariat.

The globalization project of the ACP Group is articulated in the Georgetown Agreement.⁵ Article 2 lists the key objectives at the time of formation, which can be summarized as follows:

- a) to realize the aims of the Lomé Convention;
- b) to facilitate coordination of the ACP states in their delivery of the Lomé Convention;
- c) to determine joint ACP positions on issues related to the Lomé Convention;
- d) to strengthen solidarity between ACP states;
- e) to increase trade, economic, and cultural relations among ACP states and developing countries in general;
- f) to promote effective regional cooperation among ACP states and developing countries in general; and
- g) to promote the realization of a NIEO.

These founding ambitions reflect the twin aims of the ACP Group. Its globalization project was predicated on collective action to shape the global condition in order to enhance the development prospects of its member states and the Global South more broadly. This was to be achieved primarily through its relationship with the EU.

The ultimate aim of the ACP Group’s globalization project, expressed in Article 2 of the Georgetown Agreement, was the realization of the vision for a NIEO. Hence, there was a clear link between the globalization project of this particular regional organization and the broader response of states in the Global South to the global condition. The adoption by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1974 of the Declaration for the Establishment of a New International Economic Order articulated a set of reforms to the governance of the emerging global economy, designed to address the developmental aspirations of countries in the Global South. It is important to remember, nevertheless, that “the proposals were not antitrade or prefiguratively antiglobalization; rather, the NIEO envisaged an alternative order of global economic integration in which countries

4 Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler, *The European Union as a Global Actor*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 115.

5 ACP, “Georgetown Agreement on the Organisation of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP)” (Brussels: ACP, 1975), 4–5.

in the south could catch up with the economic achievements of the north.”⁶ Hence, the demands for a NIEO should be understood as an attempt to reestablish some of the more development-focused aspects of the plans for embedded liberalism that were ultimately abandoned during the process of negotiating the Bretton Woods System in 1944.⁷

This global context helped to shape the nature and content of the negotiations between the EU and ACP states that resulted in Lomé I. The EU were concerned about maintaining access to raw materials following the oil crisis of 1973 and, given the Cold War context, had to consider the geopolitical consequences of the relationship with former colonies.⁸ Maurizio Carbone argues that at the time the “cohesiveness of the ACP cluster of states surprised the EU.”⁹ As a result, the ACP Group was able to secure a number of concessions during the negotiation of Lomé I. As such, “although the NIEO project ultimately resulted in little concrete progress, some parts of the newly strengthened EU-ACP relationship [...] did incorporate ideas from this Southern critique of the world economy.”¹⁰

In contrast to the terms of the EU’s previous association agreements, Lomé I included nonreciprocal trade preferences for ACP countries. This opened up the possibility for ACP countries to support domestic producers by using tariffs and/or quotas to restrict the access of European exporters to their markets. It also introduced the Stabilization of Export Earnings Scheme (STABEX), which earmarked funds from the European Development Fund (EDF) to guarantee earnings from agricultural exports not covered by the Common Agricultural Policy due to a fall in prices or a loss of production.¹¹ Lomé I also contained specific protocols, which provided a guarantee of prices above the world-market level for producers of specific commodities in certain ACP countries.¹² Many observers at the time were therefore of the opinion that the Lomé Convention

6 Nils Gilman, “The New International Economic Order: A Reintroduction,” *Humanity* 6, no. 1 (2015): 4.

7 Eric Helleiner, “Reinterpreting Bretton Woods: International Development and the Neglected Origins of Embedded Liberalism,” *Development and Change* 37, no. 5 (2006): 964.

8 Adrian Flint, “The End of a ‘Special Relationship’? The New EU-ACP Economic Partnership Agreements,” *Review of African Political Economy* 36, no. 119 (2009): 81.

9 Maurizio Carbone, “The African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) Group of States: From the Lomé Convention to the Cotonou Agreement and Beyond,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of European Union Politics*, ed. Finn Laursen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

10 Stephen R. Hurt, “Co-operation and Coercion? The Cotonou Agreement Between the European Union and ACP States and the End of the Lomé Convention,” *Third World Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (2003): 162.

11 The second Lomé Convention (Lomé II) introduced a similar arrangement for mineral exports, known as the Stabilization Scheme for Mineral Products (SYSMIN).

12 There were four such protocols, covering bananas, beef/veal, rum, and sugar.

represented “a radical and progressive agreement linking developed and developing countries in a spirit of partnership and equality.”¹³

The material benefits of the trade-related aspects of Lomé I for the ACP Group were in fact rather limited. Analysis by Joanna Moss and John Ravenhill convincingly demonstrates that during the period of Lomé I, the ACP Group failed to increase their share of the EU’s imports of primary goods or diversify their exports.¹⁴ In fact, one of the consequences was to ensure that ACP states continued to rely on the export of raw materials and to import industrial goods from Europe.¹⁵ As a result, critics of this early phase of the EU-ACP relationship raised important questions over the assumed developmental benefits resulting from the innovations governing EU-ACP trade.¹⁶

The focus of the ACP Group’s globalization project on boosting cooperation between its member states and with other developing countries has in reality always been of secondary importance to the negotiation and management of its relationship with the EU. Although Lomé I raised the prospect of achieving some of the broad aims articulated in the demands for a NIEO, the material benefits for most ACP states were limited. Moreover, the renewal of the Lomé Convention in 1979 began a process whereby a more neoliberal approach increasingly shaped the globalization project of the EU. After a number of iterations of the Lomé Convention during the two decades that followed, the Cotonou Agreement, signed in 2000, marked another change in the EU-ACP relationship, by then described as a partnership. With the Cotonou Agreement due to expire in 2020, negotiations on a successor began in September 2018.

In December 2019, during the period of negotiations with the EU on a new agreement, a summit of ACP heads of state and government adopted a revised version of the original Georgetown Agreement, and the OACPS subsequently came into effect the following year. The ambition of the recently formed OACPS is to move beyond having such a strong focus on its long-standing relationship with the EU. The strategic plan of the OACPS for 2022–2025 does acknowledge that the “present international order is framed by the shifting center of gravity in the world economy and a growing disillusionment with globalization.”¹⁷ However, what this OACPS strategy document fails to outline is a credible alternative globalization project. In contrast to the more lofty ambitions articulated in 1975 at the time of the formation of the ACP Group, the focus in more

13 Richard Gibb, “Post Lomé: The European Union and the South,” *Third World Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (2000): 462.

14 Joanna Moss and John Ravenhill, “Trade Developments During the First Lomé Convention,” *World Development* 10, no. 10 (1982): 853.

15 Martin Holland and Matthew Doidge, *Development Policy of the European Union* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), 57.

16 Johan Galtung, “The Lomé Convention and Neo-Capitalism,” *The African Review* 6, no. 1 (1976): 33–42.

17 OACPS Secretariat, “Strategic Plan 2022–2025” (Brussels: OACPS Secretariat, 2022): 8.

recent years has been the renewal of existing multilateralism, reflected in support for the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

The ACP Group/OACPS Globalization Project in Practice

The globalization project of the ACP Group, discussed above, is predicated on the ability to strengthen the unity between ACP states in order to both effectively negotiate the terms of their engagement with the EU and improve their position within the global economy. The ACP Group has maintained decision-making power within the member states. However, since its formation the coherence of the ACP Group has become a key obstacle to the realization of this globalization project.

The signing of the Lomé Convention and the formation of the ACP Group in 1975 meant that a “larger and more diverse framework brought with it new challenges in terms of intra- and inter-group relations.”¹⁸ Membership numbers increased during the duration of Lomé I (from 46 to 53 members) and continued to grow significantly up until the turn of the century.¹⁹ Carbone suggests that the attractiveness of the ACP Group to new member states during this period was in large part the result of the significant aid budget on offer from the EU via the EDF.²⁰ By the 1990s, however, it was clear that the diversity of the ACP Group, combined with the limited capacity of the ACP Secretariat, was undermining its effectiveness.²¹ At the time of the Cotonou Agreement, the ACP Group had expanded to 78 countries, with only Cuba being refused accession to the post-Lomé accord by the EU.²² It is telling, however, that the location of the main OACPS office remains in Brussels and that the ACP Secretariat has continued to rely on EU funding to conduct its activities.

18 António Raimundo, “From the Treaty of Rome to Cotonou,” in *The Routledge Handbook of EU-Africa Relations*, eds. Toni Haastrup, Luís Mah, and Niall Duggan (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 63.

19 Holland and Doidge, *Development Policy of the European Union*, 54.

20 Carbone, “There is Life Beyond the European Union,” 2464.

21 Karin Arts and Jessica Byron, “The Mid-Term Review of the Lomé IV Convention: Herald the Future?,” *Third World Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (1997): 75.

22 The ACP Group of States in a show of support for Cuba allowed them to join as a member state in December 2000, which required a formal amendment to the Georgetown Agreement.

Table 21.1 Development classification of OACPS member states

Country	HDI** (2021)	HDI ranking	Country	HDI (2021)	HDI ranking
<i>African Region (32)</i>			<i>African Region (15)</i>		
Angola	0.586	148	Botswana	0.693	117
Benin	0.525	166	Cameroon	0.576	151
Burkina Faso	0.449	184	Cape Verde	0.662	128
Burundi	0.426	187	Congo	0.571	153
Central African Republic	0.404	188	Côte d'Ivoire	0.550	159
Chad	0.394	190	Equatorial Guinea	0.596	145
Comoros	0.558	156	Eswatini	0.597	144
Democratic Republic of the Congo	0.479	179	Gabon	0.706	112
Djibouti	0.509	171	Ghana	0.632	133
Eritrea	0.492	176	Kenya	0.575	152
Ethiopia	0.498	175	Mauritius	0.802	63
Gambia	0.500	174	Namibia	0.615	139
Guinea	0.465	182	Nigeria	0.535	163
Guinea-Bissau	0.483	177	Seychelles	0.785	72
Lesotho	0.514	168	Zimbabwe	0.593	146
Liberia	0.481	178			
Madagascar	0.501	173	<i>Caribbean Region (15)</i>		
Malawi	0.512	169	Antigua and Barbuda	0.788	71
Mali	0.428	186	Bahamas	0.812	55
Mauritania	0.556	158	Barbados	0.790	70
Mozambique	0.446	185	Belize	0.683	123
Niger	0.400	189	Cuba	0.764	83
Rwanda	0.534	165	Dominica	0.720	102
São Tomé and Príncipe	0.618	138	Dominican Republic	0.767	80
Senegal	0.511	170	Grenada	0.795	68
Sierra Leone	0.477	181	Guyana	0.714	108
Somalia	–	–	Jamaica	0.709	110
Sudan	0.508	172	St. Kitts and Nevis	0.777	75
Tanzania	0.549	160	St. Lucia	0.715	106
Togo	0.539	162	St. Vincent and the Grenadines	0.751	89
Uganda	0.525	166	Suriname	0.730	99

Country	HDI** (2021)	HDI ranking	Country	HDI (2021)	HDI ranking
Zambia	0.565	154	Trinidad and Tobago	0.810	57
<i>Caribbean Region (1)</i>			<i>Pacific Region (11)</i>		
Haiti	0.535	163	Cook Islands	–	–
			Fiji	0.730	99
<i>Pacific Region (4)</i>			Marshall Islands	0.639	131
Kiribati	0.624	136	Micronesia	0.628	134
Solomon Islands	0.564	155	Nauru	–	–
Timor-Leste	0.607	140	Niue	–	–
Tuvalu	0.641	130	Palau	0.767	80
			Papua New Guinea	0.558	156
			Samoa	0.707	111
			Tonga	0.745	91
			Vanuatu	0.607	140
			Maldives***	0.747	90

* Least developed countries

** Human Development Index

*** Maldives have not yet aligned with a regional grouping within the OACPS.

Source: UN Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2021/22* (New York: UNDP, 2022).

As shown in the table above, a high proportion (37 out of 46) of the countries officially defined by the UN as least developed countries (LDCs) are members of the OACPS. Moreover, the Human Development Index (HDI) levels range considerably across the membership, which has further complicated both the relationship with the EU and relations between ACP states themselves.

The globalization project envisaged in the early years of the formation of the ACP Group increasingly clashed with that pursued by the EU. It has been argued that at the time of Lomé I a form of hybrid interregionalism was in place between the EU and ACP states and that this relationship deepened into a more expansive form by the time of the Cotonou Agreement.²³ Given the significance of this interregionalism to the purpose

23 Anna van der Vleuten and Andrea Ribeiro Hoffmann, “The Politics of Inter-Regionalism: Relations Between International Regional Organizations,” in *Routledge Handbook of International Organization*, ed. Bob Reinalda (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 433.

and focus of the ACP Group, it is understandable how the ideas and interests of the EU have come to dominate the relationship. The EU's approach during the 1980s and 1990s became reflective of two key developments in the global condition: first, a shift in North-South relations toward a focus on development strategies based on economic and political liberalization and, second, the EU's internal policy agenda exemplified by the creation of the European single market in 1992.

Hence, the periodic renegotiations of the Lomé Convention took place during a period when neoliberal ideas became dominant and many ACP countries, faced with external debt problems, were pursuing structural adjustment programs (SAPs). The mid-term review of the fourth Lomé Convention (Lomé IV), signed in 1995, saw a strengthening of political conditionalities first adopted in 1989. Respect for human rights, democratic principles, and the rule of law were now "essential elements" in the EU-ACP agreement, and good governance became a "fundamental element." Economic conditions also became part of Lomé IV with the allocation of a proportion of the EDF budget to support the structural adjustment of ACP economies. This increasingly politicized aid relationship continued into the Cotonou Agreement, signed in 2000, with the addition of the rolling programming of aid, which appeared "to undermine any notion of equal partnership between the two parties."²⁴

The fundamental differences between the globalization project of the ACP Group and the neoliberal approach adopted by the EU became even more evident with respect to the discussions on trade that were taking place during the negotiations that resulted in the signing of the Cotonou Agreement. The value to ACP states of the preferential trading terms agreed in Lomé I had declined over the two decades that followed due to the wider liberalization of trade agreed at the multilateral level and the introduction of the EU's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). The European Commission produced a green paper in 1996 that set the parameters of the debate on the future of the trade provisions within a new EU-ACP accord. Their key recommendation was an end to the nonreciprocal trade preferences, which ACP states saw as one of major achievements of the Lomé Convention.²⁵ In so doing, the EU used pressure to conform to the rules of the multilateral trade system as a justification for the introduction of differential trade regimes for ACP states based on their level of development. The trade preferences provided in the Lomé Convention had been discriminatory against countries with a similar level of development that were not members of the ACP Group. As a result, the EU introduced a new scheme for LDCs in 2001, "Everything but Arms," which allows duty-free and quota-free access to the European market for all goods except arms and ammunition. In addition, despite resistance from the ACP Group during the

24 Hurt, "Co-operation and Coercion?," 172.

25 European Commission, "Green Paper on Relations Between the European Union and the ACP Countries on the Eve of the 21st Century: Challenges and Options for a New Partnership" (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1997).

negotiations, the Cotonou Agreement introduced reciprocal trade liberalization via the negotiation of economic partnership agreements (EPAs) between the EU and ACP subregions.²⁶

This meant the EU was using two potentially contradictory criteria—regionalism and levels of development—to determine this new trading relationship.²⁷ Those regional divisions, driven by the negotiation of EPAs, further undermined the unity of the ACP Group. The Caribbean region took the decision to sign a comprehensive EPA in 2008, whereas in Africa there has been significant resistance to them. One of the criticisms of EPAs has been that they have “undermined African aspirations of regional integration by pushing for sub-regional agreements within the continent that did not map on to the sub-regional divisions recognized by African elites.”²⁸ The recently negotiated post-Cotonou agreement with the EU also embeds a regional approach with the inclusion of three separate protocols, which raises more questions as to the coherence of the OACPS as an organization.²⁹

Hence, it is clear that the variation in levels of development between ACP states has also resulted in an increasingly divergent approach to their relationship with the EU. We have seen a cleavage form whereby more developed ACP states are mostly concerned with trade links, whereas those ACP countries that fall under the category of LDCs focus on preserving levels of aid funding.³⁰ Overall, the ACP Group has consistently been on the back foot in its negotiations with the EU ever since the conclusion of Lomé I. In the particular case of the Cotonou Agreement, Carbone attributes this to “its structural difficulties in forging common positions on most issues.”³¹ What unites the member states of the OACPS is their shared historical experience of European colonialism, rather than their current values and interests. As Ulf Engel notes, we can understand regional organizations in the Global South as an attempt to boost the sovereignty of member states.³² The actorship of regional projects relies on the consolidation of common positions. The ACP Group does not have an accomplished record in this regard, except during the initial negotiations that resulted in Lomé I, as discussed above.

Given that the relationship with the EU has continued to play such a dominant role in its history, this is key to understanding the scope for agency of the ACP Group.

26 The EU conducted EPA negotiations with West Africa, Central Africa, the East African Community, Eastern and Southern Africa, the Southern African Development Community, the Caribbean, and the Pacific.

27 Gibb, “Post Lomé,” 473.

28 Toni Haastrup, Niall Duggan, and Luis Mah, “Navigating Ontological (In)Security in EU-Africa Relations,” *Global Affairs* 7, no. 4 (2021): 548.

29 Hurt, “African Agency and EU-ACP Relations,” 146.

30 Carbone, “The African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) Group of States.”

31 Carbone.

32 Ulf Engel, “Regionalism and Regional Organizations,” in *Spatial Formats Under the Global Condition*, eds. Steffi Marung and Matthias Middell (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019): 321.

Much of the literature on this question of ACP agency in recent years has focused on the negotiation of EPAs with the EU. However, as Frank Mattheis reminds us, EU-ACP relations demonstrate “how asymmetry can be structured and formalized within interregionalism.”³³ Given this asymmetry, what scope is there, if any, for the ACP Group to exert agency in advancing an alternative to the neoliberal globalization projected by the EU in its external relations? To answer this question, we need to embed our understanding of agency within the broader material and ideational structures of the global economy in order to avoid equating it with simply exacting influence.³⁴

In contrast to the Caribbean region, the five subregions across Africa have sought to resist the EU’s intention of concluding EPAs, which would go beyond the reciprocal liberalization of trade in goods, to include a range of behind-the-border issues.³⁵ As Mark Langan and Sophia Price remind us, “negotiations for EPAs represent a final step in the redesigning of the ACP-EU relationship to one based solely on the principles of free trade and private sector competition.”³⁶ Scholars have argued that, despite the asymmetry in the relationship, the EU’s development narrative around EPAs has allowed ACP elites, supported by an advocacy campaign by civil society organizations, to use normative power to resist and delay the implementation of more comprehensive agreements.³⁷

Beyond this strategy of resistance, however, the African subregions have been unable to exert an agenda-setting role in the EPA negotiations. This is evident in the EU’s desire for comprehensive EPAs to include a range of issues that go beyond those needed to ensure that they meet the compatibility criteria of the World Trade Organization (WTO).³⁸ It is important to acknowledge that the already agreed interim EPAs are merely part of an ongoing process of negotiations with the EU. The EU’s ultimate objective for the EPA negotiations is still to promote a globalization project that “is pro-

33 Frank Mattheis, “Regionalism and Interregionalism in EU-Africa relations,” in *The Routledge Handbook of EU-Africa Relations*, eds. Toni Hastrup, Luís Mah, and Niall Duggan (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 31.

34 Hurt, “African Agency and EU-ACP Relations,” 143.

35 Of the five subregions in Africa negotiating EPAs with the EU, only the Southern African Development Community group has signed and begun implementing a full EPA at the time of writing.

36 Mark Langan and Sophia Price, “Extraversion and the West African EPA Development Programme: Realising the Development Dimension of ACP-EU Trade?” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 53, no. 3 (2015): 267.

37 Tony Heron, “Trading in Development: Norms and Institutions in the Making/Unmaking of European Union-African, Caribbean and Pacific Trade and Development Cooperation,” *Contemporary Politics* 20, no. 1 (2014).

38 Stephen R. Hurt, “African Agency in World Trade Undermined? The Case of Bilateral Relations with the European Union,” in *African Agency in International Politics*, eds. William Brown and Sophie Harman (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 59.

market in orientation and attempts to secure and deepen the embedding of the world market in different national ACP contexts.”³⁹

This resistance to signing more comprehensive EPAs demonstrates the defensive stance that ACP states have taken in response to the more dominant globalization project of the EU. What it highlights is the notably different views on the most appropriate development strategy for ACP states in an era of globalization. This is encapsulated by Rikard Bengtsson and Ole Elgström, who argue that the “EU’s conception of a harmonious relationship between trade liberalization, regional integration and economic development and poverty reduction confronts the ACP’s images of a relationship where development assistance is prioritized and trade liberalization has to be postponed for as many years as possible.”⁴⁰ As the next section of this chapter outlines, a similar strategy to that adopted by the ACP Group in its interregional trade relations with the EU has also been reflected in its promotion of second-order globalization projects at the multilateral level.

Evolution of the ACP Group/OACPS Globalization Project

Beyond its formal relationship with the EU, the ACP Group/OACPS has been engaged in a number of second-order globalization projects. The ACP Group has occasionally been able to realize its aspiration to promote internal solidarity between its member states and, more broadly, developing countries by playing a role at the multilateral level. At the same time, it has singularly failed to advance an alternative to the neoliberal globalization project that has dominated its relationship with the EU.

The ACP Group/OACPS does have observer status in a number of international bodies, including the UN and the WTO. In 2015, during the UN negotiations that led to the Paris Agreement on climate change, the ACP Group, alongside the EU, created the High Ambition Coalition, which was able to exert pressure on high carbon-emitting countries such as China and India. However, even in this case, it was the EU, together with the Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) group, that took the lead.⁴¹ Moreover, Carbone reports that some ACP states were unhappy with the position taken in Paris, on the basis that working with the EU undermined the solidarity of developing countries.⁴²

39 Sophia Price and Alex Nunn, “Managing Neo-Liberalisation Through the Sustainable Development Agenda: the EU-ACP Trade Relationship and World Market Expansion,” *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 1, no. 4 (2016): 464.

40 Rikard Bengtsson and Ole Elgström, “Conflicting Role Conceptions? The European Union in Global Politics,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8, no. 1 (1997): 105.

41 Jean Bossuyt et al., “The Future of ACP-EU Relations: A Political Economy Analysis,” *ECDPM Policy Management Report* 21 (Maastricht: ECDPM, 2016): 99.

42 Carbone, “There is Life Beyond the European Union,” 2460.

Within the WTO, which plays an important role in underpinning the hegemony of neoliberal ideas in the sphere of trade, the ACP Group has been able to exact some influence in multilateral negotiations. The two most notable examples were its role in the WTO Ministerial Conferences held in 2003 and 2013. We can categorize both examples as more of a defensive approach rather than being reflective of the ability to advance an alternative globalization project. In 2003, the 5th WTO Ministerial Conference took place in Cancún (Mexico). The talks eventually collapsed due to an inability to reach an agreement on the “Singapore issues” (investment, competition, transparency in government procurement, and trade facilitation). The ACP Group formed an umbrella body with two other negotiating groups (the Group of Least Developed Countries and the African Group) to form the Group of 90 (G90), which was able to effectively stymie the proposed final deal through its sheer weight of numbers.⁴³ As Federico Silva convincingly argues, one of the other key aspects of the 5th WTO Ministerial Conference was the role played by civil society organizations who “developed a strong alliance with Southern governments as a result of the extensive consultation, lobbying and advocacy work.”⁴⁴

At the 9th WTO Ministerial Conference, held in Bali (Indonesia) in 2013, ACP states put forward a proposal on trade facilitation, which became the basis of the final agreement. Trade facilitation refers to the harmonization and simplification of bureaucratic processes that enable goods to move across borders. The ACP Group managed to create a bridge between the negotiating positions of developed and developing countries by arguing that the latter would only be required to meet their commitments on this issue if they received financial support for capacity-building from the Global North.⁴⁵ However, even this negotiating achievement by the ACP Group can be overstated and “obscures the fact that the trade facilitation agreement is of greater value to industrial countries and that developing countries will shoulder disproportionate burdens and implementation costs.”⁴⁶

In pursuing these second-order globalization projects, the ACP Group has benefited from the establishment in 2002 of a second office for the ACP Secretariat in Geneva. This, together with the focus on development issues in the Doha Development Round, has enabled them to play a role in WTO negotiations. At the same time, however, factors outside of the ACP Group’s control mean that this example from the 9th WTO

43 Amrita Narlikar and Diana Tussie, “The G20 at the Cancun Ministerial: Developing Countries and Their Evolving Coalitions in the WTO,” *The World Economy* 27, no. 7 (2004): 954.

44 Federico Silva, “Global Networks on Trade Policy: The Case of the WTO Conference in Cancún,” in *Global Justice Activism and Policy Reform in Europe: Understanding When Change Happens*, eds. Peter Utting, Mario Pianta, and Anne Ellersiek (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012): 130.

45 Carbone, “There is Life Beyond the European Union,” 2458.

46 Rorden Wilkinson, Erin Hannah, and James Scott, “The WTO in Bali: What MC9 Means for the Doha Development Agenda and Why it Matters,” *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 6 (2014): 1041.

Ministerial Conference might not be easily replicated in the future, given “the slow decline of multilateralism (and the rise of interregionalism) and the continuous strain on the Doha Development Round.”⁴⁷ These examples demonstrate the role that the ACP Group has been able to play within specific multilateral negotiations. They should be seen, however, as the exceptions that prove the rule. In general, attempts to develop cooperation with other developing countries have fallen short of the lofty ambitions outlined in the Georgetown Agreement. Moreover, as discussed above, the ACP states have been unable to translate this periodic multilateral influence into their subregional EPA negotiations with the EU.

Spatialization Effects of the ACP Group/OACPS Globalization Project

As this chapter has demonstrated, the globalization project of the ACP Group was originally aligned with the wider calls across the Global South for a NIEO. At the same time, the central focus of the ACP Group has been to manage the trade and aid relationship of its member states with the EU. This has resulted in a clash with the globalization project being pursued by the EU (see chapter 13, this volume). The recent creation of the OACPS has, rhetorically at least, led to an attempt to reinvigorate the aspirations of those who founded the ACP Group in the mid-1970s. Article 5 of the revised Georgetown Agreement lists the updated objectives of the OACPS. These include the desire to “develop strategic relations and partnerships with external parties including within the global South.”⁴⁸ To this end, in September 2021, in recognition of the long-held ambition for the OACPS to encourage wider South-South cooperation, the official launch in Malabo (Equatorial Guinea) took place of a new Information Centre for South-South and Triangular Cooperation.

The revised Georgetown Agreement also reemphasizes in Article 5 the long-held goal of the OACPS participating actively in the system of global governance. In a more general sense, it is clear that the intention of this organizational renewal is for the OACPS to be able to act more on its own terms. However, it remains the case that other organizations are much more significant actors. In particular, the African Union (AU) has developed ambitious plans for the continent as a whole (see chapter 2, this volume). This is particularly evident with the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area, which became operational on January 1, 2021. This has led to calls for the EU to shift further away from its relationship with the OACPS and toward a more exclusive relationship with the AU. In March 2018, ahead of the launch of the post-

47 Bossuyt et al., “The future of ACP-EU relations,” 34.

48 ACP, “Georgetown Agreement, as Revised by Decision No.1/CX/19 of the 110th Session of the ACP Council of Ministers” (Brussels: ACP, 2019), 6.

Cotonou negotiations, the AU controversially adopted a position advocating that the conduct of future relations with the EU should be on a continent-to-continent level.⁴⁹ Moreover, the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) already provides the foundations for such an interregional approach based on EU-AU cooperation. Such a move would provide greater scope for African agency to be realized, given that the OACPS “ensures that the political strength of Africa is not exercised since Africa is treated the same as the other two smaller regions.”⁵⁰ One explanation for the persistence of the OACPS is that, despite the increasing assertiveness of the AU, individual African member states retain a privileged status in their relationship to the EU by virtue of their membership.⁵¹

In sum, the formal conversion of the ACP Group into the OACPS in April 2020 represents a largely superficial change. As a result, it is unlikely that this will improve the ability of the OACPS to advance its own globalization project. Carbone concludes that the change will “not transform the ACP Group into a political international organization effectively designed for ambitious collective action.”⁵² Despite its ambitious rhetoric, so far the negotiation of a new agreement with the EU has been the one notable achievement of the OACPS since its formation.⁵³ However, over time we have witnessed the erosion of both the levels of aid and preferential trade access to the EU for some OACPS member states. As a result, as Niels Keijzer demonstrates, we are likely to see a further decline in engagement with the OACPS from the more developed ACP states, who feel they have seen a decline in their benefits from the relationship with the EU.⁵⁴ The recent announcement made by South Africa that it had decided to leave the OACPS with effect from September 2022 is a clear example of this.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has argued that the original globalization project of the OACPS aligned with the ideas of the NEIO in seeking to challenge inequalities between the Global North and Global South. However, since this very early phase, it has increasingly

49 Maurizio Carbone, “Caught Between the ACP and the AU: Africa’s Relations with the European Union in a Post-Cotonou Agreement Context,” *South African Journal of International Affairs* 25, no. 4 (2018): 486–87.

50 Toni Haastrup, “Critical Perspectives on Africa’s Relationship with the European Union,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Critical European Studies*, eds. Didier Bigo et al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 515.

51 Hurt, “African Agency and EU-ACP Relations,” 144.

52 Carbone, “There is Life Beyond the European Union,” 2464.

53 At the time of writing, the post-Cotonou agreement, which was agreed between EU and ACP negotiators in April 2021, will be provisionally applied from January 1, 2024. Known as the Samoa Agreement, it was officially signed on November 15, 2023, although 36 OACPS member states were not ready to sign at the official ceremony held in Apia (Samoa).

54 Keijzer, “Feigned Ambition,” 520.

conformed to the dominant ideas underpinning neoliberal globalization. As a result, it has taken a largely defensive posture, and this is evident in both the management of its relationship with the EU and the limited role it has played in multilateral trade talks. The member states of the OACPS have become an increasingly diverse grouping during its history since the formation of the ACP Group in 1975. This, together with the emergence of other more significant actors (especially the AU), has increasingly restricted its agency as an organization. The recent changes reflected in the creation of the OACPS will not make any meaningful difference to its ability to advance an alternative globalization project to the one that dominates its ongoing relationship with the EU.

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