The Nordic Countries and Africa
– Old and New Relations

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In September 2002 the Nordic Africa Institute celebrated the 40th anniversary of its founding. The Institute could then look back on a long period of engagement in Africa and a constant commitment to increasing the knowledge on Africa in the Nordic countries.

In 1962 when the Institute started its activities the general knowledge on Africa in the Nordic countries was limited. The Institute worked on many levels: publishing booklets in Swedish on the developments in different parts of Africa for a general public, arranging conferences for researchers and “experts” (the few that existed at that time), distributing modest travel grants for field research, to mention but a few of its numerous activities.

Throughout its existence the Institute has gradually changed its activities and adjusted to new needs and demands articulated by its different target/interest groups: students and researchers in the Nordic countries, development agencies, foreign ministries, the media, NGOs, etc. The knowledge about Africa has increased. At the same time the governments in all the Nordic countries have over the last four to five decades cooperated on different levels with African countries through what has been called development aid, development assistance, development cooperation, partnership, etc.

When looking back at the past 40 years it was decided it would be challenging to reflect the activities of the Institute against the role Africa has played in the politics, trade, etc. of the five Nordic countries. With that in mind we invited one representative from each Nordic country to give an account of how their respective countries have dealt with Africa over the years (in some cases even over the centuries) but with an emphasis on the period since the founding of the Institute.

The diversity of the authors’ backgrounds and fields of specialisation is reflected in their contributions to this volume, as is the fact that they were given a rather free hand to decide upon the content and form of their accounts. Two of the invitees are researchers, one has his background in politics. The other two contributors have long experience from administration of development assistance. However, they all have one thing very much in common: their long experience from, and deep engagement in, Africa’s development, both of which emerge clearly from their individual presentations.

Karl-Eric Ericson
Denmark and Africa – Past and Present Relations

Steen Christensen

The African Paradox

To most Danes, Africa is a paradox. On the one hand Africa is the Africa of one of Denmark’s most revered authors, Karen Blixen. Her “Out of Africa” with its declaration of love for the beautiful Kenyan Ngong Hills (“The landscape had not its like in all the world.”), and the loving description of the Africans she encountered has formed an impression of an Africa in harmony with its beautiful nature and the setting for a romantic love story.

On the other hand Africa is also seen as the continent ravaged by internecine strife, seemingly unending civil wars, the marginalization and lack of participation in globalization, the increasing failure of states, famine, destitution, abject poverty, illiteracy, malaria, and the more recent scourge of AIDS, which characteristically has hit the African continent harder than any other continent. Africa, then, is, in the public perception, a continent struck by most of the world’s most adverse circumstances and stuck in a quagmire.

When the heavyweight boxer Muhammad Ali in the 1970s fought his now famous “rumble in the jungle” with George Foreman in the then Zaïre, he is reported to have exclaimed as he saw the poverty and deprivation of the Congolese people on the way from the airport: “I am happy that my ancestors escaped on the slave ships!” That one of the most degrading human experiences, the slave trade, can, albeit ironically, be seen as a positive experience, puts the extent of the despair of independent Africa into perspective.

So, “the essence of Africa” in the words of Ryszard Kapuzinski, “is its endless variety” (Kapuzinski 1998:30). It is both beautiful nature, amazing wildlife, and the hardest living conditions on earth.

What, then prompted, in the first place, a small country in the northernmost part of Europe to engage in relations with this great far away continent?

In his stimulating book, The Paradox of American Power, Joseph S. Nye quotes the British politician Horace Walpole who after Britain lost its American colonies in the 18th century lamented Britain’s reduction to “a miserable little island as insignificant as Denmark or Sardinia” (Nye 2002).

But Denmark had not always been a “miserable, little, insignificant country”. In the international politics of Europe, Denmark was in the 17th century a power to be reckoned with, although not among the first rank of nations. And the 17th century was precisely the time when Danes for the first time ventured into Africa.

Denmark and the Gold Coast

It was the dramatic change of power structures and trade relations in the North Atlantic region during the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48) that prompted the Danish king, Christian IV, to seek a more prominent place in the European international system. This attempt was made in competition with Sweden. The Danish adventure on the Guinea Coast was directly linked to this new situation. A Dutch merchant, Willem Usselinx, who had started the Dutch-West Indian Company in 1621, but who had fallen out with his compatriots, approached King Christian IV to obtain his support for a competing company.

However, Christian IV turned him down, and he offered his services to the Swedish king Gustav Adolf II, who gladly accepted. Christian IV cooperated instead with a Danish based Dutch merchant Jan de Willum. The reason for this was clearly to not alienate the merchants in Copenhagen, and to not challenge the Dutch Company, which would have created problems with the Netherlands. He had to retain good relations with both the merchants based in Copenhagen and the Netherlands in order to fulfil his ambitions of entering the Thirty Years’ War.

Denmark’s entry into the Thirty Years’ War was disastrous and led to defeat. Consequently, Christian IV had to tackle an imminent threat of Swedish-North German trade cooperation. He tried to counter this threat by giving trade protection and privileges to merchants in the new Holstein city of Glückstadt. At the same time he had to balance
his favours between the merchants in Glückstadt and Copenhagen. He solved this by giving merchants in both cities the right to trade on the Guinea Coast. The first ship for Guinea thus departed from Glückstadt in 1649.

The tense situation between Denmark and Sweden had, however, not been resolved, and while the new Danish king, Frederik III, in 1657 prepared for war against Sweden, he hired a dissatisfied Swede, Henrik Carlof, and gave him permission to attack the Swedish forts on the Guinea Coast. In cooperation with the Netherlands, he succeeded briefly in conquering the Swedish fort Carolusborg. The Dutch aided the Danes, not out of sympathy, but because they considered the Danes less of a threat than the mightier Swedes.

In the meantime, the Danes had build forts and trade stations on the coast, most notably Christiansborg and Frederiksborg Castles. However, the Danish influence did not reach beyond the coastal areas, even after the first treaty with the Africans in 1659.

The alliance with the Dutch was shortlived. The Dutch became more occupied with an emerging greater threat, the British Africa Company. The Dutch feared that the British would ally themselves with the Danes in order to gain a foothold on the coast, and thus the Dutch reverted to an aggressive policy against the Danish forts. This was, temporarily at least, resolved with the peace treaty of Breda in 1667. In the power struggles on the coast, the Danes chose to support the British who in 1664 occupied the Dutch fort Cabo Corso and renamed it Cape Coast Castle. The Danish alliance with the British is probably the reason why Denmark with its very limited resources was able to cling to its African possessions for generations.

Seen in a European perspective, the trade which originally was based on gold, was slow to start, and never really took off. In the mid 17th century two to three ships annually reached the Gold Coast. But by the 1670s no more than one ship annually reached Christiansborg Castle.

However, things were soon to change. The labour shortage in the West Indies, Brazil and the American tobacco state of Virginia, ignited a rush for African slave labour. With the slave trade and the triangular trade, a new phase was entered, where the acquiring and selling of slaves gradually overtook gold as the most important economic activity on the Gold Coast.

Denmark had earlier acquired the West Indian islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. Jan. To the plantation owners a steady supply of cheap African labour was essential, and this need formed the basis for the Danish entry into the slave trade. The latter half of the 17th century thus saw the slave trade becoming the most important export activity from the Gold Coast. The importance of the slave trade was emphasized by Governor Lorentz on St. Thomas in 1696: “All other trade is nothing in comparison with this slave trade.” (Nørregaard 1996:138).

But even though this Gold Coast slave trade became ever more important, it still remained of minor overall significance. It is estimated that less than one per cent of the total slave trade was conducted on Danish ships. Overall it is assessed that the share of the slave trade that emanated from the Gold Coast was between 5 and 15 per cent (Justesen 1980:344).

This period saw the end of the economic growth period in the 1770s which had been caused by the Danish neutrality during the European wars which were raging, which had created beneficial circumstances for Danish trade. But in 1782 the warring nations had entered into peace negotiations, which resulted in peace treaties in 1785. This “threatening” peace agreement made the Baltic-Guinean Company, which then had the monopoly on the trade on the Guinean coast, suggest to the government in 1783 that it should scale down its activities. With the growing economic problems, and the discussions which were beginning – especially in Britain – about the ethics of the slave trade, attention was to a smaller degree turned to attempts at colonising the Gold Coast, i.e. using the African labour in the colony instead of exporting it. A Doctor Paul Erdman Isert, who had visited both the West Indies and the Gold Coast wrote to the government:

Why were our forefathers not so sensible as to establish plantations in Africa with sugar, coffee, chocolate and other necessities? There you could have had plenty of workers at better conditions!...But Africa is still the continent where by establishing plantations, you could gradually stop the despicable export of Negroes from their fertile homeland. (Erdman Isert 1985, Jonassen 1985).

Following Isert’s initiative attempts were made to farm on the coast. Isert himself was, however, not successful. All he achieved was to plan Frederiksnobel, a plantation, before he died in 1789. Attempts were also made to grow cotton, and a
Danish botanist Peter Thonning was dispatched to assess the viability of growing various crops.

The slave trade was coming to an end. The finance minister Ernst Schimmelmann, who incidentally was the owner of a gun factory, plantations in the West Indies and a sugar refinery in Copenhagen, was well aware of the British debate on abolishing the slave trade and commissioned a study to prepare Denmark for the new situation. This resulted in an ordinance in 1792 abolishing the slave trade. The ordinance banned all trade in slaves as of 1803. In the meantime all nations had the right to import slaves to the Danish West Indian Islands. This, though imperfect ordinance, made Denmark the first slave trading nation to abolish the slave trade.

Why did Schimmelmann take this initiative? It was probably a mixture of motives. A series of moral and humanitarian arguments were enumerated in the ordinance. But the economic considerations were no doubt of greater importance. The slave trade just was not paying off. As we have seen attempts were concurrently made at a proper colonisation, but this made no great headway. The local circumstances, the African political environment in particular, was not conducive to plantation activities. And by 1811 local wars had virtually stopped the colonisation attempts. With the slave trade being phased out, and no great success with local plantations, the countdown for the colony was beginning.

After 1792 serious considerations were given to selling the possessions on the Gold Coast, but it would take another half century before this was finalized. The sale was delayed partly because some still dreamed about seeing the colonisation work, and partly because of the war with Britain 1807–14. During the Vienna Congress the Danish foreign minister suggested to his British counterpart Lord Castlereagh a sale of the colony.

The asking price was, however, unrealistically high: 50,000 pounds. At the same time the Danish government tried to play France against Britain. France was interested in acquiring the possessions, but Britain would not allow that, and finally the sale was settled for a mere 10,000 pounds. And thus in 1850, the Danish colonial presence in Africa came to an end.

So just before the great scramble for Africa was about to begin, Denmark quietly exited Africa as a colonial power, a reflection of its reduced status among the European powers, no longer a power to be reckoned with. In the ensuing century Denmark was kept busy keeping its own territory intact, staving off the challenges from its increasingly self-confident southern neighbour, Germany.

**Development assistance**

When Europe after the second world rose out of the ashes, international relations again began to take on prominence. To many, especially younger people, it was necessary to do the utmost to prevent another devastating war. A group of young, idealistic Danes in 1944 established Fredsvennerernes hjælpearbejde (The Friends of Peace Relief Organization), formed by three organisations, Vennernes Samfund (The Friends’ Society), Aldrig Mere Krig (Never More War) and Kvindernes Internationale Liga for Fred og Frihed (The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom). The organization changed its name in 1949 to Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke (MS) (Danish Association for International Co-operation) (Juul 2002). In the beginning MS concentrated its work to Europe. It was only at the end of the 1950s that the developing countries began to appear in the public debate. This naturally coincided with the discussions on decolonisation. MS at that time initiated its first projects in the third world, in Ghana and India.

Today MS is one of the major Danish non-governmental organizations. One of its successful achievements over the past decades has been the recruiting of volunteers to work in developing countries, particularly in Africa. MS has its own training centre in Arusha, Tanzania, where the volunteers are prepared for the difficult circumstances, they are about to encounter, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Zambia etc.

The government also at an early stage showed an interest in being involved in technical development assistance. The Social Democratic government in 1950 initiated a project to look into development assistance under the aegis of the United Nations. The following year, the new liberal-conservative government established a “government committee for technical assistance under the UN”. At this early stage it is worth noting that the results of the discussions about development assistance were unanimous among all the political parties. They had not yet been politicised. The conservative foreign minister Ole Bjørn Kraft expressed it in this way:

We all know that deprivation and want and the feeling of oppression and despair are the breeding grounds of war. There is a vivid understanding in the West that you do not obtain the goal that we strive...
for as long as large parts of the world’s population live on or under subsistence level. (Folketingstidende 1951, quoted in Kelm-Hansen:21).

In this first phase a joint Nordic initiative was also being considered, but the UN alternative was preferred. However, this was soon to change. The driving forces behind the interest in development assistance were MS and DUF (The Danish Youth Council, an umbrella organization, grouping political and non-political youth organizations). In these organizations a wish soon developed to also carry out bilateral Danish projects in the developing countries, and not just to give support through the UN.

Politically there was support for the idea of a Danish bilateral programme, and on March 19, 1962 the first law concerning development assistance was enacted. It is noteworthy that the structure and the basic principles that were then made the basis of Danish development assistance have changed very little to this very day. The changes have mainly been corrections to stream-line the organization (such as separating the technical assistance department as an independent unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and adapting the policies to the current thinking and choice of words with the changing fashions in development vocabulary. Some observers ascribe this continuity to “a combination of the basic motives of interest in giving aid and the permanence of the actors involved in policy-making on aid” (Rye Olsen 1999).

The law was passed unanimously in parliament, and entailed the establishing of a larger discussion forum (Ulandsrådet – The development council), and a steering committee (Ulandsstyrelsen), consisting of nine members, who were to discuss more detailed development strategies and individual projects and advise the minister. From the beginning, the aim of the political parties was that Denmark should fulfil the aim set up by the UN of donating 1 per cent of GDP (later this ambition was scaled down to the present target of 0.7 per cent) in development assistance. However, since finances were often tight, the march towards this goal became long and arduous, and first at the beginning of the 1990s did Denmark surpass the 1 per cent mark, and was even before the elections in 2001, quickly on the way towards 1.5 per cent. Besides the ordinary development assistance, the Social Democratic government introduced additional allocations from 1993 that were not covered under the strict rules of the development assistance (i.e. giving assistance only to the poorest countries, with a GDP below about 2,100 USD per capita). The new allocation under the so called MIFRESTA heading (short for miljø, fred, stabilitet: environment, peace and stability) made it possible to also support countries, which had demonstrable problems with the environment, for instance the newly industrialising countries in Asia, but whose GDP was above the 2,100 USD. This extra support grew rapidly during the tenure of the Social Democratic government, 1993–2001, but was scaled down under the first budget of the new Liberal-Conservative government.

The development assistance from the beginning and to this day, has broadly speaking been divided into two almost equal parts (with variations over the years, but basically stable): bilateral assistance (state to state, support of non-governmental organizations, support of volunteer programmes, business programmes etc), and multilateral assistance through the various UN specialised agencies (UNDP, FAO, WFP, ILO, UNESCO, to mention but a few), and after the accession of Denmark in 1973 to the EEC (later the EU) also through the EU programmes, particularly through participation in the Lome (later Cotonou) agreements with the ACP countries (African, Caribbean, Pacific countries).

The basic principle of Danish development assistance has popularly speaking been, and remains, to support the “poorest people in the poorest countries”. This objective has then meant that a very substantial part of Danish development assistance has been directed to the poorest continent – Africa.

Very early the discussions about development assistance became concerned with the element of democracy and in the jargon of the 1990s: good governance. At this stage – in the 1960s – there was an understanding that developing countries could naturally not be measured by the same standards as the developed countries in this respect.

I think there very often is reason to wonder why the Western world shows such intolerance over people and events in the developing countries, because they there do not fulfil our norms of democracy, do not fulfil our norms of government. We can see, what development, what tension lies in Africa – latest in Nigeria – in Asia, in Vietnam and in Kashmir, and we must face the fact, that we need a wholly new and different yardstick, building on the cultural and historical background. (Niels Mathiasen, later minister of culture, Folketingstidende 1951, quoted in Kelm-Hansen:88–9).
Surprisingly, in view of the present political debate, the Liberal Party foreign affairs spokesman Per Federspiel concurred in this assessment:

...we cannot demand that these countries shall develop democratically. I do not think that they have the qualifications for it. Unfortunately it has been demonstrated that in many of these countries the most healthy form of regime in fact is a temporary military dictatorship. (Folketingstidende 1951, quoted in Kelm-Hansen)

In the more ideological climate in the 1970s, where the division between left, right and centre became more pronounced, and political views became more radicalised, the development assistance also came under fire, both from the left and right, and the consensus that had reigned until then cracked. On the left, development assistance was criticized for being the extended arm of imperialism. A typical example of this line of thinking was a book published in 1975 (Arnfred 1975). The book roundly condemned Danish development assistance for assisting the Danish business community instead of the peoples of the developing countries. Take for example this quote: “A striking example of this is the assembly factories for electric bulbs, that exist in Asia and Africa. They only use one local component: a vacuum!” (Annerstedt & Gustavsson 1975:13). On the right – as will be seen below – the liberal government tried in 1973 to undercut the assistance to the liberation movements. Knud Vilby, who for many years has dominated the Danish development debate lamented this climate and rightly pointed to the detrimental effects:

The Danish development assistance has over the last couple of years become very technocratic, and it has often been cut by various governments. The cause of this is among other things that the Danish left wing has been strongly critical of the development assistance, at the same time as the right wing, especially formulated by the Progress Party, has rejected all development assistance. (Annerstedt & Gustavsson 1975)

This division in the political debate has persisted to this day, albeit in a less confrontational manner, but is clearly behind the cuts that were made by the new Danish Liberal-Conservative government in 2002.

The acrimonious debate over support to the African liberation movements

Very early on Danish governments condemned the apartheid regime in South Africa, and called for majority rule in Portuguese Africa and Southern Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe). At the UN General Assembly in 1963, foreign minister Per Hækkerup applauded the arms sanctions against South Africa, but stressed that this was not enough. He gave the undertaking that the Danish government would support an action-oriented policy in order to “create a real democratic, multiracial society of free people with equal rights for all individuals irrespective of race”. He later followed this up by setting aside 250,000 DKK for the victims of apartheid with special emphasis on education of young South Africans particularly those in exile.

This was the beginning of a Social Democratic inspired policy, that later would be the subject of some of the most acrimonious debates over Danish foreign policy (apart from the debate over the EEC in the early 1970s and security policy in the 1980s) in the post World War II period. It was to split the usual Danish consensus over foreign policy and create a battlefront between on the one hand the centre-left and on the other the liberal-conservative parties.

The support to the victims of apartheid – as the support to the individuals and the liberation movements came to be known – was at the beginning modest, and only focused on South Africa. But even during the centre-right government of Hilmar Baunsgaard, 1968–1971, the support was continued. In the light of the later uncompromising debate it is interesting to note that the Liberal Party foreign minister Poul Hartling even approved support for two liberation movements, MPLA of Angola and Frelimo of Mozambique.

The Danish support was given after advice from an advisory committee, popularly known as the antiapartheid committee, consisting mainly of non-governmental organizations. The Danish support was given – unlike the Swedish and Norwegian – exclusively through other organizations, either UN organizations or private non-governmental organizations. No aid was given directly to the liberation movements.

At the Social Democratic party congress in 1969 a resolution was carried that gave explicit support to the liberation movements, and in 1971 when Jens Otto Krag again formed a minority Social Democratic government, his foreign minister K.B. Andersen substantially increased the support to the liberation movements. In the financial year 1971 (the last year of the liberal-conservative government) the support was 700,000 DKK. K.B. Andersen immediately raised this to 6.5 million DKK. This amount grew steadily and reached
under the Social Democratic-Liberal government in 1979 25 million kr., and in the last financial year of the appropriation to the liberation movements (1993) it amounted to 94.6 million DKK. The total amount spent over the twenty-year period amounted to 975 million DKK.

This may sound to be a considerable amount, but in reality it was only a minor proportion of the substantial means allocated to development assistance from Denmark during the same period. But in spite of this, the policy of supporting the liberation movements was soon subjected to heavy attacks from the Liberal and Conservative parties. The government was attacked for allegedly supporting communists and thereby indirectly being stooges of Moscow. A conservative member of parliament wrote thus about the support to the liberation movements:

Does the Social Democratic Party really believe that Denmark stands any chance of competing with the Soviet Union and the GDR in these new countries, if the communist movements get into power? It is high time that this odd piece of Danish foreign policy is taken away from the left wing of the Social Democratic party.” (Fischer 1978)

A Conservative Party spokesman categorically announced that “Danish assistance will inevitably support the Marxist guerrillas”. He also branded the leader of the PAIGC, Amilcar Cabral as “a communist of a Moscow conviction” (Peter la Cour 1976 and in his pamphlet in 1978). The so-called Progress Party (a populist party represented in parliament from 1973) was even more categorical. An MP stated that “The first of May hysteria with hackneyed phrases about freedom is meant to make way for support from the people to increased appropriations to the communists’ wars of aggression in Southern Africa.” (Junior 1978).

My constantly repeated argument was that we did not do the Western democracies any service by turning our back on the liberation movements. That would precisely push them into the arms of Moscow. And how could we anyway dream of demanding democratic governments in societies, that because of illiteracy, oppression, poverty and political lack of freedom did not stand a chance to undergo a democratic development in our sense. (Gyldendal 1983:14–5).

After the chaotic parliamentary elections in 1973, which turned Danish politics upside down, a liberal government was formed (based solely on 22 MPs from the Liberal Party). The new foreign minister Ove Guldberg decided to confront the issue of support to the liberation movements. He acknowledged that there was no majority in favour of abolishing the support to the liberation movements, so instead he decided to change the administrative praxis. Instead of letting the non-governmental organizations channel the support, he suggested that the support thereafter should be channelled through the UN. At the same time he intimated that the reason for this suggestion was that the support had been used for purposes that were not included in the terms of reference for the support, i.e. arms for the guerrillas. Consequently he did not wish to support the liberation movements, but exclusively individual victims of apartheid.

The fate of the proposal hinged on the votes of the Christian People’s Party, which supported the appropriation, but had been vaguely sceptical about some of the procedural practices. However, when Guldberg was not able to produce evidence to support his claim that the support was abused and was used for arms purchases, the Christian People’s Party finally sided with the centre-left, and the foreign minister’s proposal was defeated.

This did not stop the barrage of criticism from the liberals and conservatives. It only stopped when the Liberal Party briefly joined the Social Democratic Party in a major coalition (1978–79). The Liberal chairman and foreign minister Henning Christophersen then claimed that the liberal opposition to the support for the liberation movements was solely of a financial nature. The reality was that the discussion about the support to the liberation movements had become domestic policy more than foreign policy. This can among other things be witnessed by the positions of the former liberal leader and prime minister Poul Hartling when he became UN High Commissioner for Refugees. During a visit to the liberation movements in Lusaka (jyllandsposten 17/12 1978) he stated that “Denmark has a very good name down here”, and that the support to the liberation movements was not used for arms. “Not only the political leaders and administrators in the frontline states that I have visited have expressed their gratitude over the attitude of Denmark and the other Nordic countries. Also in the liberation movements you meet the same attitude. They know well that we are against apartheid…”

So, after this conflict in the 1970s, criticism subsided, the support continued and was increased, and the political debate turned to a discussion of sanctions against South Africa.
Sanctions against South Africa?
The question of economic boycott came to dominate the discussions about the relations towards southern Africa, when the debate about the support to the liberation movements subsided. For many years there was a consensus that sanctions against the South African regime were necessary. But it was considered they would be most effective if the sanctions were all encompassing and were passed by the UN. This changed in the 1970s. The triggering factor was the import of South African coal. The centre-left political parties wanted to stop the coal import by the electricity company, ELSAM, whereas the liberal-conservative parties argued along the lines of Karl Kjeldgaard: “I do not for one minute believe that conditions in South Africa will either improve or deteriorate if we use Russian or Polish coal instead of South African coal.” (Karl Kjeldgaard, MP, the Conservative People’s Party, in Jyllandsposten 24/6 1978) Nonetheless parliament in May 1978 passed an ordinance asking ELSAM to “if possible buy coal in other countries than South Africa.”

Sanctions again came to the fore of the political debate during the Liberal-Conservative government (1982–1993). In 1986 a majority in Parliament (excluding the government) passed unilateral trade sanctions against South Africa. This is probably the foremost initiative in the Nordic struggle against apartheid, where Denmark took the lead.

A final round of polemics concerning sanctions were strangely enough initiated just before South Africa was in the precarious transition from apartheid to majority rule. Liberal-conservative voices were raised in favour of lifting sanctions, even before the final transition had been finally negotiated and still hung in the balance. But the majority in Parliament stuck with the argument which Nelson Mandela put forward: “To remove sanctions now is the same as disarming us in the middle of the decisive battle.” (Quoted in Schori 1992:297). So sanctions stayed in place until the transition had been finally approved by the first free parliamentary elections.

I think it is fair to say that the discussion concerning sanctions also took on a domestic political angle. In government, the Social Democrats had been hesitant to introduce uni-lateral sanctions, but when a Liberal-Conservative government did not have a foreign policy majority, this was made use of.

Danish development policy at the threshold of the 21st century
As mentioned earlier, Danish development policy has changed fairly little. There is still a division between multilateral and bilateral aid. However the parliamentary elections in 2001 suddenly changed the developmental environment. The Liberal Party entered the elections pledging to cut development assistance in order – as it was stated in their election programme – to give more resources to the health sector, particularly the hospitals. The election result turned Danish politics upside down, and gave a straight right wing majority for the first time in Danish history. Therefore, for the first time in decades, the smaller centre parties, who in the Danish parliamentary system normally hold the balance of power, and who have always supported development assistance, became unimportant, as the government had a clear cut right wing majority with the support of the Danish People’s Party. Consequently, the budget for 2002 cut 1.5 billion DKK from the development allocation.

Partnership 2000
The Danish Parliament has not – unlike Sweden – discussed a particular Danish policy towards Africa. Parliament, however, in October 1999, at the initiative of the then Social Democratic government, decided to review Danish development assistance in the light of the new challenges facing the world community, in particular globalization and AIDS. The following discussions that successfully attempted to include broad circles of interested participants in the developing dialogue, resulted in a new Danish development strategy, called Partnership 2000.

This revision of the existing policy was, as mentioned, made in the light of the rapid change in the world due to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the consequent opening of new societies to market forces, and the ensuing globalization, which has dealt a new set of cards. This is not the place to discuss the merits and drawbacks of globalization, but only to point out that the fact of globalization at the moment does present, especially Africa, with negative consequences. That grand old man of so-called realistic foreign policy, Henry Kissinger, in his recent book, reflects on some of the negative effects of globalization. He rightly points out that: “The very process that has produced greater wealth in more parts of the world than ever be-
fore may also provide the mechanism for spreading an economic and social crisis around the world.” (Kissinger 2001:213). The book, published before September 11, 2001, uncannily presaged what would happen in the wake of an economic recession. “Whenever a recession happens – especially a prolonged one – globalization is likely to spread its consequences quickly around the world.” (Kissinger 2001:213). I am sure that they see his point in Argentina and Zimbabwe. And he also foresaw what is happening right now in Africa: “A permanent worldwide underclass is in danger of emerging, especially in developing countries, which will make it increasingly difficult to build the political consensus on which domestic stability, international peace, and globalization itself depend.” (Kissinger 2001:230).

During the preparation for this new policy a broad range of interested parties were invited to participate in the discussion, and several regional seminars were held which included representatives of the recipients. At such a conference in Dar es Salaam, the then minister for development assistance Jan Trøjborg outlined the thinking behind Partnership 2000. What is noticeable about his presentation of what in many respects focuses Danish policy on new areas, is that he nonetheless mentioned that:

In essence you will have noticed, the main principles and objectives of Danish development policy remain the same. The principle of poverty-orientation and the crosscutting themes of gender, environment and human rights and democratisation stay at the centre of Danish development policy. So, in a new environment of change, it was necessary to also stress the continuity of the basic principles. He then emphasized that the concept of partnership is not a new invention.

It is the fundamental premise of our existing strategy that development assistance can only be effective when based on the ownership and leadership of our partner countries. But partnership is a two way street. Real partnership is all about mutual obligations. And it is equally important that our partners give high priority to poverty reduction, to sound economic policies, to good governance and to respect for human rights.

On the question of globalization he chose to emphasize the opportunities for growth and development, which are also inherent in the concept. And he praised many African countries for having taken the first steps to adapting to the new international environment.

He then touched upon the specific challenges for Africa, and singled out two main themes: AIDS and the proliferation of armed conflict. “A few years ago we thought that a new era had dawned in Africa. An era of peace and prosperity. Today we see that our optimism was premature. Violence and use of military force often seem to be the first choice of many African leaders. This ‘culture of violence’ is deeply troubling.” And he then inserted a note of cautious warning:

I know of course that the media picture of an Africa constantly torn by conflict is not at all true. But I am often confronted with this image when I meet ordinary Danish citizens. Danes in general support development assistance to Africa. I sense, however, a growing disbelief in the usefulness of spending Danish taxpayers’ money in countries where killing and destruction of both people and resources are common.

Finally, he emphasized the importance of civil society and “a very close connection between promoting democratisation and public participation and achieving reduction of poverty. Therefore it is essential to give the poor and the women a voice.”

The policy here presented by the minister, also became the policy adopted by Parliament as Partnership 2000.

Partnership 2000 underlines that the policy is a continuation of the law on development assistance of 1971, thus emphasizing the continuity. The aim of Danish development assistance is still to combat poverty. “A solution of the poverty problems in developing countries is a condition to further a global sustainable development.” It puts emphasis on the equal participation of men and women, the preservation of the environment, respect for human rights and democracy. It also notes that “Danish development policy is an integrated part of Danish foreign policy, where the promotion of joint security, democratic rule and human rights and the creation of economic, social and environmental sustainability are the main aims.” It goes on to stress the wish for a “genuine” partnership with the developing countries. Among the new challenges are enumerated: globalization, the prevention of violent conflicts, children and young people as a resource in the development process, and how to prevent and cure HIV/AIDS.

The instruments to carry the revised policy through remain basically the same. The division between multilateral and bilateral assistance remains basically unchanged. In 1999 the bilateral assistance was 49.4 per cent, the multi-lateral assistance 46.5 per cent (the rest being administra-
The bilateral assistance was planned in Strategy 2000 to be concentrated on activities in 20 specifically appointed so-called programme countries, 13 of these in Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Eritrea, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe).

Part of the bilateral assistance is the support to non-governmental organizations. About 17 per cent of the bilateral assistance is thus channelled through NGOs. There exist framework agreements with a smaller number of NGOs which can administer more freely in accordance with submitted applications, than other NGOs which have to apply for every project. Contrary to the system in Norway and Sweden there is no requirement for its own contribution on the part of the applying organisation.

The multilateral assistance goes to a number of multilateral organizations, especially a number of UN specialized agencies, such as the UNDP, UNESCO, FAO, ILO etc. Since accession to the EEC in 1973, Denmark has participated actively in the ACP cooperation, and tried to influence the contents of this cooperation. In a broader spectrum, Danish EU assistance only amounts to 6-7 per cent of the entire Danish budget. Right from its inception the Lomé Convention introduced some of the elements that have later come to be core concepts of Danish development assistance, such as “partnership” and “mutual interdependence”, and in the Mid-Term Review in 1995 of Lomé IV significant changes were introduced such as the mentioning of democracy and human rights (Rye Olsen 1999).

In November 2001 political power shifted in Denmark to a Liberal-Conservative government with the support of the Danish People’s Party, which consistently has called for dramatic reductions in Danish development assistance. As mentioned the budget for 2002 included a reduction of 1.5 billion DKK. The cuts in the multilateral assistance primarily hit the UN organizations (the EU assistance being covered by agreements). Specialized UN agencies such as the UNDP, UNESCO, ILO were cut fairly dramatically. In the bilateral assistance it was decided to phase out the support for three African countries entirely, on account of a poor record on corruption and bad governance; Eritrea, Malawi and Zimbabwe.

The budget for 2003 was presented at the end of August 2002. In a time when the September 11 occurrences have made politicians worldwide reflect that increased development assistance may be one road to take in order to prevent further outbreaks of terrorism and have taken the initiative to increase development assistance, the Danish government has chosen to take another road. The budget of 2003 further reduced Denmark’s development assistance to 0.8 per cent, a sorry contribution to the demands of an international world order.

Some concluding remarks
Historically, Denmark’s relations with Africa have been and remain of marginal importance. Trade is negligible, and the number of people visiting the continent is, though increasing, all the same limited. Denmark has of late received a number of refugees from Africa, primarily from Somalia, and the integration of the Somalis does present a problem or rather a very great challenge, but them apart, very few Africans have settled in Denmark, and the number of Somali refugees are insignificant in relation to the much larger population of Turkish and Pakistani extraction residing in Denmark. The main Danish link with Africa is constituted by development assistance.

The problems Africa faces today are so immense that they cannot be solved by the continent alone without outside assistance. This assistance will have to come both in the form of increased development assistance, but also in the form of increased trade and higher commodity prices (coffee is today cheaper in the Western super-markets than in 1974!). Maybe even more important would be non-interference in the internal affairs of African countries by Western powers and private interests that have so far shamelessly exploited the weaknesses of African states, most notably in the Great Lakes Region, where minerals have been stolen from the people by outside forces, African neighbours and European fortune hunters alike. And the net result so far is about four million African victims.

In the wider perspective it must also be in the self-interest of the Western world to resolve the poverty and injustice that today is prevalent in Africa. The present situation is the breeding ground for violence and anger. So far, surprisingly, Africa has not been angry with the West. But will that last as large parts of Africa experience poverty and deprivation, wars, plunder of natural resources and outside interference?
In conclusion let me again quote Joseph S. Nye who in his book discusses the impact of various countries’ foreign policy and convincingly argues for the importance of “soft power”: “And some countries such as Canada, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian states have political clout that is greater than their military and economic weight, because of the incorporation of attractive causes such as economic aid or peacekeeping into their definition of national interest.” (Nye 2002:10).

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The legendary Finnish cartoonist Kari once produced a drawing of what he reckoned must have been the shortest telegram in the world. It was from the long-time Finnish president Urho K. Kekkonen, known as UKK, to his colleague Daniel Arap Moi in Kenya and said: “MOI UKK”– “Moi” meaning “Hello” in casual Finnish. One could be forgiven for thinking that a treatise on the place of Africa in the policies of Finland must qualify for the prize for the shortest study in the world – so peripheral has been the place Africa has occupied in Finnish policies. Contacts have been infrequent, and their essential content seems all but exhausted in UKK’s one-sided message to Moi. Yet this would be a premature conclusion. Throughout the decades, Africa has exerted an irresistible pull on Finnish policy-makers and forced them to make choices that have not always been easy.

Of course, there can be no question of the peripheral and secondary nature of African issues in Finnish policy-making. For obvious reasons of geography, history and culture, Africa could not have been a core area for Finland in foreign policy or trade. Direct contacts have been few and far between and much policy-making has been dominated by perceptions and images rather than an immediate encounter with the African everyday conditions. Even after the contacts have intensified and knowledge has accumulated, Africa as a policy objective has largely been seen through the lenses of others, the colonial and post-colonial powers. This said, Africa has continuously figured in Finnish policies and often done so in quite complex ways, bringing its realities to bear on Finnish policy-making.

What is perhaps most strange is that the Finnish interests and policies in Africa appear to have been animated and informed by humanitarian and moral considerations to a greater extent than elsewhere. In recent history, two main factors have dominated the Finnish relations to Africa: the racial conflict in Southern Africa and development aid – both subjects highly charged with value content. Before the age of apartheid and aid, the Finnish Africa scene was driven by Christian missionaries converting pagans and doing good in the remote Ambomaa. Even when more mundane business interests and political motivations and considerations became conspicuously involved as in the Republic of South Africa, it has been suggested that Finnish policies have been unusually strongly influenced by moral arguments emanating from the civil society.1

To put such arguments in a broader perspective, we need to be clear about what the “Africa” we are speaking of is. Like Karen Blixen who had “her” Africa, there have been several Finnish Africas. We have started to understand that Africa as an object of humanitarian intervention, colonial assault, and post-colonial knowledge formation was the product of a complex historical process of what is nowadays called invention and imagination and it was something that was done by Europeans and Africans alike.2 Africa as a concrete missionary field, or aid or business partner for Finnish, or any real-world, participants inevitably has different co-ordinates and a more limited, time- and spacebound existence than that vast land mass we call Africa. For the purposes of this paper, we have quite arbitrarily redivided Africa into three big chunks which we think have been of most relevance for the Finnish policy point of view: South Africa, Namibia, and the rest.

South Africa: trade and moralism

The key country in African-Finnish official relations has been South Africa – although in a very different way in different phases. At first, South
Africa was one of those “Neo-Europes” to which European immigration flows, trade and investment naturally gravitated. From the 1950s onwards South Africa was progressively turned into an international outcast as the Nationalist regime in Pretoria devised ever more elaborate ways of keeping the races hierarchically apart at the same time as racial barriers in the rest of Africa were coming down. In the new international set-up dominated by the post-colonially race-conscious United Nations, it became necessary for every government to take a stand on South Africa’s apartheid, something which the Finns with their supposedly non-moralist foreign policy found more difficult to do than the other Nordics. At present, a new phase has set in, apartheid having been relegated into the dustbin of history. South Africa is a major development co-operation partner and the budding hope is that in the not so distant future it will again prove a good trade and investment partner.

Building up a relationship

The Finnish-South African relationship has historical depth far exceeding that with the rest of Africa and going even beyond that with neighbouring Namibia. Finland started to trade with South Africa when both were in a politically subjugated position: Finnish sawn timber, used for mine supports and fruit crates, was exported to South Africa by British agents from the middle of the 19th century. Meanwhile, more than one thousand immigrants crossed the wide seas from Finland to South Africa before World War One, mainly to take up work in the Johannesburg mines. Though many migrants were short-term and their numbers were small compared with the hundreds of thousands who went to North America this nevertheless represented a major subsidiary flow of Finnish overseas migration.

Whereas the Finnish immigration did not plant a sizeable and vociferous population of Finnish origin in South Africa, trade relations not only continued but intensified and were completed and driven further by political contacts. Due to the infrequency and limited nature of other contacts, the state and capital became unusually intimately interwoven in the Finnish-South African relationship. Finnish diplomatic representation in South Africa was geared to promote Finnish exports. Although the greatest of economic restrictions were in place when newly independent Finland was building up its network of diplomatic representation, South Africa was a priority outside Europe. No less than five honorary consulates were established there in 1925: Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, Port Elizabeth, and East London. After the Great Depression had forced an intensified search for new markets a consulate was established in Pretoria in 1937: this was the first permanent Finnish mission in Africa.

The Finnish exports to South Africa were proportionally at their height from 1925 to 1939 when they approached 1.5 per cent of the total value of all Finnish exports. Significant as such, South Africa was also the largest single overseas market for Finnish sawn timber. Moreover, trade with South Africa was advantageous to Finland’s national economy as the exports always greatly exceeded the imports. During the same period, the South African share of Finnish imports represented a tiny 0.06 per cent – wool and fruits were not much to match the flows of sawn timber and the beginning of paper exports.

The relations between the two most distant countries in the same time zone grew so warm that after the Soviet frontal assault on Finland, South Africa, no doubt recalling that dozens of South African Finns had volunteered to fight on the Boer side, provided considerable military help to the fiercely resisting Finns in the Winter War of 1939–40. In accordance with a League of Nations resolution, South Africa sent 25 airplanes and a considerable amount of cash to Finland. South African wine growers even donated 24,000 litres of brandy, although the bottles somehow ended up in the Finnish Embassy in London and the frontline soldiers were left fighting thirsty.

Later during the war years, when the Finns joined the Germans to take revenge on the Russians, South Africa as a British dominion had to declare war on Finland. The practical consequences were non-existent, and the episode was actively forgotten after the war. The first fully-fledged Finnish diplomatic legation on the African continent was established in Pretoria in 1949 while the head of the South African legation to Sweden was accredited to Finland in 1955. Honorary consulates were reopened by the early 1950s and filled mostly by agents of Finnpap, the Finnish Paper Mills Association which had established a sales office in Cape Town in 1952. Sawn timber was increasingly replaced by paper, and later metal-industry products whereas fruits remained the major import. Quantitatively, the trade did not quite reach its previous proportions but continued to be in surplus for Finland. From 1946 to
1966, South Africa’s share of Finnish exports was 0.74 per cent and of imports 0.27 per cent.

Friends disunited

Against this background of a decades long build-up of amiable relations and vested interests, the Finns felt in an awkward position when they realized that having been belatedly accepted into the United Nations in 1955, they were expected to take a critical stand on the way the Nationalist government was treating its non-White majority and was holding on to Namibia, or South West Africa, despite the UN’s attempts to take over the territory. In 1958 when the Finnish delegates participated for the first time in the discussions on the South West African issue in the General Assembly they explained that the relations between Finland and South Africa were most friendly and satisfactory and Finland’s contribution to the issue would take place in a spirit reflecting these good relations. On the big issue of the day as to whether apartheid represented the internal business of the country which was beyond the UN’s competence or whether the human rights principles of the UN charter gave other members reason to intervene, Finland first joined the non-interventionist side.

To deal with the situation, high officials responsible for Finland’s new global policy developed a policy doctrine of what was called neutrality but might also be called balanced inaction. After the war, Finland had had to bite the bullet and accept a special relationship of peaceful co-existence with the Soviet Union. Part of maintaining this delicate relationship was that the Finns were not to criticize Soviet misdeeds on moral grounds, such as the violent crushing of the Hungarian uprising in 1956: everything had to be done to keep popular emotions down inside Finland. To counterbalance this, it was argued, Finland had to refrain from criticizing others on moral grounds too. As Max Jakobson, a major official responsible for the policy, later explained “when, for reasons of political realism, we did not want to pass moral judgements on actions taken by governments near to us, we avoided them in the name of consistency even when the scene of the crime was far away, for instance in South Africa…”.

As Jakobson, himself a Jew, stated in the UN in 1959, racial discrimination did violate the sense of justice of the Finnish people but Finland did not think it was the business of the UN to interfere. In the famous formulation of Kekkonen, Finland was to be “doctor rather than judge”.

After the Sharpeville massacre in 1961 and the international outcry following it, such an ultraneutral line became impossible to sustain, though the Finns tried their level best. They only abandoned it for good in 1966 when for the first time they voted for a resolution condemning racial oppression in South Africa and recommending the Security Council to make use of economic sanctions. Yet they continued to abstain in votes proposing more concrete action. This new line may not have been unconnected with the emerging, and ultimately unsuccessful, drive of Jakobson, then the Finnish UN representative, for the post of the Secretary General of the UN. Be that as it may, in the same year, 1966, Finland started humanitarian assistance to the victims of apartheid and for the first time contributed to the UN Trust Fund for South Africa. At that stage, a new left-dominated government was sitting in Helsinki and Finnish civil society had awakened. Small but vociferous student groups were organizing campaigns and a visible group of young radicals was demanding a “new foreign policy”. The Seamen Federation (Merimies-Unioni) led by the legendary Niilo Wallari embarked on a boycott of the state alcohol monopoly Alko selling Kap Brandy, known on the street as “Lumumba” (a revealing indicator of the level of confusion in African political geography in Finland!).

From 1966 to 1987 when the Parliament of Finland unanimously adopted the South Africa Act prohibiting trade with South Africa the history of Finnish-South African relations followed the same pattern. With the despair of the non-White people growing inside South Africa and Pretoria responding with new refinements of everyday oppression and occasional massacres such as those in Soweto in 1976, international pressure to influence the South African government through boycott action was stepped up. In Finland, fresh campaigns were organized in which also the Lutheran state church increasingly participated. Parliamentarians pestered the ministers with awkward questions. But the influence of the wood industries outweighed this and official Finland dragged its feet, giving in only gradually, step by step. Apartheid was being ever more clearly condemned in words and a sports boycott was introduced in the early 1970s. Direct aid to the African National Congress, ANC, was started in 1977. The sums

involved were trifling and it was emphasized that the support was strictly for humanitarian purposes. It took until 1985 before new investments were banned.

Meanwhile, trade – the overwhelmingly most consequential factor in Finnish-South African relations – continued and even temporarily increased. From 1967 to 1985 South Africa’s share of Finnish exports, consisting increasingly of paper machinery instead of paper products, fluctuated around 0.5 per cent, reaching 0.68 per cent in 1984, although imports showed a gradual decline from the level of 0.2 per cent towards 0.1 per cent. One of the principles now introduced to make a case for Finnish behaviour was that of universality of trade and the Finnish insignificance. The articles of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) forbade unilateral discrimination of individual parties to the GATT agreement, and, in any case, as long as the other countries continued to trade, uni-lateral Finnish action would make no difference except harm the Finns themselves, the long-time Foreign Minister Paavo Väyrynen (Centre Party) argued. A trade embargo could be based only on a UN Security Council resolution.4 Whereas the Finns had no problem in joining the South African arms embargo in 1977 as it was decided by the Security Council, or the previous Rhodesian trade embargo, unilateral sanctions against South Africa were a different matter.

Yet Finland ended up in declaring such a unilateral trade embargo in June 1987. It was preceded by similar action by other Nordic countries and by a blockade of Finnish transport workers. In 1985 the Nordics had decided to implement more farreaching sanctions against South Africa, the Finns complaining that the proposed measures were “technically complicated” to apply. In October 1983 the Transport Workers’ Union (AKT), led by the maverick Risto Kuisma, decided to start a blockade of goods to and from South Africa, an action that gained wide support and soon reduced direct trade between the two countries to a trickle. But indirect trade continued, and new campaigns were mounted to stop it. When laws prohibiting all trade with South Africa went into effect in one Nordic country after another, starting in Denmark in December 1986, the Finnish government finally bowed to pressure to introduce similar legislation.

Search for a new basis
A collateral casualty was the Finnish policy doctrine of balanced inaction. To save the remnants of it, the idea of South African exception-alism was introduced. The situation in South Africa was so bad that the normal “realist” state logic could not be applied there, it was argued. Whereas many countries in the word practised discrimination of one kind or another, South Africa was, after all, the only one where such discrimination had been written into the books of law. Others saw it more as sour grapes. Finland’s relations with South Africa had “stopped being foreign policy in the proper sense on the word,” Keijo Korhonen, a former high Foreign Ministry official in Kekkonen’s confidence, argued “They have become a new dimension of domestic and party politics and simultaneously an important instrument for foreign political masturbation...” 5

One could argue that Finland’s South Africa policy was shot through with irreconcilable contra-dictions all the way along. The line separating a “moralist” from “non-moral” stand on an issue like apartheid was so thin that it disappeared into thin air: it overlooked that moral issues and feelings are facts of life influencing human action as much as flows of trade and machinations of power politics do. Here, as in many other second-ary foreign policy issues the line of the leading clique of the Foreign Ministry had been to follow the other Nordics, in order to keep up a foreign policy profile of a Western, that is non-Soviet, block country. Väyrynen expressed it sublimely when he said that on the issues of boycotting South Africa Finland had been “in the second coach of the first train”.6 Yet Finland’s policy was supposed to be non-moralist while the other Nordics openly let moral feelings influence their policies and in Finland the same feelings spurred the civil society into action. The “realists” themselves well understood that the strengthening of feelings of international solidarity and building up an inter-national system based on respect of human rights was very much in the interests of a small nation in the position of Finland.7

While Finland was the last Nordic country to impose trade sanctions on South Africa it was also the first to lift them, in 1991. The minor controversy following this was quickly forgotten when South Africa moved to majority rule in 1994 and

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4 Heino, op.cit., pp. 69, 86.
5 Keijo Korhonen, Mitalin toinen puoli, Helsinki, 1989, p. 93.
6 Quoted in Heino, op.cit., p. 90.
7 Jakobson, op. cit., p. 60.
faced entirely different challenges. Finland started bilateral aid there in 1995 although it was too wealthy to be officially included among the main co-operation partners. The 1997 Africa policy document stated that Republic of South Africa is the most important co-operation partner in sub-Saharan Africa for Finland. It is also the only African country which Finnish ministers have visited quite frequently. The top leaders of the two countries decided in 1998 to continue Finnish aid after the interim phase and even increase it. It has been agreed, however, that the programme is temporary and will be phased out by 2010. In the longer term, Finland’s interests in South Africa are more oriented to political co-operation and, again, furthering Finnish exports. ICT (information and communication technology) is seen as the new growth sector.

From Ambomaa to Namibia: special relationship transformed

Finnish relations with Namibia have necessarily been entangled with the relations with South Africa, yet they have a quality and history of their own. Among the “real” African countries Namibia is the one with which Finland has had a very special relationship – or at least the Finns like to think so. This is mainly because of the long presence and cultural influence of Finnish missionaries there, most conspicuously reflected in the Finnish-sounding first names of many older-generation Namibians. More recently, many Finns played an active role in the long drawn-out independence process of Namibia, notably Martti Ahtisaari who later became the President of Finland. After independence, Namibia, despite its mineral-based wealth, became a major recipient of Finnish aid. Lately, however, the relations have turned sour, and it has now been decided that the Finnish bilateral aid programme to Namibia is to be phased out within a few years. The special relationship is obviously being transformed although probably not disappearing.

Independence struggle: representation and interference

In retrospect, the relationship was always more complex than it appeared in glib speeches and declarations on either side in its heyday. Whereas the Finns innocently felt that they “had sort of adopted that far-away corner of the world” it was not quite clear who “Namibia” was and to what extent the Namibians reciprocated to such a basically patriarchal attitude. Tensions kept on being generated beneath the sunny surface. During the Namibian independence struggle, Finns took great pride in their non- and anti-colonial background. After all, Finland never had colonies: it had been a colony itself, first under Swedish rule, and from 1809 to 1917 a Grand Duchy of Tsarist Russia. Yet this had not prevented many Finns having a rather “colonial” mentality in their dealings with Africans. The post-colonial aid relationship was marred by the unequal starting point emanating from the inequality of resources and a reluctance to tackle some sensitive issues.

The issues the Finns confronted in Namibia bore a superficial resemblance to those they faced with South Africa but in fact they went deeper as their own involvement was so much deeper. There is no doubt that from the 1970s onwards the overwhelming majority of the relevant Finnish actors – from missionaries to government officials – sincerely supported Namibian independence and were relieved when it was finally achieved in 1990. Underlying this unity of purpose there were two major unresolved issues: those of representation and interference. Who was entitled to represent the Namibian people in their struggle and who had the right to interfere in the doings of those who claimed to be the rightful representatives? Obvious questions as they were, confronting them was nevertheless evaded for as long as possible.

What made it complicated was exactly the history behind it all. It took quite some time before the bulk of the missionary opinion accepted that Namibians were ready to govern themselves. The first missionaries had started to work in 1870 in Ambomaa, that is Ovamboland in northern Namibia, well before the German colonialists had set foot there; and they had formed good working relations with both the German and the subsequent South African colonial administration. During the German period, they had been in a key position as political and spiritual mediators between the colonialists and the local rulers and peoples. Under South African rule, their political role diminished but they were for a long time essential in providing the greater part of education and health care. The missionaries naturally maintained their own identity but could not avoid being influenced by the surrounding “colonial situation” aggravated by official segregation. “Are there any among us,” a former missionary wondered, “who

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8 Jakobson, op.cit., p. 65.
Juhani Koponen and Hannu Heinonen

have not been guilty of feelings of false superiority – or artificial camaraderie...?" 9

When SWAPO (South West African Peoples’ Organization, the main liberation movement and the present ruling party) was formed in 1960, the first reaction among Finnish missionaries was overwhelmingly negative. The attitude changed only during the 1960s. In the early 1970s the balance of the missionary opinion had tilted in favour of independence. Three factors contributed to the change. One was the irresistible wave of independence north of the Limpopo and the outside pressure brought by it. The second was that the local Ambo-Kavango church that had grown from the Finns’ own work took an unequivocal stand for independence. Third, when the guerrilla war was started in 1966, low-key as it was, the warfare methods graphically revealed the nature of the South African state to the missionaries. When “victims of strange accidents, frightened people who were not even able to tell what had happened to them” began to appear in mission hospitals, the Finnish missionaries realized that people were being tortured in detention. Their conclusion was, “South Africa is a police state” (Väisälä).

Meanwhile Finnish officials at the UN headquarters in New York, frustrated by the endless stream of resolutions “which were not even meant to be implemented” (Jakobson)10 but which they had themselves joined, stepped up efforts to search for what they thought would be a more workable solution acceptable to all parties. Namibia, as a former League of Nations mandate was in international law in a very different position from South Africa: it was hard to deny that it belonged to the UN’s jurisdiction. The question was what to do. The Afro-Asian majority in the General Assembly had for years produced resolutions to make South Africa relinquish the territory and hand it over to the UN’s administration. Major Western countries were unhappy and tried to seek a compromise acceptable to South Africa. Jakobson, as the Finnish UN representative, was part of this search as the chairman of the South West Africa Committee established in 1966. He initiated the legal procedure whereby the International Court at The Hague finally managed to declare that the South African mandate of Namibia had indeed expired.

Later, the Nationhood Programme covering the UN assistance to Namibia was established following a Finnish initiative and was co-ordinated by Finns.

The Finns had not always been so keen to interfere. A revealing historical episode, and the first time when Africa figured in official Finnish foreign policy, was played out shortly after Finnish independence. A delegation consisting of local notables turned up in the office of the State Secretary of the newly independent Finland, K.G. Idman, and proposed that Ovamboland should be made a Finnish colony. Finnish missionaries had done so much good there and the German Empire was obviously collapsing, they pointed out. The more realistically-minded Secretary turned the proposal down immediately, observing later that “Finland would not have had any practical benefit from the country and the only consequence of our possessing it would have been the investment of considerable amounts of money in a country, which we would have probably lost sooner or later anyway”.11

Only in the 1960s were the Finns ready to invest some money in a country they could not imagine ever gaining. As for the issue of representation, they took the UN General Assembly declaration of SWAPO as the “sole authentic representative of the Namibian people” as their cue. Other Namibian groups were politely turned down. Finland started to give direct aid to SWAPO in 1974 when Sam Nujoma visited Finland. At first the sums were very modest and destined mainly for education but they grew and diversified. In 1975, a scholarship programme was initiated under which more than 60 Namibian students were brought to Finland to study topics ranging from nursing to geology. Funded by Finnida and administered by Finnchurcharid, the students were selected by SWAPO and the Finns in co-operation. In 1983, all assistance to Namibia/SWAPO was fashioned into a Namibia Education, Health, Nutrition and Research Programme which included in addition to scholarships production of education materials and funding to the UN Institute for Namibia.

Perhaps the most visible of all Namibia-related Finnish activities was Ahtisaari’s work for Namibian independence. This has been the source of special pride to the Finns and it was not least due

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9 This and the following quotations are from the account of a former missionary, Marja Väisälä, “Suomalainen lähetystyö”, in Kimmo and Marja-Liisa Kiljunen (eds), Namibia – viimeinen siirtomaa, Helsinki, 1980, pp. 246–247.
10 Jakobson, op.cit., p. 62.
to the publicity resulting from it that he in 1994 was catapulted to the position of President of the Republic as an outsider sponsored by dissident Social Democrats. However, it is not quite clear what his contribution ultimately was: to what extent he was an international civil servant dutifully executing the orders of his superiors and how much independent leeway he exercised and to whose benefit. At first he walked on tip-toe with the difficult double role of being at the same time the African-sponsored UN Commissioner for Namibia and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Namibia after this post was created in 1978 to execute the Western sponsored independence plan endorsed in the UN Security Council Resolution 435 in 1978. Opting for the latter, he became involved for much longer than many had imagined. It took more than ten years before mutual suspicions could be cleared and the plan was implemented. The process was marred in its final stages in April 1989 by a bloody debacle. Ahtisaari gave the South African troops stationed in Namibia the green light to confront SWAPO soldiers who had crossed the border from Angola. Although sending in armed combatants, evidently to establish a showy presence in the anticipation of elections, was a breach of existing agreements and showed poor judgement from the side of the relevant SWAPO leadership, a lot of bitterness was bound to remain. Apparently hundreds of SWAPO men were killed: the loss of life during these fateful days probably exceeded that in all the guerrilla war prior to it.

SWAPO had been frustrated at having been left on the sidelines during the long negotiation process and had tried to bolster up its tattered image. Its position was tricky indeed. While it had been treated as the sole representative of the Namibian people by the UN and the donors, it had not been given any special treatment in the peace plan based on the UN Resolution 435. What made it worse was that the movement was internally split and the leadership was maintaining control with increasingly repressive measures. Whereas in an earlier showdown in 1976 the main dissidents had been given the opportunity to go into exile, in the 1980s perhaps up to 2,000 SWAPO members were rounded up in prison camps in Angola, accused of being spies. It appears many were tortured and some killed.

The Finns, and other donors, were not unaware of what was happening inside SWAPO but decided not to interfere. It was evidently feared that if SWAPO had formally disintegrated, it would have played into the hands of South Africa. During the 1976 crisis when some SWAPO dissidents were detained in Zambia, some of the fugitives sought refuge in the Lusaka house of a Finnish official, Kari Karanko, but otherwise the support went on as before. When accusations about prison camps in Angola began to circulate, an international fact-finding mission went to investigate the matter but came back empty-handed. For the Finns, the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of SWAPO was a natural adaptation of their general line. “The liberation struggle is not the most democratic phase in the life of an organisation”, Ahtisaari later explained. Finland continued the direct support to SWAPO until 1989. When it was discontinued it was not because of concerns about human rights inside SWAPO but because the political process based on Resolution 435 had reached a stage where it was no longer feasible to prop up one party.

### Transforming the relationship

In this way, several sensitive issues which were never properly confronted were carried into the relationship between independent Namibia and Finland. The beginning was bright, to be sure. Despite recriminations after the April 1989 killings, the Namibian settlement plan remained on track, leading to elections in late 1989 and to full independence on 21 March 1990. New Namibia was firmly in the hands of SWAPO. In the first elections, SWAPO gained 57 per cent of the votes, which had grown to 76 per cent in 1999, and Nujoma easily made it to President. The bulk of SWAPO’s support came from Ovamboland. For a while Namibia seemed to become an exemplary African democracy. A promise made back in 1976 that Namibia would be taken as a major recipient of Finnish aid could finally be realised. The Finnish aid programme started with a considerable volume, and Finland became one of the major donors in Namibia. Most Finnish aid went into health, education, water and the environment.

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13 There are several works on this today although the subject remains officially uninvestigated. This short account is based on Soiri and Peltola, op.cit., pp.125–131.

14 In an interview with Soiri and Peltola, op. cit., p. 184.
Lately, however, cracks have appeared and the relationship has started to go sour. In African terms, mineral-rich Namibia is a relatively well-off country and in 1997 it was decided that the Finnish aid programme would be gradually phased out. There was little need to reconsider the decision when oligarchic traits were intensified inside Namibia and the government became involved in wars in Angola and Congo. Finnish aid disbursements have been in steady decline during the past few years. Political relations are no longer as close as they used to be, after Namibia asked Finland to call its ambassador home from Windhoek. No public explanation was offered but the ambassador in question was known as a straightforward and vocal man who did not hide his displeasure on ventures such as Namibia’s involvement in Congo. He also happened to be the same Finnish official who had once hid SWAPO dissidents in his home in Lusaka, Karanko.

Finland has decided it will not appoint a new ambassador to Namibia, and the embassy will be headed by a chargé d’affaires. This can be seen as a sign that the embassy may be closed after the development co-operation programme has been terminated in 2007. What will happen after that is anybody’s guess: NGO co-operation will no doubt be continued and some more “economic interaction” is hoped for. The special relationship will look rather different without the heavy state backing.

The rest: the flag follows aid

What makes it justifiable to treat the rest of Africa summarily as one residual category for Finnish policies is that the Finnish relations with other countries and areas in Africa have not only been even less developed but they have been formed on a different logic. Some beginnings to historical links have been present there as well but one factor has become dominant in determining these relations: development aid. In Finnish relations with Africa, the flag followed aid more often than the other way around. It is only very recently, due to pressures emanating from the demands of the Finnish membership of the European Union (EU), that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) has made attempts to forge a comprehensive Finnish strategy for Africa also comprising other, i.e. non-aid related issues, but without convincing success so far.

One of the few places with which some historical links, now all but forgotten, exist, is Congo.

In addition to South Africa, it was the other area that attracted some worker migration in the early 19th century. Some 150 young Finns, like their more numerous counterparts from Sweden, were drawn to King Leopold’s violent venture. They went right into the heart of darkness, working as captains and engineers on boats plying back and forth along the River Congo. Otherwise the Finnish-African relationships before World War Two, the high noon of European imperialism in Africa, were very haphazard: some diplomatic interaction with Ethiopia and Liberia in the League of Nations, a missionary here and a traveller there. After the war, the winds of change began to be felt. Larger groups of Finnish missionaries went to a number of new places from Angola to Tanzania and elsewhere in East Africa. Yet what transformed these relations was the advent of aid.

The rise and fall of Finnish aid

Finnish aid, a relative late-comer, was from its very start heavily concentrated to Africa as this was the common Nordic line in the early 1960s. Tanzania quickly became the major partner. The Nordics had collectively ended up there when looking for a suitable recipient for intensifying their aid efforts." At that time, Africa seemed to present a notable opportunity for co-operation: a giant awakening. Tanzania – still Tanganyika – was picked out because of the appeal of the moderation of Julius Nyerere’s policies, its developmental potential and the fact that there was no need to try to speak French there. There were more than 50 Nordic missionaries in the country, some of whom lobbied strongly for Nyerere. The Nordic Tanganyika Centre was constructed in 1963–67 and run by a Nordic staff until 1970 when it was handed over to the Tanzanian state as the Kibaha Educational Centre as a “gesture of human brotherhood” (Nyerere). The first bilateral group of Finnish volunteers, called the Development Corps (kehitysjoukot) was dispatched in 1967. Soon, other forms of aid which gained popularity in Finnish development co-operation such as the use of development “experts” and consultancy companies, and soft loans called Development Credits were pioneered in Tanzania.

Tanzania’s rise and long pre-eminence was due to the Nordic factor. Meanwhile, Finnish diplomatic missions had been established elsewhere, in

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countries that seemed more important from the more general, political or economic point of view: in Cairo (1957) which was more oriented towards the Middle East than Africa, Lagos (1963), the capital of the most populous and commercially most promising of the emerging West African nations, and Addis Ababa (ambassador accredited in 1965) which had become the seat of the Organization of African Unity. The original idea was that diplomatic representation would direct aid to countries such as Ethiopia and Nigeria. In practice it was the opposite that happened: after aid relations were initiated they drew diplomatic missions after them. Aid to the countries where the new embassies were situated did not take off as expected. Work in Ethiopia started very sluggishly and the attempts to assist Nigeria were given up after a few years due to the unwieldy and corrupt working environment. Meanwhile, commercially more promising countries such as Kenya and Zambia were added to the recipients to counterbalance poor and now “socialist” Tanzania and new diplomatic missions were established where aid was flowing to, first as preliminary aid administration posts which in due course were elevated into fully-fledged embassy status. In this way Finland established embassies in Dar es Salaam (1971), Lusaka (1976) and Nairobi (ambassador transferred from Addis Ababa in 1977).

Finnish aid funds grew very slowly during the whole of the formative period in the 1960s and well into the Nordic-national phase in the 1970s when the Nordic countries, especially Sweden, provided the role model. In 1977, the share of development aid of the Finnish GNI was still only 0.16 per cent – one of the lowest in Europe. But then the growth accelerated so that in the latter part of the 1980s it was the most rapid of any Western donor country. The international aid target was reached and even exceeded in 1991 when Finnish aid rose to its unique peak of 0.80 per cent – only to be drastically cut the in years thereafter.

There were many reasons for this growth; one being that the use of the funds reflected more commercial than developmentalist considerations. Projects were planned with an eye to maximising Finnish deliveries and implementation was entrusted to Finnish consultancy companies. When new countries were added to the recipient list, more emphasis was placed on their openness to foreign capital than the extent of poverty or the drive for social equality. Egypt and Kenya were elevated to the “main recipients” category in 1979. Even when in 1982 a number of least developed and other poor countries were listed by a Cabinet decision care was taken that they were sites for on-going Finnish project activities. African countries then included were Ethiopia, Somalia, the Sudan and Mozambique. In the late 1980s Finnish aid to Africa was at its widest. Besides the listed “main recipients” aid-funded projects were undertaken in several countries, some of them in Central (Burundi) or Western Africa (Senegal).

Also here, the issue of interference emerged although in a rather different manner than in Namibia. The official Finnish line at the beginning was to respect the sovereignty of the recipients in the conduct of their internal affairs. After the donor had made its choice of partners, it was not to interfere in the policies of the latter. In practice, this line was also stuck to as long as it resonated reasonably well with the commercial ambitions of Finnish aid and projects which were satisfactory in this respect could be agreed upon. But when African economies came to the brink of collapse in the early 1980s and the Bretton Woods Institutions, IMF and the World Bank started to push structural adjustment as a condition for continuation of their support, Finland and other bilateral donors had to make up their mind, about whose side they were ultimately on.

The earliest, and the most decisive, battle was fought in Tanzania. With its early assistance, Finland and the other Nordics had lent their support to the Tanzanian policy of ujamaa socialism and self-reliance. It had appeared to be an honest attempt to build a modern African society. In the early 1980s it was clear that whatever the moral appeal of ujamaa, economically it did not work. When the crisis set in, Finland and the other Nordic countries, after some soul-searching, accepted the gist of the Bretton Woods analysis and threw their weight behind it. The ultimate roots of the problem were seen not as external, as claimed by the Tanzanians, but internal, stemming from the wrong policies pursued by the government. The main culprit was identified as too much state control and interference in the economy. This was to be corrected by the standard package of devalua-

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tion, liberalization and privatisation. After the change of heart of the Nordic countries, the Tanzanian government had few options other than to swallow its pride and endorse the conditionalities imposed in 1986.

After the turnabout in Tanzania, it was easy for Finland to support structural adjustment policies elsewhere in Africa, as they became topical in one country after another. Gradually this amounted to a major policy shift and adoption of a new doctrine where conditionality and interference, now called dialogue, are rather seen as necessary ingredients than something to be shunned.

**Mainstreaming Africa**

Finland’s policy on Africa underwent a considerable change during the 1990s. Aid funds were slashed and the MFA felt the need to reduce the heavy reliance of its policy on aid. It started what it regarded as ‘mainstreaming’ Africa as a part of ‘normal’ foreign policy. It now considers development co-operation only as one of the ‘tools’ of Finnish foreign policy in Africa, and puts more emphasis on developing other dimensions of foreign relations with African countries. At least four factors, partly inter-related, affecting this mainstreaming can be identified, in chronological order: cuts in aid, the EU membership, new policy outlines and administrative restructuring. The most consequential of these is no doubt the EU membership to which all the others are in one way or another related.

**Cuts in aid**

In the early 1990s Finnish aid funds were drastically cut. From their peak of 0.80 per cent of GNI in 1991, Finnish aid disbursement rapidly declined to 0.31 per cent in 1994 (in absolute terms this meant a decline from over 633 million euro to some 255 million). This occurred at a time when Finland was suffering from the worst depression in its modern economic history, caused by a combination of botched liberalisation of the financial markets and the collapse of the Soviet Union that put an end to the so-called clearing trade between the two countries which was beneficial to the Finns. The peak in the aid-GNI ratio had been reached only when the Finnish GNI had gone into decline because of the on-setting depression and this decline was steep indeed.

The even sharper decline in the funds available for development co-operation forced MFA to rethink its approach to development co-operation. A major principle was to downsize development co-operation programmes in long-term partner countries – although the decline first hit Finnish disbursements to multilateral agencies most severely. However, although the Finnish economy bounced back from the doldrums, no corresponding change happened in the relative size of the Finnish aid. It has remained on the level of roughly 0.34 per cent of the GNI ever since. Certainly, in absolute terms the Finnish development co-operation budget increased appreciably every year during the latter part of the 1990s, with the high growth rates of GNI. Nevertheless, funds are still nowhere near their former level, even in absolute terms (the appropriation was 480 million euro in 2002). This indicates that the policy relevance of development co-operation for Finland has changed during the 1990s. The economic factors that forced Finland to decrease the co-operation budget no longer exist, but funds have not fully recovered.

**EU membership**

At the same time, Finland became a European Union member, something that profoundly changed Finland’s approach to development co-operation as well. During the Cold War period it had been important for Finland to identify itself as a member of the Nordic community. Aiming at the same level of development aid with the rest of the Nordic countries was therefore considered to be necessary. The end of the Cold War and membership in the EU completely changed Finland’s international position, and it became more important for Finland to identify itself as a member of the EU. Therefore, it is no longer considered worthwhile to aim at the same volume of aid as the other Nordics, but rather to keep at the average level of the EU.

The EU membership also added a new, explicitly political dimension to Finnish Africa relations. Whereas previously Finland had a limited number of handpicked countries with which it maintained aid-driven bilateral relations and followed what happened in them, during their first years in Brussels the Finns realised that this would not do. Participation in EU decision-making required that Finland had more extensive knowledge of African affairs, as African affairs are on the agenda in the EU almost daily. That gave an impetus to Finland to attempt to create a comprehensive policy on Africa, which had a greater emphasis on the political dimension than previously. The strengthening of the political dimension of bilateral relations and increasing political dialogue with Afri-
can countries are seen to increase Finland’s possibilities to influence EU decision-making. Thus, the EU is the single most important thing that has affected the diversification of Finland’s policy on Africa.

**New policy outlines**

These changes required new policies and strategies, with an aim to clearly organise relations between different foreign policy instruments, and guarantee that the requirements of EU membership could also be fully met in Finland’s Africa policy. So far this policy work has been mainly conducted on a more general level, and has produced three government decisions-in-principle concerning Finland’s policy on relations with developing countries in general. These documents are: **Decision-in-principle on development co-operation** (the Cabinet, September 12, 1996), **Finland’s Policy on Relations with Developing Countries** (the Cabinet, October 15, 1998) and **Operationalisation of Development Policy Objectives in Finland’s International Development Cooperation** (the Cabinet, February 22, 2001). For Africa especially, MFA has not yet prepared a comprehensive strategy. The only relevant document in this respect is from 1997 and is called **The principles and guidelines of Finnish foreign policy in sub-Saharan Africa**. However, it is not a real strategy paper, but rather a basic description of the international environment where MFA operates in sub-Saharan Africa.

A gradual change in the Finnish foreign policy concerning developing countries can be traced from the more general documents. The first decision-in-principle was a response to the declining relevance of development co-operation and the challenges brought about by the EU membership, and it attempted to define a new role for aid in the Finnish foreign policy. In the 1998 outlines, the objective was to harmonise the use of different instruments in Finland’s policy on developing countries. And finally, the objective of the last document was to consider what practical and operational implications previous documents should have on Finland’s actual policies (the original Finnish title of the third decision-in-principle should read “Operationalisation of policy on relations with developing countries”).

This stream of policy papers clearly demonstrates that Finland’s foreign policy on developing countries has changed from the previous rather pragmatic *ad hoc* approach to a more strategic approach, where objectives are first set out and then their operational implications thought through. How this will work in practice is another thing – one of the present writers has recently put forward a strong critique of the internal incoherence of the documents and the new development policy doctrine inherent in them and doubted their potential to give a firm direction to action. According to this critique, the documents, though clearly predicated on a market-friendly and basically neo-liberal logic, contain elements from conflicting discourses, and the ends and the means tend to get blurred in them.18

**Administrative restructuring**

MFA implemented an organisational reform in 1998, mainly to be better prepared for Finland’s EU presidency in 1999. Previously the Ministry had been divided into three separate departments (political, economic and development co-operation) that were responsible for the relations with single countries in their respective fields. In the organisational reform operational responsibility for Finland’s foreign policy was given to regional divisions in all the different sectors. This of course also served the change in Finland’s foreign policy on Africa and other developing countries, because the new regional divisions were also able to harmonise the use of development co-operation with other instruments more efficiently.

MFA itself considered the organisational reform to have been successful, especially in development co-operation, in a report on the tasks and resources of the Finnish Foreign Service presented to Parliament. It is seen to have enabled a more extensive and effective consideration of political and economic factors in project planning. In practice, the organisational reform was a prerequisite for the operationalisation of changes in Finland’s policies that were made during the 1990s.

Despite the “mainstreaming”, it is clear that in practice Africa continues to have very little political relevance for Finland. This is reflected in the administrative resources. The two units responsible for sub-Saharan Africa at MFA are relatively small compared to other Scandinavian countries and Finland also has fewer diplomatic missions in the region. Although Finland has established diplomatic relations with all independent African countries, it maintains a permanent official pres-

ence in far fewer of them. At the moment Finland has four ambassadors accredited to sub-Saharan Africa: in South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and Nigeria. In addition, there are embassies that are headed by chargé d’affaires in five countries: Ethiopia, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Of these, the Harare embassy is to be closed down whereas the one in Maputo will be upgraded to have an ambassador as its head. South Africa continues to be the only sub-Saharan country that has an embassy in Finland.

Limitations in the political dimension of bilateral relations with African countries could be taken as increasing the importance of EU in this respect. Since EU is a global actor and has a strong presence in all African countries, it is also a channel through which Finland in principle can pursue its own goals in Africa. At the present stage of the integration, however, the practical possibilities for this are rather limited if compared to those that bilateral political dialogue offers.

**New policies**

What then does Finland want to achieve with its new policies, whatever the available resources? The above mentioned decisions-in-principle define the main objectives of Finland in Africa too. The primary goal of Finland’s policy on Relations with Developing Countries is, according to the 1998 decision-in-principle “to promote peace, cooperation and welfare and to combat threats to these values in a world of deepening interdependence between nations”. The stated objectives of Finland’s policy on developing countries are also listed more broadly as follows:

- Promotion of global security
- Reduction of widespread poverty
- Promotion of human rights and democracy
- Prevention of global environmental problems
- Promotion of economic dialogue

The MFA officials are instructed to take these objectives into account in all aspects of Finland’s relations with African countries. Some more tangible principles are outlined in the 1997 document concerning Finnish foreign policy in sub-Saharan Africa. The first objective here is to diversify relations with all African countries. No state in sub-Saharan Africa can in the future be only a recipient of development aid, the document says. Furthermore, development co-operation will be only one of the foreign policy tools in Africa, and other instruments should also be used, which is in line with the decisions-in-principle. Political dialogue should be extended to cover all areas of sub-Saharan Africa and deepened, because this helps to promote Finland’s own national interest in the EU forum. Many problems that have a global reach – meaning problems such as climate change, organised criminality, the spread of drug abuse, HIV and other epidemics – can best be tackled at their roots in Africa, which also serves the purpose of guarding the Finnish national interest.

One goal above the others is the “promotion of economic interaction” as stressed, in particular, in the 1998 decision-in-principle. There appears to be some confusion about what is actually meant by this. Some suspicious critics have taken it as a disguise for pursuing Finnish economic interests. In sub-Saharan Africa, however, South Africa is the only country that can be taken to have any more general significance for the Finnish economy. Rather it appears that the objective of Finland’s policy in Africa in this respect is not so much steered towards promotion of its immediate economic interests, but supporting the adjustment of African countries to the world economy. That is, as a good EU member, official Finland is working not so much for its national capital but for the spread of capitalism in general. There is a strong belief in the ultimate benefits of globalisation and the market economy underlying the new Finnish development policy doctrine. For poorer countries and people the integration into the world economy is presented as the solution: the real danger is seen in their exclusion.

A problem – quite apart from the issue whether the underlying analysis is convincing – is that the means available in bilateral relations for reaching this objective are rather limited, apart from aid and the political ‘dialogue’ buttressed by it. In countries that Finland is assisting, the partners are expected to share the Finnish goals and themselves take the responsibility for finding the means to reach them. Finland will give support to them in reaching the mutually agreed goals. The policy goals are underwritten by a soft conditionality: if a partner lacks “commitment” to the common goals, the co-operation with it needs to be “re-considered”.

But apart from to aid, the means available are very limited. Political dialogue conducted by diplomatic missions has relevance, especially because Finland’s influence has increased through the EU membership. But to make it matter, it needs backing from aid, and economic interaction as such
has so far had next to no significance. Finland has tried to promote investment promotion and protection treaties but this, too, has happened in countries with an aid relationship. In 2001 such a treaty was concluded with Tanzania, and negotiations for a similar treaty with Namibia are almost finished. These treaties will have little real significance in increasing, for example, investments and trade with these countries. They can be seen to have more political relevance as well as symbolic value in Finland’s effort to diversify relations with its long-term partners. Some support has also been given to the training of African officials for tough international trade negotiations.

More important instruments in the economic field as well may therefore be provided by the multilateral forums. The EU and the new Cotonou agreement are naturally the most important ones in this respect for African countries. However, the MFA has taken a rather passive stand; it does not appear to have much faith in Finland’s possibilities to affect the EU’s trade policies in relation to African countries. The same applies to such influential multilateral forums as the World Trade Organisation, WTO.

Thus, in spite of attempts at diversification of the instruments used in bilateral relations, Finnish bilateral relations with African countries still in practice rely heavily on development aid. The only obvious exception is Nigeria where an embassy is in place although the establishment of a development co-operation programme was given up long ago. The embassy in Lagos, soon to be transferred to the “new” capital Abuja, also has a wider regional function. It is the only Finnish diplomatic mission in the whole of West Africa. Otherwise Finland has development co-operation programmes running at the moment in ten sub-Saharan countries. Six of them – Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania and Zambia – are long-term partner countries and all have a Finnish embassy. With other partners (Malawi, South Africa, Burundi and Burkina Faso) co-operation is more limited, varying from one pilot project in Burkina Faso to a broader programme in South Africa.

The policy is to further concentrate on fewer partner countries and larger country programmes, as spelled out in the Operationalisation document. In practice this means “picking out the winners”: programmes will be expanded in those countries where the government is showing what the donors regard as commitment to development and which can present tangible results in development effectiveness. Mozambique is now a major such country in Africa; it has been picked out as one of the two countries where Finnish aid will in the next few years be considerably increased (Vietnam being the other). Tanzania, which continues to be in terms of accumulated volume by far the biggest recipient of Finnish aid anywhere, has lost its actual predominance and been reduced to one of the main partners. Together with Ethiopia it is now placed in the “business as usual” category, meaning that no immediate changes are expected in the present relationship. Namibia, until recently the third largest recipient in Africa, is going to be phased out, as we saw above. Zambia and Kenya are in danger of totally disappearing from the bilateral partners. They have been placed under special surveillance and their performance, especially their political development, will be carefully assessed. On the other hand, new countries may join in. The possible inclusion of Burkina Faso after the present experimental phase would include the French-speaking West Africa.

As for aid modalities, Finland has continued to be mainly engaged in project aid. Most projects in longer-term partner countries are carried out in the forestry, rural development, health, and water and sanitation as well as education sectors. A change has come about in projects, however. With the drastic cuts in aid funds, large infrastructure and industrial projects relying on Finnish deliveries and manpower have given way to smaller and softer activities employing more local resources. The project mode seems to be carrying on for the moment although there is much talk about, and some actual movement towards, a shift to the fashionable sector-wide approaches (Swaps) and direct budget support under the World Bank and IMF-sponsored Poverty Reduction Strategy processes. But it has been made clear that Finland will participate in such strategies only if the partner country is considered to possess adequate capacity and be committed to good governance. Otherwise, direct sectoral or budgetary support is not yet considered possible.

Finland has also introduced a new instrument, which aims to enhance democracy, human rights and good governance in partner countries. Through funds for local co-operation the Finnish embassies in the partner country can directly finance various small scale NGO and other civil society projects. Previously separate cultural funds were incorporated into these in 2000. The aim continues to be to encourage direct contacts between cultural institutions, organisations and in-
individuals rather than promote official cultural exchange within the framework of cultural agreements.

Conclusions
We have argued in this paper that although Africa has been peripheral and had very little political or economic relevance for Finland, it has attracted the attention of Finnish policy-makers and forced them to take a stand on issues which they otherwise might have preferred to eschew. In fact, the Finnish-African relations have brought forward some of the most important and vexing issues in the conduct of international relations – such as those of the weight given to humanitarian and moral considerations vis-à-vis the more immediate political and economic interests as well as those of the nature of sovereignty and the legitimacy of interference in relationships based on intervention from the outset. Whereas the Finnish policy-makers have often done their best to evade such sensitive issues, unsure of how to tackle them, the issues have persisted not least because of the unequal basis of the relationship. One could even argue that a reason why they have stood out so clearly is the very peripherality of Africa for Finland – there have been no weightier factors interfering in between.

If there is one major trend emerging in the Finnish-African relations, it is the increasing and deepening Finnish involvement in African internal affairs. From protesting against apartheid and supporting Namibian independence Finland has gone on to take a stand on the policies of the African governments with whom it co-operates. In the future, this may change now when apartheid is gone and Namibia is independent. These two countries will be for Finland more like the others, “the rest” in terms of this paper, and will increasingly be treated with the same criteria as them. But there are factors which are likely to keep the propensity to interfere high everywhere. One is that the major force now fashioning Finnish policies including those on Africa is the EU, whose mission includes the propagation of its supposedly superior economic system and “European values”. Another is that the relations between Finland and Africa will still be pre-dominantly based on aid. Despite the attempts of the MFA to “mainstream” Africa as a part of ‘normal’ foreign policy and diversify the “instruments” used in bilateral relations, so far there has been little advance not related to aid. And although the dominant aid ideology emphasizes partnership and “ownership”, the reality of aid continues to be intervention.

Africa may well provide a litmus test for the new strategic thrust in the Finnish policy-making. As we argued above, the previous rather pragmatic manner of policy-making has given way to a more strategic approach in Finnish policies on developing countries. Documents have been issued in which the attempt has been made to think out the means in relation to the ends. But the potential of such strategy documents to give firm direction to action has been challenged with reference to their debatable premises and internal incoherencies. As should be clear from this paper, Africa has always refused to be fitted into the neat categories of the Finnish foreign policy thinking and the Finns have been forced to confront Africa’s realities when considering their options. Africa’s potential to produce policy surprises is hardly over now when Finland is no longer working alone and ad hoc but trying to think strategically as part of a novel political power unit in the making.

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Iceland’s Policy on Africa

Thórdis Sigurdardóttir

From an international point of view, the status of Africa is weak and there are many indications that the continent is becoming more and more economically and politically marginalized. It is true, of course, that there has been economic and political progress in many African countries during the last decade and generalizing about a whole continent is obviously always suspect. The fact, however, remains that the results of the reform programmes of the past years have not lived up to expectations and that the vast majority of Africa’s inhabitants still live in dire poverty under unacceptable social conditions. Africa remains the poorest continent and rather than reversing that trend it seems to be lagging further behind the rest of the world. There are many, often complicated, reasons behind the fact that so many African states have not managed to ensure their citizens the standard of living taken for granted in many other parts of the world. Obviously, the African states must themselves tackle the situation and turn this development around. However, it remains the responsibility of the international community to join in the struggle against poverty and make a contribution towards successful economic, political and social development on the African continent. This applies to small countries like Iceland no less than it does to other industrialized countries.

**Icelandic Development Policy**

Africa has always been an important factor in Icelandic development policy. Icelanders have been granting development aid for approximately 30 years and the aid has always been primarily targeted at Africa. The Icelandic development policy on Africa is based on the basic principles of alleviating poverty and promoting sustainable economic development, the responsible use and protection of resources in the countries targeted by the development aid, along with work based on strengthening the democratic tradition and human rights.

Outside the arena of development aid, Iceland’s relations with Africa are minimal, be it in terms of trade, politics or culture. However, over the last few years, relations with the continent have gradually strengthened resulting in the opening of the first Icelandic embassy in Africa – in Mozambique in 2001. Currently no African state has an embassy in Iceland.

Iceland rates low in comparison with other Nordic countries in terms of official contributions towards development cooperation. Iceland allocates what amounts to 0.12 per cent of the domestic product towards development aid. However, Icelandic development aid is completely untied, which is generally argued to be a more efficient way to deliver assistance and more beneficial for the recipient countries. A review of Iceland’s development affairs, conducted by experts on behalf of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Iceland, is currently in process and will be finalised by the end of 2002. The review will evaluate Iceland’s development policy for the last five years and look to the future.

There is no one explanation at hand for why Iceland’s contributions towards development cooperation are comparatively modest. It may be pointed out, however, that general discourse on development cooperation in Iceland and the issues never seem to have gained momentum amongst the political parties, or for that matter at grass root level. The size of the country, with only 300,000 inhabitants maintaining an expensive welfare state, may well have something to do with this apparent lack of interest in development issues. Another reason may be that the Icelandic school system has never placed much emphasis on teaching about the world outside the Western hemisphere. Furthermore, because of the country’s geographical location and its relative isolation the inhabitants in general have had fewer opportunities to get to know different cultures than their neighbours have. However, polls show that the majority of people in Iceland favours development cooperation and appeals for humanitarian assistance through funding are usually well received by the public.
The Division of Icelandic Development Aid

Iceland's official participation in development cooperation was initiated in the early seventies and was at that time mainly confined to funds being allocated to international agencies and a few Nordic cooperation projects, with little direct Icelandic participation. Since the year 1981 Iceland's official bilateral aid has been coordinated by the Icelandic International Development Agency (ICEIDA). In recent years roughly one third of Iceland's official development aid has gone to the agency.

Approximately 60 per cent of Icelandic development aid goes towards multilateral projects. Roughly 30 per cent of the total aid is earmarked for a few international bank agencies such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), of which Iceland is a founding member, the International Development Association (IDA), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA). Among the projects that Iceland actively participates in is the HIPC project, whose goal is to write off the debt of the world’s poorest countries. Iceland is also part of the Nordic Development Fund, which grants loans for and funds development projects in Africa and elsewhere. A little less than 30 per cent of the total aid then goes to a number of United Nations agencies, either towards their operating activities or for specific projects run by those agencies, as well as towards refugee and disaster relief. The United Nations University (UNU) is one of the specific UN projects that Icelanders help fund, and furthermore, two of the University’s departments are located in Iceland, i.e. the UNU Geothermal Training Programme and the Fisheries Training Programme.

Many industrial nations have offered aid in the form of subsidized loans and high-risk loans for companies based in developing countries. That form of aid was initiated in Iceland in the year 2001 under the name of Vidskiptathroun (Business Development). The goal of this initiative is to strengthen the business activities and marketing of Icelandic companies in the developing world and with that in mind the emphasis falls on Africa and those states targeted by Icelandic development aid. In this respect, a new reinforced Icelandic Consultancy Trust Fund was recently founded with the aim of strengthening Icelandic development assistance by allowing Icelandic companies and individuals to export their expertise in the fields of energy and fisheries to, for example, Africa.

Iceland’s official development aid is only to a very small extent channelled through non-governmental organizations. There are a few Icelandic organizations that work in the field of development aid and disaster relief, but contrary to the situation in the neighbouring countries, those organizations are mostly independently funded. The largest and best known of such organizations in Iceland are the Icelandic Red Cross Society and Icelandic Church Aid.

The Icelandic International Development Agency (ICEIDA)

ICEIDA has now operated for two decades as the agency was founded by an Act of Parliament in 1981. According to the Act the Agency shall promote cooperation between Iceland and developing nations. The goal of such cooperation shall be to support the governments of these countries in improving their economy and thus participate in strengthening social progress and political independence within the framework of the United Nations. ICEIDA is an autonomous agency under the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and is governed by a politically nominated board, elected by Parliament for a term of four years, except for the chairperson, who is nominated by the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The board is entrusted with the responsibility for the general policy of the agency by the Minister, and also has an advisory role to the Minister in terms of Iceland’s policy on development issues. The Minister also appoints the agency’s director who is responsible for the agency’s day-to-day business. The financial contributions to the agency are decided upon each year in Parliament’s general budget. The agency operates in accordance with a long term plan for the years 2000-2004 and its activities are currently focussed on four African countries: Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia and Uganda. From the outset the basic principle of ICEIDA’s operations has been to focus its activities on countries suffering from acute poverty and to focus on those parts of society worst affected by it. The fight against poverty is thus the agency’s main goal. The agency has set priorities, which were last updated in 1995 and emphasize the following issues:
– The development cooperation shall help people to be self-sufficient, in particular by transfer of knowledge and professional skills. The cooperation shall promote: sustainable development; protection of the environment and natural resources; progress of the productive sectors; equality of individuals; democracy and human rights.

– It is important to improve the living conditions of the poorest. The circumstances of women and children are often neglected in the granting of development aid. ICEIDA shall endeavour to make certain that its development assistance will be beneficial to as many as possible and does not adversely affect the living conditions of the recipient people.

– Emphasis shall be placed on cooperation with the least developed countries as evaluated by competent institutions.

– Development assistance shall be given primarily in areas in which Icelanders have special knowledge and experience, which can be transferred, by teaching and training.

**Where Does the Aid Go?**

All the way from its founding, the agency has almost exclusively focussed its activities on Africa. ICEIDA's first projects were based in the Cape Verde Islands, which was the agency’s sole cooperation country until 1988, but from that year onwards other countries in the southern part of Africa were added. The cooperation was mainly in the field of fisheries and for a very long time almost every project ICEIDA was involved in was in the field of fisheries, marine research and the training of seamen and fish-processing personnel. This is no surprise as the fish sector is what Icelanders are best known for and where they consider themselves to have valuable knowledge to offer others. The fish resources of many African states have been over-fished by foreign fleets over the years and early on ICEIDA adopted the position that it would aid coastal states and other fishing countries in Africa to develop their fisheries sectors with the goal of exploring the sector to the fullest, both in terms of using it to achieve foreign exchange and in terms of obtaining fish for domestic consumption, without either of these in any way compromising the fish stocks. An important issue in this respect is that the fishing communities are often fringe communities and the fishermen are frequently among the poorest inhabitants of their countries, even if poverty in its worst manifestations, accompanied by social disintegration and lack of food, is seldom as serious there as it can be in the urban areas. Aid given to such communities strengthens the rural and village communities of the countries in question, which in itself is important in these times of increasingly rapid urbanization.

In 1997 a change of emphasis occurred in the activities of ICEIDA. That year the government of Iceland agreed to triple its contributions to ICEIDA for the term 1999–2003, and thus the operations of the agency have increased significantly. That same year an overall review of the agency's operations was conducted and in its wake it was decided to expand into new sectors, in particular those of health and education. Most African states are facing an enormous health challenge, which has only increased after the AIDS epidemic hit the continent. Lack of education is also one of the most serious problems facing the continent. For these reasons the decision was made that ICEIDA would emphasize these issues in particular. The health and education sectors are also important in terms of building human resources, which in and of itself is one of the most important development goals. The agency has, however, not abandoned the fisheries sector and many of the agency's new projects aim at strengthening the fishing communities through supporting other aspects of the communities. With this in mind new projects have mainly focussed on adult education and health care.

**How Does ICEIDA Work?**

The theory and practice of development aid has changed dramatically over the years. The methods, ideas and goals of development aid are always open for revision and ongoing critical discourse takes place within the field itself. Lately a great deal of criticism has been directed at project based development aid which has been accused of being donor driven. By now, most development agencies have redesigned their operations and are increasingly basing their policymaking, budget estimates and activities on aid towards whole sectors of the community rather than on specific projects. The role of the recipient has likewise been rethought and today includes increased responsibility for every stage of the planning and implementation processes. The basic idea is to base the development work on the goals that the locals have set for themselves.
So far, Icelandic development cooperation has mainly been project based. However, in the choice of projects the overall programme of the sector involved has increasingly been taken into consideration, and the projects themselves have been planned in order to fit into the development goals of each partner country. The main reason for the project bias of ICEIDA’s development aid is probably how small the agency is. Compared to most other official public agencies the Icelandic one is microscopic in size and its size and ways of operating are in many ways better compared to nongovernmental organizations than its international sister-agencies.

It should, however, not be forgotten that project-based aid has its benefits. The main benefit being the perspective it allows. Projects are usually clearly demarcated and designed to solve well-defined problems. There is typically a clear agreement as to what the development agency provides and what remains the responsibility of the cooperation partner. Projects are usually designed around a pre-established time frame, often only comprising a few years, and the results are supposedly easily measured. An agency providing project-based aid generally becomes quite visible and its agents are responsible for, and in control of, the capital flow and implementation process, which makes mismanagement of funds less likely to happen. Still, the question remains whether that kind of aid contributes towards permanent stability and development in the cooperation country involved.

Another characteristic of Icelandic development aid is its emphasis on technical advice. The change in emphasis which has taken place in many development agencies towards placing less emphasis on long term technical advisors and more on local people and technical advisors hired for the short term has yet only partially managed to make its mark on the way ICEIDA operates. Icelandic long term technical advisors work on most of the projects the agency is involved in and are usually responsible for the implementation of those projects, although situations do exist where they simply work as advisors to the locals. The reasons behind this are, among others, that the capacity of many of the agencies and bodies that ICEIDA cooperates with simply does not allow for things to be done in any other way. Finally, according to the Icelandic Act which governs the agency, ICEIDA shall always oversee all of the projects it sponsors. The law governing the agency is 20 years old today and needs revising.

ICEIDA has in recent years followed the lead of most other development agencies in working towards the goal of integration in its projects, especially in the field of gender equality. The agency’s current long-term plan mentions such integration goals. Many of the agency’s smaller projects have been designed with this goal in mind.

**Experiences Gained from Development Cooperation**

As mentioned above Iceland’s contributions towards development aid are very small and this has always restricted operations, both in terms of choice of projects and cooperation countries. Icelanders took their first steps in independent development aid in the Cape Verde Islands. Those projects bore the mark of inexperience and the results were varied. During the 20 years of ICEIDA’s operations Icelanders have learnt from experience and undeniably gained valuable knowledge on how to manage development cooperation. ICEIDA has at various times cooperated with other development agencies on individual projects and assumed responsibility for specific sectors of the work. Independent evaluations have regularly been conducted on the activities of ICEIDA, both as regards individual projects and its whole operation. In most instances the agency has received good reviews for its part in development projects, both its own and those on which it has cooperated with others, although those evaluations have also identified certain problems.

The results of development aid must always be looked at in conjunction with what the cooperation partners are doing and in terms of their own development experiments. Thus it is important for ICEIDA, as it is for any development agency, to adjust its aid to the situation in, and the goals of, the cooperation countries. The goals of development projects are mostly to strengthen the policy and the goals that the locals have set for themselves so that these result in better living conditions and better services for the citizens of the society in question. Therefore it is very important that those involved in development cooperation are ready to learn from experience, to listen to the point of view of the locals and that they are committed to constantly trying to improve their ways of working in order to create conditions conducive to change for, and in cooperation with, those on the receiving end of development aid.
References

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Introduction
African affairs have never occupied a central place in Norway’s official foreign policy. This fact reflects both Africa’s marginal economic and political place in Norway’s foreign relations and the continent’s geographical remoteness as seen from the North. Moreover, Norway has no colonial past and no strategic interests to defend on the African continent. Indeed, for those and other reasons, it may be argued that Norway to this day has never really had a conscious and coherent Africa policy. Apparently, for a small country there was no perceived need to formulate such a policy. An attempt to do so was made in the late 1990s but it came to naught. As a result, what may be construed to be Norway’s Africa policy is a patchwork of diverse elements, haphazardly put together more by default than by deliberate policy-making. More than anything else, aid relations have predominated in the interactions between Norway and Africa.

A historical flashback
Historically, three types of interaction have formed Norway’s relationship with Africa: mission work, whaling, and shipping. Each in its own way has contributed to shaping official Norwegian policy towards Africa, yet differently and variously in successive epochs.

The earliest relations with the African continent involved missionary activity, first in South Africa (in present-day KwaZulu-Natal) from the 1840s, and later in Madagascar, Cameroon, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Mali as the main fields of evangelisation (Jørgensen 1992). More than a thousand Norwegian missionaries recruited through the Norwegian Missionary Society have spent considerable periods in these African territories over a 150-year time span. Their numerous letters and reports home, as well as the organised dissemination of their experiences through various publications, newsletters and newspapers gradually created a certain awareness of the so-called ‘dark continent’ in Norwegian society.

The second area of African exposure stems from whaling in the Antarctic and the Southern Atlantic. In the former half of the 20th century Norway was one of the largest whaling nations in the world. Ports on the southern shores of the African continent – notably in South Africa, Namibia, Angola, Gabon and Mozambique – served as bases for processing plants and sources of provisioning for the whaling expeditions (Tønnessen 1967, pp. 432–474). Due to the over-exploitation of the whale populations, however, the Norwegian whaling industry has by now virtually collapsed.

The third point of contact was that, as citizens of a major shipping nation, scores of Norwegian sailors in the merchant marine have over the years made numerous visits to ports of call along Africa’s long coastline. Although their encounters with Africa were generally limited to coastal towns, they did represent significant contact points, which have contributed to providing images of Africa – whether accurate or not – to the Norwegian population. The commercial shipping interests have exerted considerable influence over Norway’s relationship with African states in this policy sphere.

Even though Norway was never a colonial power, many Norwegians in private capacities took part in scientific expeditions, and some were recruited for positions in the civil service, the transport system and the military in the Belgian Congo. Norwegians served as judges in the Congo and Egypt, a considerable number emigrated to South Africa and several other African countries where they ran plantations (Eide and Vaa 1986, pp. 362).
Contemporary relationships
It was not until the late 1940s after Norway had become a member of the United Nations Security Council that an official political position had to be taken on a significant African question. At that time, Norway’s ambassador to the UN led the diplomatic group mediating over the status of Eritrea. It eventually opted for incorporation into Ethiopia as the appropriate solution. Ethiopia’s struggle against Italian fascism and its monarchic system of government had struck a sympathetic chord and no doubt influenced the Norwegian position in this regard.

Subsequently, membership of the UN and the axiomatic emphasis placed on multilateral institutions in the foreign policy of a small state have largely shaped Norway’s Africa policy. Much of the impetus has come through the UN system, ranging from sanctions against apartheid in South Africa and Namibia and the racist minority regime in Southern Rhodesia to decolonisation. Involvement in conflict mediation in African hot spots has also been a spin-off from the UN.

Similarly, the emergence of policy conditionality in aid relations has emanated from multilateral institutions. When relating to various UN Africa initiatives Norway has sought to find middle-of-the-road positions, partly because of its desire to mediate and partly due to its reluctance to challenge the great powers. Norway’s membership of NATO has clearly constrained its manoeuvrability on a number of issues, most notably on the decolonisation of Portugal’s African possessions when Portugal was also a NATO ally.

Apart from the decisive influence of the UN, the official Norwegian policy towards Africa has to a large extent been driven by civil society: churches, trade unions and NGOs. Overall, it seems justified to state that Norway has only had a conscious Africa policy in the past 50 years, if at all.

Trade and investment
Norway’s external trade volume with the entire African continent has hovered around only one per cent—exports slightly below and imports somewhat above that average figure (Statistics Norway 2000 and previous years). Among the African countries, South Africa accounts for the bulk of this volume. Nigeria was for many years a significant export market for sun-dried split cod and later frozen fish products. Other important export commodities include paper and paper products, artificial fertilisers, and tele-communications equipment. Imports include bauxite, copper-nickel, coffee and tea. From time to time ships figure in the trade statistics due to Liberia’s position as a ‘flag of convenience’ for Norwegian ship owners.

Part of the trade flows is associated with the aid flows, because a proportion of the aid grants finds its way back to Norway, despite the non-tying policy. Otherwise, it is worth noting that while aid-related trade predominates in Eastern and Southern Africa, most of the trade links with West Africa are purely commercial.

The minuscule trade percentages over decades in no way suggest that African trade relations would play a great role in Norway’s overall foreign trade policy. Africa has remained marginal as a trading partner and there is nothing to indicate that this situation will change appreciably in the foreseeable future.

In general, as a small economy Norway has not been a major exporter of capital in the form of direct foreign investment. Instead, Norway was a net importer of capital until the 1990s. To the extent Norwegian investments have been made in Third World countries the destinations have been found in Latin America and Asia, not in Africa. Again, this reflects the marginality of Africa in the world economy and also the generally poor and unpredictable investment climate in most African countries. Apart from mineral resources, Africa is perceived to have little to offer potential investors. The markets are small and volatile, the skill level of the work force is low, and the physical infrastructure deficient.

Recently, the above picture appears to be changing somewhat. Resource-based offshore investments related to hydrocarbons in Nigeria, Angola, and Namibia have attracted Norwegian oil companies – initially into prospecting and later into production. There is reason to believe that these commitments will be sustained and expanded in the future.

In general, Norwegian business relations with Africa have been characterised by ambivalence. On the one hand, aid and trade relations have been promoted through various schemes, particularly in the 1980s. Norwegian business interests were encouraged to enter into trade and investment partnerships through generous support schemes such as export and investment guarantees. However, in some cases, contrary to intentions, these efforts led to state indebtedness when private local counterparts went bankrupt.

In some programme countries, sister industry
projects were set up to facilitate transfer of technology and management skills. Similarly, a Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) has been put in place to stimulate imports from developing countries, including from Africa. On the other hand, African exporters have been met by tariff and quota restrictions on their key exports, in particular agricultural commodities that were seen as competing with Norwegian products. Most of these barriers have since been removed; as from 1 July 2002 all exports from Least Developed Countries will enjoy duty-free access (Wiig 2002). But other restrictions – so-called safeguard measures – have been maintained in terms of the WTO (Hagen et al. 2001). Informally, environmental standards and harmful residues in foodstuffs are often used as pretexts for denying them full market access.

Development assistance

More than any other contemporary relationship, development assistance has had a determining influence on Norway’s Africa policy. Two strands of thinking have converged to form the foundation of Norwegian aid policy since its inception in the early 1950s: the Christian imperative of compassion and charity, and the solidarity notion of the labour movement. This foundation reflects a broad consensus across most of the political spectrum.

Even though the first Norwegian aid project proper was located in India (Pharo 1986), on account of Africa’s deep poverty the aid flows were soon redirected to Africa. In the past four decades 40–50 per cent of all bilateral aid has accrued to African recipients, predominantly in Eastern and Southern Africa. Through multi-lateral channels, additional funds of Norwegian origin have found their way to Africa. Today, the majority of the so-called programme countries are African.

This is not the place to discuss in detail the finer nuances of Norwegian aid policy. It will suffice to recapitulate the main operational principles as they have evolved and changed over the decades.

The aid budget has generally been split evenly between bilateral and multilateral aid, but the bilateral share has tended to increase slowly. The aid contributions through the multilateral aid system are an expression of the importance attached to multilateral solutions in the overall foreign policy: as a small country Norway must seek protection under the multilateral umbrella.

Furthermore, a Norwegian aid principle is long-term co-operation, in recognition of the need for a long time horizon to build sustainable development from a low base. Aid flows were not to fluctuate with political vagaries.

It has always been a matter of policy principle that Norwegian aid should be given as grants rather than loans, and that it should not be tied to procurement of goods and services in Norway. Notwithstanding this policy, the overall return flows on bilateral are considerable, at one stage in the region of 40 per cent. This figure might be lower today. By contrast, the return ratio on multilateral aid is much lower – only about 15 per cent – despite considerable financial contributions through this aid channel (Granberg 1993, p. 17).

Furthermore, in the early 1970s, it was stated as a principle that the grants should be extended on the terms of the recipient, i.e. that the plans and priorities of Third World partners should form the basis of co-operation. Aid measures and funds were to be fitted into that set-up in a complementary fashion, not as enclaves within themselves.

At the beginning of the 1990s a shift of emphasis occurred. From then on the principle of recipient responsibility was applied. This meant that only the recipients themselves could take responsibility for their own development. No external power could take charge and direct development on the recipients’ behalf. This shift stemmed from a realisation that development by remote control is impossible, not only impracticable.

It is necessary to distinguish between stated principles at the official level, on the one hand, and actual practice, on the other. All principles are subject to deviation. In some cases there are great gaps between rhetoric and practice, even

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4 This section draws on Sorbo (1997) and Stokke (1987).
5 In the 1990s a considerable share has accrued to the Balkans.
6 A programme country is a recipient of considerable aid flows, the use of which is subject to negotiations and country programming.

7 This high percentage can partly be attributed to the sizeable elements of commodity support in the aid flows: artificial fertilisers, telecommunications equipment, turbines for hydro-electric power generation, etc. The large number of technical assistance personnel (TAP) also contributed to maintaining a high return flow. As commodity assistance has diminished in volume and the TAP number reduced, the percentage may have decreased correspondingly. On the other hand, in tandem with the reduction of commodity assistance and TAP in the state-to-state aid programmes, the rise of NGOs in the total picture may have compensated somewhat for the loss of state-related return flows.
contradictions. This became most apparent with regard to conditionality. Although White Papers and other official policy documents have only occasionally alluded to what might amount to conditionality, that very term has never been used. Still, conditionality was introduced in the early and mid-1980s – not as a stated principle but as a visible practice.

The 1980s have been characterised as Africa’s lost decade. Imprudent policies and lax financial discipline of the euphoric 1960s and 1970s, combined with an adverse international environment began to take their toll. The economic downturn was felt throughout the continent and, hence, the 1980s saw the emergence of stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes, in effect designed by the IMF and the World Bank. In order to draw on the financial facilities offered by the IFIs, the African countries had to comply with a host of policy conditions. Thus, the 1980s became the decade of policy-based lending.

Norway was not prepared for this shift and initially resisted it by continuing its disbursal of funds without heeding the conditions being tabled. For several years there was considerable agonising and vacillation over the matter, partly reflecting varying views within the aid administration and other key institutions such as the central bank and the ministry of finance. But as from the mid-1980s Norway succumbed to international pressure and adopted macro-economic conditionality as an acceptable policy. Later, other forms of conditionality emerged, above all in the political sphere, e.g. democratisation and human rights observance (Stokke 1995b).

The general aid policies applied to all recipients regardless of location. But it can be argued that some of the preconditions presumed necessary for successful implementation were less present in Africa than elsewhere. To accept responsibility for one’s own development or to comply with externally imposed conditions presupposes fairly well developed institutions. Africa, perhaps more than any other continent, is deficient in such institutional capacity.

Arguably, the institutional problems are most pronounced in the governance realm, not only in the overt political organs but equally so in the civil service. Endemic corruption and limited administrative capability have marred aid relations with African countries all along. For a long while the donor community shied away from these sensitive issues, fearing accusations of meddling in domestic affairs à la the former colonial masters.

However, at the end of the Cold War political conditionality was placed firmly on the agenda by the entire donor community as a second conditionality generation (Stokke 1995a). Some writers even went as far as audaciously declaring the ‘end of history’ after the Western, liberal form of democracy had ostensibly triumphed (Fukuyama 1992). Championing human rights became the new ‘missionary calling’. For instance, the diplomatic rupture between Kenya and Norway in 1990 was widely attributed to human rights issues (Selbervik 1995). When diplomatic relations with Kenya were resumed in 1994, it was largely justified in terms of providing an opportunity for advancing the human rights agenda.

Commitment to the New International Economic Order (NIEO) of the 1970s is perhaps a mere parenthesis in Norwegian aid policy. In the interest of a more just world order, Norway sympathised with the demands of the G-77 in the struggle between North and South – along with the like-minded group of Northern states. Algeria took the lead in promoting the NIEO and practically all the African countries joined ranks.

An offshoot of the NIEO was a small-scale variant or a mini-NIEO. The idea was launched by the Finnish Prime Minister at the time, Kalevi Sorsa, and was often referred to as the Sorsa initiative, alternatively the Nordic-SADC initiative. It represented an attempt to achieve the objectives of the grand NIEO on a modest scale (Tostensen 1990). The Nordic region was seen as a suitable counterpart to Southern Africa. Considerable resources were committed to this venture but it produced meagre results. After about ten years it was given up altogether and buried. It is noteworthy, however, that the Nordic-SADC initiative derived from thinking in vogue at the UN, transformed into a region-to-region undertaking when the more ambitious global endeavour failed.

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8 Hilde Selbervik of the Chr. Michelsen Institute is currently finalising a doctoral dissertation on the de facto policy shift in the mid-1980s from the erstwhile position of non-conditionality to an increasingly stringent form of macro-economic conditionality associated with structural adjustment programmes. The country case under scrutiny is Tanzania. Her work documents the ambivalence and vacillation of the aid administration in this regard – torn between an empathetic attitude towards Tanzania and the tough policy-based lending of the Bretton Woods institutions.

9 It is perhaps ironic that institution-building entered the aid vocabulary in response to such institutional deficiencies. Even so, the overall principles were not modified.
Recently, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Nepad) was launched – a very ambitious plan for an African renaissance. The intention is to raise large sums of money from external and African sources to resuscitate the continent’s economy. Africans are themselves divided over its feasibility, particularly in view of its dependence on external funding. The institutional preconditions are also questioned.

The Nepad document reads like a visionary statement, reminiscent of Kwame Nkrumah’s grandiose pan-africanist schemes of the late 1950s. It also resembles the Lagos Plan of Action of 1980. The main contrast to earlier designs, however, lies in Nepad’s emphasis on market-based economies and the role of information technology.

The G-7 has welcomed Nepad and declared its willingness to provide some funding. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has politely been considering it, but taken a reticent position with respect to direct monetary support. Politically, however, Norway has assumed a positive attitude to Nepad, however cautious.

Supporting the liberation struggle in Southern Africa

Norwegian support to the national liberation struggle in Southern Africa has formed such an important part of the aid relationship with Africa that it warrants a separate section.10 On the one hand, policy evolution in this sphere must be seen in conjunction with developments at the UN and Norway’s response to them. On the other hand, independent developments within Norway, not least activities and pressures by civil society have contributed greatly to an activist Norwegian stance. The dialectics between these two influences on the overall Norwegian position must be borne in mind.

From a modest start in the early 1970s with humanitarian and legal assistance to refugees and victims of apartheid, support for the liberation struggle gradually grew in volume and intensity until the demise of the apartheid regime twenty years later. Awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Albert Luthuli and hosting the UN/OAU World Conference for Support of the Victims of Apartheid and Colonialism in Southern Africa represented milestones in this development.

When Luthuli was awarded the Peace Prize in 1961, the Norwegian public was exposed to extensive media coverage on the situation of the oppressed black majority in South Africa. Following the Sharpeville massacre the year before, this event contributed to raising the awareness of the Norwegian people on these matters. Previously, this problem had attracted only limited official and media attention. In the 1950s the official position appears to have been one of ‘constructive diplomacy’ with a view to finding workable compromises with the apartheid regime through the good offices of the UN.

The Sharpeville massacre and the Peace Prize for Luthuli spurred a host of civil society activities. It should also be recalled that the early 1960s was a period in which African decolonisation peaked. This decade saw the first consumer boycott of South African goods and student activism was intensive. The South Africa Committee, which had been formed in late 1959, received a boost with support from broad sections of society.

In 1963–1964 Norway served its second stint as a member of the UN Security Council, which provided a platform for activism. The General Assembly had in 1962 passed a resolution calling on all member states to impose comprehensive sanctions against apartheid South Africa. Together with the other Nordic countries, Norway had abstained. In the Security Council Norway continued its cautious line on comprehensive sanctions, largely on account of its expected loss in trade and shipping. Also, the permanent members would not accept such a tough stand; allegedly the South African situation constituted no threat to international peace and security as required by Chapter VII of the UN Charter to justify sanctions. Norway concurred with that assessment. However, an arms embargo was worth considering. Short of a comprehensive and mandatory arms embargo, a weaker resolution was passed in 1963 to the effect that UN member states were called upon to implement appropriate measures, including sanctions, as far as arms supplies were concerned.

Norway had a role in wording a similar resolution – also adopted in 1963 – pertaining to the territories under Portuguese rule. It requested all states to refrain from rendering the Portuguese government any assistance that might enable it to continue its policies of repression of the peoples under its administration, and to take measures to prevent the sale and supply of arms and military equipment for that purpose.

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10 This section draws extensively on Tore Linné Eriksen’s edited volume on the subject (2000).
The 1973 UN/OAU conference in Oslo was a watershed in Norwegian policy-making vis-à-vis Southern Africa. Not only did it give Norway a high profile on these matters, the conference also adopted a programme of action which committed Norway to sustained follow-up. Apart from reaffirming commitment to basic principles, it was most significant that all countries were called upon to deal directly with the liberation movements recognised by the OAU.

Subsequently, direct support to liberation movements in South Africa, Namibia, Southern Rhodesia and the Portuguese colonies was included as a separate budget line. After the military coup in Portugal in April 1974 and the attaining of independence of the Portuguese territories, the relationship entered a new stage of regular state-to-state development assistance. In 1980 a new Zimbabwe was born and Namibia followed suit in 1990 as an independent nation. The last bastion of white supremacy, South Africa, held universal, non-racial elections in 1994. Only then did the Southern African region enter into normalcy as far as international relations are concerned.

Although the impetus received from the UN system was critical in the evolution of a Norwegian policy on Southern Africa, domestic civil society played a major role in bolstering official activism. Before 1973 it was left to civil society organisations, particularly the Norwegian Council for South Africa, to keep the national liberation struggle in Southern Africa on the political agenda (Drolsum 1999, 2000). This organisation played a key role in bringing information about the struggle to the Norwegian public and in organising consumer boycotts. It also acted as an important pressure group on Norwegian authorities, particularly on the sanctions issue and direct support for the liberation movements.

The other major player in the solidarity movement was the churches (for details, see Agøy 2000). Drawing on a long-standing relationship – dating back to the first missionaries – with counterparts in South Africa in particular, the Norwegian churches had maintained close liaisons for a century and a half. There is no doubt that the web of relations based on mutual trust that had been woven over the years was the mainstay and the comparative advantage of the Norwegian churches' solidarity work; it proved invaluable. The main organisational vehicle was the Council for Ecumenical and International Relations – Church of Norway.

It should be recalled that the Southern African religious constituencies were large. In addition, they were generally considered to be non-political in the sense that they did not necessarily align themselves with particular political parties. The exception was the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, which was widely perceived to be the 'official' church of the Afrikaners. The non-political nature of the churches provided them with a 'cover' for an array of resistance activities. These ranged from scholarship programmes and other educational initiatives, legal aid, health care and social relief measures, as well as human rights and democratisation activities. This network of contacts was also a tremendous source of information channelled to the outside world.

The churches were not only engaged in activities of their own in the fields mentioned above. It must be emphasised that due to their perceived 'neutral' position with respect to the big issues, the churches were used as a conduit by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to funnel money clandestinely to opposition forces inside South Africa. This practice was highly unorthodox and shows the close relationship between the authorities and the churches.

The third leg of the tripod in support of the liberation struggle was the trade union movement, particularly with respect to South Africa where a sizeable working class had developed (see Verlesen 2000). Despite repressive legislation regarding the rights to organise and bargain collectively, the black workers had operated clandestinely for many years. However, the Cold War schism in the international trade union movement created problems. Due to its affiliation to the Brussels-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions found it difficult to give support to the main trade union federation in South Africa, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), because the latter was affiliated to the Eastern bloc.

This situation changed in the mid-1970s, not because the Cold War was over yet but because the organisational structure of the South African trade union movement changed. In response to a series of strikes and labour unrest in the early 1970s, the legislation governing the labour market was amended in a more liberal direction. This opened up for direct contact and support because the new emerging confederations, notably the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), decided to be autonomous of the bipolar structure at the international level.
The trade unions were also instrumental in mounting a consumer boycott and in making it effective by utilising their international contacts. In addition, the trade unions channelled funds directly to various liberation movements in the Southern African region.

The above three examples of civil society organisations document how important non-state actors were in shaping Norwegian official policy on Southern Africa, and the significance of their complementary solidarity work as a parallel course of action.

Tore Linné Eriksen has characterised Norway as an ambiguous champion of national liberation in Southern Africa. On the one hand, constrained by its membership in NATO and the UN, coupled with its own shipping and trading interests, Norway often assumed a cautious stance and acted as a moderating influence. On the other hand, pushed by domestic civil society, official Norway engaged in political activism on this issue, sometimes in unorthodox ways.

Mediation and conflict resolution
A special sphere of Norwegian relations with Africa consists of mediation efforts. The mass media coverage has projected an image of Africa as a conflict-ridden continent, which is not denied. Suffice it to mention Somalia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Southern Sudan, the Great Lakes Region, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These are long-standing crisis areas where state structures have collapsed and the parties are stubbornly pitted against each other, without apparent hope for workable solutions in the near future.

Norway has taken upon itself a role as mediator in several conflicts spots around the world. The best known include the Middle East, Guatemala, Colombia, and Sri Lanka. Less known is the low-key mediation efforts in the Southern Sudan, between the central government in Khartoum and the secessionist rebel movement of the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/SPLA). These efforts have been conducted under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

The self-image of Norway’s comparative advantage in conflict mediation stems from widespread notions well enunciated by Jan Egeland (1988), former state secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He argues that Norway as a small state can turn its apparent weakness into strength by exploiting a number of factors. Norway has no colonial past; it is not suspected by any party of harbouring ulterior motives, such as strategic or economic goals; it has a good image as a supporter of decolonisation and national liberation; it has a recognised record as a staunch supporter of the UN and its constituent agencies; it has an impressive record of bilateral aid; it has a tradition of human rights advocacy and democracy promotion; and it has a vigilant civil society that will monitor state action or inaction in a critical vein. According to Egeland, these factors add up to a position of moral authority that is respected by most conflicting parties in Africa and elsewhere. With this ‘moral capital’ at its disposal Norway is thus well equipped as a mediator in deep-seated conflicts.

As a current member of the UN Security Council, Norway has sought to put Africa on the agenda, notwithstanding its chairmanship of the committee on sanctions against Iraq. Some two-thirds of the agenda items of the Security Council in recent years have been related to complex African conflicts. They generally require peace-making by means of military measures, combined with emergency relief, long-term development efforts, reconciliation and peace-building.

Besides mediating through the UN, Norway has also emphasised the importance of strengthening the capability of Africans themselves to manage and solve conflicts. Towards that end, support has been given to conflict mediation through regional and subregional African organisations such as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and IGAD.

In recent years, attention has been directed towards long-term reconstruction and institution-building, human rights observance and democratisation. Considerable aid resources have been set aside for this purpose. Support has been given to the administration of elections, civic education, and human rights promotion. In Norway, a special unit has been established to handle this form of assistance – the Norwegian Resource Bank for Democracy and Human Rights (Nordem) – under whose auspices election observation missions have been mounted.

Part of the conflict scenario is the flow of refugees and asylum seekers from Africa generated by civil strife. For some time Norway has received so-called quota refugees through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. In recent years, however, a far larger number have made it to Norway.
on their own and have been awaiting individual vetting and assessment. A special category of African immigrants are those who arrive as part of a family reunion. The policies appear to have been tightened recently, exemplified by the introduction of DNA testing to determine the true identity of alleged relatives. Norway’s accession to the Schengen agreement is an influencing factor.

**Conclusion**

From the above discussion a number of main points emerge as the conclusion to this article. First, it is questionable whether Norway has ever had a coherent official policy towards Africa. Second, to the extent a policy pattern is discernible in the ad hoc positions on various questions over the years it has come about rather by default than by design. Third, aid to African countries has predominated with respect to volume and duration in the overall relationship. Fourth, regular trade and business interactions with Africa have remained marginal. Fifth, Norway’s commitment to the UN has had a decisive impact on policy decisions. Sixth, domestic civil society organisations have exerted considerable influence in specific policy fields, notably in aid and support for the liberation struggle in Southern Africa.

These features are not likely to change in the future, for two reasons: (a) Africa continues to remain marginal in the world economy and in Norway’s economic relations with the outside world; and (b) as seen from Norway, Africa is still a remote continent. If anything, the aid relationship will be reinforced, perhaps with the added dimension of mediation and conflict management.

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**References**


Early Contacts

Not until after the great voyages of discovery in the 15th and 16th centuries did the first Swedes begin to make their presence felt in Africa. During this period, Sweden went through a process in many ways reminiscent of what the young states of Africa are going through today.

During the 17th century the Swedish family, de Geer, of industrialists, merchants and financiers, originally from Belgium, and with good connections to the merchants in Amsterdam, started trade with West Africa. They were involved in the formation of the Swedish Africa Company in 1649 and first anchored their ships at Cabo Corso (present-day Ghana) in April 1650. A treaty was signed with King Bredewa of Futu for a Swedish colony to be established. The Swedes at Carlsborg built a fort, but in 1663 it was taken over by the Futu and sold to the Dutch. The castle is still there and is on UNESCO's World Heritage List (Blomé, 1999).

Many Swedes travelled on Dutch ships at this time. One of the first European explorers to Southern Africa was Olof Bergh a Swede who served with the Dutch East India Company. He arrived in the Cape Colony in 1676. After many expeditions he eventually took a seat on the judiciary. When he retired he was wealthy and purchased Cape Colony's first vineyard, which he named “Groot Constantia”, now a museum. His son, Martinus Bergh became the first Governor of Swellendam.

In order to obtain safe conduct for Swedish shipping in the Mediterranean and along the west coast of Africa, treaties were signed with Algeria (1729), Tunisia (1736) and Morocco (1763). In 1731 some Swedes and a Scotsman, set up another trading company, the “Swedish East Asia Company”. In 1773, one of their captains, Carl Gustaf Ekeberg became the first to chart False Bay and another Swede, Elias Giers, became the first to explore the Cape Peninsula by land as far as Cape Point (Blomé, 1999).

During the 18th century, the great Swedish botanist, Carl von Linné, sent out a number of students on expeditions to Africa. One of the best known, Peter Forsskål, went to Egypt and Anders Sparrman and Carl Peter Thunberg travelled to the interior of Southern Africa after arriving in the Cape. Thunberg later became the father of Cape botany, and Sparrman, after sailing with Captain James Cook, returned to the Cape in 1775 and mounted new expeditions into the interior. He wrote the first scientific description of South Africa's fauna and made significant contributions to the knowledge of the geography of the Cape territory. When he returned to Africa in 1787, he took with him plans for a Swedish colony in West Africa. Together with another Swede, Wadström, he became an active campaigner against the slave trade. On their return to Sweden via London they made statements to Parliament about their experiences and their opinions against the slave trade. Their actions turned out to be one of the factors which turned the British public against the slave trade. Wadström stayed in London and worked devotedly for the anti-slavery campaign through-out Europe (Berg, 1997).

Moving to the early 19th century, a number of Swedes had become firmly established in South Africa, one of them, Anders Stockenström, was known for his liberal ideas. In a report to the British government, he wrote that coloureds should have the same rights as whites. As a result of the disapproval of the British government and the colonists, he was forced to return to Sweden. He was however, later appointed by the British as Deputy Governor of the Eastern Province in the British Cape Colony. He signed a number of treaties with the Africans, which disgusted the colonists, and, eventually, he was forced to retire in London. His efforts were later rewarded and he received a knighthood for his achievements in the Cape.

By the late 19th century the allegiance of many Swedes in South Africa became divided between the Dutch and the British and consequently during the Boer Wars, Swedes and other Scandina-
vains were to be found on both sides. The Scandinavian volunteer corps which fought on the Boer side suffered very heavy losses at Magersfontein in 1899. The story about “Swedes discovering Africa” is developed in detail in a book by Lasse Berg (Berg, 1997).

The Missionaries

From the mid-19th century, a different category of Swedes – the missionaries – dedicated their lives to Africa. In addition to preaching they were also concerned with practical issues and building schools, hospitals and churches and engaging in agriculture and small-scale industries. The Church of Sweden, the official church, dominates the picture since up to 90 per cent of the population belonged automatically to it at birth. However, the religious history of the last 150 years in Sweden also encompasses the emergence of new revival movements. This diversity is mirrored in the activities of Swedish missionaries (Sellström, 1999, Blomé, 1999 and Gustafsson, 1987).

The National Missionary Society of Stockholm (SELM) sent their first missionary to Massawa (in present day Eritrea) in 1866. The first Swedish Missionary Station was set up in Monkullo in 1871. These early links between Sweden and Ethiopia later, in the 1960s, led Ethiopia to become one of the first countries to receive Swedish international development aid.

The Church of Sweden has had long-standing relations with Southern Africa. Through a unique act of parliament, the Swedish Mission Board was founded in 1874 to spread the gospel to non-Christian people. Two years later the Church of Sweden sent its first missionaries to Zululand in South Africa. In 1903 their work was extended to present day Zimbabwe. The significance of the early presence of the Church of Sweden in Southern Africa for the Swedish support of the liberation movements cannot be underestimated.

In addition to the Church of Sweden, several free churches embarked upon missionary work in Africa at an early stage. In 1959, there were around 1,000 Swedish missionaries on the continent. Outside South Africa and Ethiopia the main areas of concentration were the two Congos, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Angola, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The free mission involved were the Baptist Missionary, the Swedish Missionary Society, the Örebro Missionary Society and the Swedish Pentecostal Movement. Missionaries were not the only Swedes arriving in Congo. Many Swedes came to work in Congo, as a result of the new Belgian nation needing help with administration, transport, technology and defence. Because of the strong connection between the Belgian and Swedish royal families, campaigns were organised to attract Swedes to Congo. The Swedes became the third biggest European nationality in Congo during the late 19th century, after the British and the Belgians (Blomé, 1999).

During the first half of the 20th century the two world wars slowed down the attractiveness of and interest in Africa, but after the Second World War Swedish attention was drawn to Kenya, and many Swedes established plantations and ranches. One world famous Kenyan-Swede was Baron Bror Blixen, with his Danish wife, Karen, who wrote the famous book “Out of Africa”, published in 1937.

After the Second World War, before official Swedish aid was launched, Swedish co-operation targeted Ethiopia. The Swedes provided help in developing the Ethiopian air force, as well as the legal, telecommunication and education systems. Swedish doctors, nurses, lawyers, police officers, teachers and pilots etc, numbering approximately 200 moved to Ethiopia. The first bilateral assistance agreement was signed with Ethiopia in 1954 for the setting up of a building technology institute in Addis Ababa. Between 1955 and 1962 semiofficial aid continued to increase and more countries became involved. In 1962, the first government agency, Nämnden för Bistånd (NIB), was created for administering foreign assistance.

Swedish business also began to take an interest in Africa and in 1955 two partners, Swedish Gränges and American Bethlehem Steel, made a huge investment in the iron-mining business, the LAMCO consortium, in Liberia. In addition to the construction of the mine, roads, railways, a harbour and a town were also built. Mining activities continued until 1989 when the civil war stopped further production. However, this successful investment persuaded other Swedish private persons and enterprises to invest in Africa.

Political Support to the Liberation Struggle in Africa

Without a colonial past, Sweden remained politically distant from Africa until after the Second

1 This section is to a large extent drawn from the monumental works of Tor Sellström (Sellström, 1999 and Sellström, 2002)
World War. The historical links with Africa – established by emigrants, explorers, scientists, missionaries and businessmen as discussed above – were, however, significant, and in the early 1960s a growing concern for the struggles for democracy and national independence in South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Guine-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique emerged (Sellström, 1999).

Swedish intellectuals and students started to raise their voices against the South African apartheid regime in the 1950s. A fund-raising campaign in support of the victims of apartheid was launched. After the beginning of the 1960s, this campaign and other initiatives led, with support of the student and youth movements as well as church representatives, to the formation of a national anti-apartheid committee. Broadly based boycott campaigns against South Africa soon thereafter gave birth to active local solidarity committees and to an involvement with the entire Southern African region. The emerging solidarity movement was assisted by a number of books and a wealth of articles on Southern Africa by Swedish writers and journalists, as well as by translations into Swedish of texts by prominent Southern African nationalists. Some of the leading national newspapers – such as the liberal Expressen and the social democratic Aftonbladet and Arbetet – joined the solidarity efforts, organising fund-raising campaigns for the liberation movements in Angola and Namibia (Sellström, 1999).

One of the first initiatives by the emerging Swedish anti-apartheid movement was to offer study opportunities in Sweden to black students from Southern Africa. Many of these students represented nationalist organisations in their home countries and later became their leaders. The relations established thus proved valuable when Southern African liberation movements started to visit Sweden and were received at the highest level of government from the beginning of the 1960s. Often invited by the ruling Social Democratic Party, many addressed the traditional Labour Day demonstrations. ANC’s Oliver Tambo visited Sweden for the first time in 1961. In the case of South Africa, there was thus a difference of some twenty-five years between the first Swedish contacts with ANC at the highest level of government and corresponding contacts between ANC and the Soviet Union, France, Great Britain or the United States, all permanent members of the UN Security Council.

The often very personal relations between Swedish politicians and opinion makers and the Southern African leaders – as well as with Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania – facilitated a deeper understanding of the nationalist core of the liberation struggles.

Significant to note is that movements with which Sweden first established contacts eventually became victorious in their respective countries (ANC of South Africa, MPLA of Angola, FRELIMO of Mozambique and ZANU and ZAPU of Zimbabwe). In the case of Namibia, SWANU – at the time aligned with ANC – initially played a prominent role, but from 1966 SWAPO was seen as the genuine nationalist representative. When
official assistance was granted by the Swedish government it was ANC, SWAPO, MPLA, FRELIMO and ZANU and ZAPU – the latter subsequently forming the Patriotic Front – that de facto were recognised as ‘governments-in-waiting’. Direct official Swedish support was never channelled to competing organisations.

It was only through the armed struggle that the liberation movements were drawn closer to the Soviet Union and/or China. Against that background, it is relevant to note that the political relations established in Sweden in practically all cases preceded the military operations. Neither the transition to armed struggle nor the links with the Communist countries, however, eroded the Swedish support the Southern African nationalist movements already enjoyed.

Although the nationalist organisations enjoyed increasing support, the Swedish government in the mid-1960s primarily saw them as protest movements against racial oppression and denial of civil rights. With Palme’s dramatic entry into the foreign policy arena in 1965, a new generation of Social Democrats would lead the ruling party towards more independent international positions. In March 1966, Palme chaired the International Conference on South West Africa in Oxford, England. With regard to Southern Africa, it was, however, the developments at the congress of the Socialist International in Stockholm two months later that decisively marked the beginning of the reorientation.

The break with the cautious past was reflected at the level of policy formulation in a number of articles by a younger generation of Social Democrats. In the era of Vietnam, the foreign policy reorientation introduced by Palme in the Swedish labour movement had a parallel in the liberal movement and encompassed all parties but the conservatives. Pushed by an active public opinion and carried forward by a new generation of political leaders, Sweden, as the first Western country, in 1969 launched a policy of proactive support to the movements struggling for democracy and self-determination in South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique.

Based on that decision of the Swedish parliament, Swedish support to the African liberation movements gained momentum and became a major part of the aid implementation from there onwards to 1994 when South Africa as the last country in Southern Africa became independent. Apart from the other Nordic countries that followed suit (in particular Norway) such consistent support was far from a trend in other parts of the Western world. Thus between 1969 and 1994, Sweden granted SEK 4 billion or about 700 million US dollars as official humanitarian assistance to the liberation struggle in Guinea Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Of this amount SEK 1.7 billion went to direct support to the liberation movements. In several areas, the Swedish contributions represented almost half of their non-military expenditures (NAI, 1999). In addition, the front line states surrounding the countries of Southern Africa became priority countries in Swedish aid and received a substantial part of all assistance granted on a bilateral basis (Sellström, 2002).

The scope of assistance to the liberation movements was however kept confidential all through the period due to its special nature. As a result, little documentation is available on this exceptional North-South co-operation. To overcome this lack of information, the Nordic Africa Institute launched a documentation project National Liberation in Southern Africa: The Role of the Nordic Countries. So far five books have been published.

**Swedish African Relations on the Eve of the 21st Century**

After more than one hundred years of missionary work, more than forty years of development contacts as well as immigration from Africa there are now thousands of Swedes who have either personal experience from different parts of Africa or who have personal African contacts (Övergaard, 1998). In a study commissioned by the Nordic Africa Institute in 1998 it was estimated that some 23,100 Swedes (out of whom 5,575 are women) had lived and worked in Africa for a period of more than six months between 1960 and 1998. By adding accompanying spouses and children the total would be close to 50,000. The study only includes documented persons and the above figure is therefore very conservative, and would if all those approached had replied to the questions be substantially higher (Wieslander, 1999). Thus after having had only very few relations in 1960 when development aid was introduced in Sweden, today a substantial group of the Swedish population is rather familiar with Africa and its present development. Below follows a summary of what the relations between Sweden and Africa look like today.
1. Swedish Development Assistance

Official Swedish development assistance was initiated in 1962 in a bill to Parliament, which still forms the backbone of the present aid policies. The policies are in 2002, for the third time, being reviewed. The overall goals for Swedish development co-operation have for almost 40 years been to raise the standard of living of poorer groups of people in the world. The following six specific objectives have been adopted in order to achieve this overall goal (the two last having been added during the nineties):

1. Economic growth
2. Economic and political independence
3. Economic and social equality
4. Democratic development in society
5. Long term, sustainable management of natural resources and the protection of the environment
6. Equality between men and women

With no colonial past or other political or economic objectives, Sweden has, to a large extent, been able to channel its support to a considerable degree to the poorest countries and to strengthen the multilateral system. Solidarity has been the ultimate reason for the aid allowing for relatively high aid allocations and low tying of the aid to Swedish goods and services. In the annual assessments made by the Development Assistance Committee of OECD, Sweden has therefore been one of the most successful countries in fulfilling the overall commitments to the UN and other international fora (Sida, 1999).

Swedish aid to Africa has aimed at supporting the liberation struggles, the poorest countries (mainly anglophone and lusophone), and providing humanitarian assistance. Regional co-operation between countries in Africa has also been substantially supported.

In 1968 Sweden decided to set aside one percent of its GDP for aid, a goal reached in 1975/76. During the second half of the 1990s Swedish aid decreased again to 0.7 per cent of its GDP, a level maintained since that time (with a slight increase). The total disbursement of Swedish aid was SEK 13.316 billion in 1999 (0.705 per cent) of which 30 per cent went to multilateral aid, 6 per cent to NGOs, 12 per cent to humanitarian aid and SEK 2.945 billion to development aid in Africa (38 per cent of the bilateral support) (Sida, 1999).
number of multilateral organisations – primarily the various UN agencies, the World Bank group, the regional development banks and the EU. Support is provided both as core contributions to regular operations and as support to special activities.

Through its membership in the EU, Sweden contributes to extensive development co-operation activities administered by the EU Commission. Approximately half of the EU development support is allocated to 71 countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP countries) within the framework of the Lomé Convention.

2. Trade

In 1950 the African region’s share of total Swedish exports was some 3.6 per cent. Due mainly to official interventions, as a consequence of the struggle for liberation and against apartheid in Southern Africa this share successively fell to just below one per cent in the first half of the 1990s (CBS, 1960), and the flow of private direct investments had almost ceased completely. Since the mid-1990s with the abolition of sanctions against South Africa exports to the region have started to increase again (MFA, 1997).

The value of exports from Sweden to Africa in the 1990s averaged some SEK 3 billion a year. Imports averaged about one billion during the same period. During the last few years of the 1990s, exports increased rapidly while imports remained unchanged. If Nigeria (oil) and Liberia (shipping) are excluded, South Africa is by far the major recipient of Swedish exports while South Africa and Kenya account for the largest imports to Sweden from Africa (MFA, 1997).

Sweden imports raw materials, mainly food and minerals, from Africa and exports processed products to Africa. Swedish companies with an interest in Africa are mainly half a dozen of the biggest and most internationally active companies, notably Ericsson, ABB, Skanska, Volvo and Scania. Medium-sized and small Swedish companies have, with few exceptions, not engaged in the African markets – and if they have, it has been through deliberate efforts of special forms of aid. Consultancy firms have been especially connected to aid. The reasons for Swedish companies’ very limited trade with Africa is partly due to the sluggish economic developments in Africa in the past two decades and to the limited size of the markets but also to such factors as red tape, over-regulation and political instability. This in turn led to increased difficulties in attracting finance and credit guarantees for covering exports, investments etc. (MFA, 1997).

Tourism, on the other hand, has been increasing all through the 1990s. At present, some 30,000 Swedes visit sub-Saharan Africa and in particularly Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa and the Gambia each year. The number of Swedes visiting some of the traditional tourist resorts in North Africa is even higher. At present, however, any further expansion seems unlikely.

3. Other contacts between Sweden and Africa

In connection with a Government investigation, “Partnership with Africa” all the contacts between the different sectors in the Swedish society and Africa were studied in detail and the findings reported in papers published in connection with this investigation (SIPU-International, 1997, Övergaard, 1998 and MFA, 1997). These studies include the number of official contacts (which seem to have increased substantially during the 1990s) the NGO activities (160 Swedish NGOs operate in 40 of the 48 sub-Saharan African countries); trade unions with all their contacts in most African countries; cultural exchange and sports which again have increased in the 1990s and friendship and immigrant organisations (there are approximately 35,000 first generation immigrants/refugees from Africa in Sweden today of whom most come from Ethiopia and Eritrea (39 per cent), Somalia (27 per cent), Uganda (6 per cent) and the Gambia).

The personal relations created by development assistance, trade, voluntary cooperations and immigration have drawn Africa much closer to Sweden than only some decades ago. It is important to emphasise that these contacts have had a great impact on Sweden as a country as well as on individuals who have had the opportunity to work and live in different African countries. There are endless accounts of people who, after some time in Africa, develop new views and perspectives on life and work. Having been exposed to a completely different working environment also enhances these people’s abilities to work and live in Sweden. This experience should be highly valued and be put to use.
In Search of a New Partnership for African Development

1. Preparation of a New Policy

In October 1996, the Swedish government gave a working group in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs an assignment to draw up proposals for “a new Swedish policy towards Africa”. The expectation was that the report would serve as a basis for a new, more grounded and relevant Swedish Africa policy, which would represent a departure from previous efforts at cooperation.

The Swedish government’s decision to revisit the Africa policy was based on two major underlying factors. Firstly, up until the formal end of apartheid in South Africa, a central feature of Sweden’s Africa policy had been its strong commitment to the liberation of the continent from colonisation and institutionalised racism. The liberation of South Africa was, from this point of view, both a success for Sweden’s consistent and principled stand against white minority rule and colonial domination as well as the end of an era in its policy towards Africa. A pressing need for the country to develop a new basis for its relations with Africa emerged, given the formal end of colonial rule and apartheid on the continent.

The second important background consideration was based on the fact that the period from the late 1980s to the end of the 1990s has witnessed growing concerns as to the effectiveness, broadly defined, of development cooperation between the countries of the North and South. This concern has covered a wide range of areas from the conceptualisation of development cooperation to its content and practice. At the root of the increasing critique of the methods of cooperation is the widely shared view that it has, to a certain extent, failed to deliver meaningful and sustainable development. Indeed, what seemed to be the case is that as the scope and volume of development cooperation increased, its effectiveness tended to decline. Problems, such as increasing aid dependence in the recipient countries, the failure of cooperation to foster the development of relevant local technical skills, the tendency towards the almost total erosion of local initiative, and the reality of aid flows tending to reinforce local power relations obstructive of democratic accountability, are just a few of the concerns that emerged in critique of the history and practice of development cooperation (Havnevik & van Arkadie, 1996).

Increasing dissatisfaction in the donor countries was matched by an equally deeply-felt sense of frustration in the recipient countries. The time for a thorough re-evaluation of the entire basis of development cooperation had clearly come, a task made more urgent by the lacklustre performance of the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s and 1990s (Olukoshi & Wohlgemuth, 1998).

The working group, therefore, had the task of developing a working document that would help to form a new basis for Sweden’s relations with post-apartheid, post-liberation Africa whilst simultaneously overcoming the main problems weakening development cooperation as an effective vehicle for encouraging change on the continent.

One principal idea of the working group was to realize its set objectives by employing an interactive methodology based on dialogue between Swedish officials and a cross-section of Africans from all walks of life. This way, it was hoped the working group would be better able to understand the African development debate, the contemporary developmental aspirations of Africans and the African perception of the experience of Swedish development intervention on the continent. The investigative assignment of the working group thereby became a project in itself, and in time was dubbed “Partnership Africa” to emphasise the aspiration for a new Swedish relationship with the African continent, grounded in mutual respect, transparency of purpose, a clear understanding of shared and divergent values and an equality of responsibilities in the conceptualisation/design, implementation and assessment of cooperation projects and programmes.

The working group confined its study to sub-Saharan Africa’s 48 of the continent’s 53 nations, addressing itself broadly to Africa’s development problems at the outset, thereafter focusing on four “basic themes”, namely:

1. Africa’s democratic culture, including gender equality, security and conflict management. This includes the state’s role and opportunities to boost public-sector accountability in Africa. This is crucially important to prevent conflicts and create true human security;

2. Africa in the international economy. This theme included economic reforms, trade policy, debt issues and poverty-reducing measures. In particular, experience of and opportunities for regional collaboration should be elucidated. Africa’s relations with the EU are another important area;
3. Africa’s aid dependency and prospects for changed relations between Africa and other countries;

To elicit ideas and experience from Africa itself, the working group arranged two conferences, attended mainly by African delegates. The first took place in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, in January 1997 under the auspices of the African Development Bank and the Nordic Africa Institute and it dealt with the African development debate in relation to the four themes referred to above.

The second conference took place in Saltsjöbaden, outside Stockholm in June 1997 and dealt with examples of African reform work in the four themes areas and related this work to possible contents of a Swedish policy. The proceedings of the Abidjan and Saltsjöbaden meetings have been published by the Nordic Africa Institute under the titles A New Partnership for African Development – Issues and Parameters and Towards a New Partnership with Africa – Challenges and Opportunities (Kayizzi-Mugerwa et al., 1998, Kifle et al., 1997).

2. A Genuine Partnership

Based on these conferences, as well as on substantial and comprehensive consultations among relevant and interested parties in Sweden the working group published a report in August 1997 (MFA, 1997), which in turn was worked into a Government white paper, discussed and approved by Parliament in June 1998 (MFA, 1997/98). The result is summarised by the working group as being that the overall objective of Sweden’s Africa policy should be “to support processes of change under African control that involve sustainable improvements in welfare for the majority of citizens and consolidation of their democratic influence”. To that they add two supplementary objectives closely linked to the main one: “to strengthen the long-term contacts between Sweden and African nations and societies” and “to promote a strong African role in the international community” (MFA, 1997).

The objectives as described above contain both a qualitative aspect based on value judgements and a more practical side requiring a number of concrete actions. The first part is deliberated upon in some detail by the then State Secretary of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Mats Karlsson, responsible for Development Cooperation in the following manner:

If Africans are again to become the subjects of their destiny, and not the object of somebody else’s design, and if we are ever to approach equality in the still unequal relations between Africa and the world, then it is the capacity of African societies, their governments and people, to analyse, choose and shape that must be strengthened. […]

Africa’s partners have not yet provided a coherent response on the positive changes unfolding on the continent. […] This time around, the response cannot come from them alone. This time, the response must intrinsically build on the actions taken and answers given by African societies. More than ever, Africa’s friends need to listen and reflect on what is actually said and done in Africa. […]

Everybody speaks about partnership, but what does it mean? In my view there are both qualitative and methodological aspects to it. First of all, look at the qualitative aspects of partnership (Karlsson, 1998).

He then follows to list the aspects he sees as crucial and which later were introduced into the Government bill as follows:

1. A basic attitude relating to sustainability and long-termism. There is need for a real change of attitude. No partnership can thrive or survive without respect for the other.
2. Openness and clarity concerning the values and interests that govern co-operation. You cannot engage in a partnership without sharing values.
3. An increased element of management by objectives and result orientation of aid, instead of a multitude of predetermined conditions.
4. A humble, listening attitude with respect for African assumption of responsibility and awareness of the local environment.
5. Clarity of resource commitments, payments and reporting principles.

In addition to these qualitative aspects of partnership the Government Bill also added the following necessary changes to be made to partnership modalities (comments made by the author):

1. African leadership and ownership, for example, holding consultative meetings to coordinate donors in the capitals of recipient partners.
2. Improved local backing and participation. There must be respect for open political debate, the role of parliament, consultation with private enterprise and civil society.
3. Improved co-ordination. Effective African ownership requires good donor co-ordination, preferably under the recipient country’s own management.

4. Well-developed sectoral and budget support, making the number of interactions with donors as small as possible and thereby manageable for the recipient.

5. Simplified procedures, minimising the numbers of reporting systems, procurement requirements, payments procedures, accounting routines etc.

6. Contractual clarity and transparency.

7. Increased coherence between different areas of policy. Behind this term are hidden scores of issues with tremendous long-term implications. It is not just the well-known trade and debt issues, but much else that relates to everything from peace and to environment, migration and the many issues that enable economic integration globally.

8. Rewards for progress.


Finally this is commented by Karlsson in the following way:

Donor governments may well be serious in accepting much of the above reasoning around partnership, but the real proof of their intent is whether they can handle coherence in their own policies. That is why the issues of global governance, and in particular global economic governance, are crucial. Stronger political dialogue and leadership, better coherence of policies, the adequate and sustained financing of the emerging global public sector’s institutions and operations are intrinsically linked to workable partnerships. If these new partnership ideas fail to catch on and fuel virtuous circles, it may well be not just because the Africans are not up to it, as will be presumed by so many in the North, but because the political courage in that very North is lacking.

Ideas of this kind have been advocated by many Africans. They inspired Sweden to reassess its overall Africa policy. That policy was to be based, not on another set of consultancy reports, but on an intense listening exercise with African policy makers, academics and civil society (Karlsson, 1998).

4. Developing Partnership in an International context

Partnership between Sweden and Africa cannot only be seen in a bilateral context. All parties concerned are part of a larger international context which has in the era of globalisation become increasingly important over the years. The UN plays a crucial role in African affairs and as a consequence of Sweden’s distinct multilateral profile – in common with the other Nordic countries – the UN has in the past and will in the future play an important role in the relations between Sweden and Africa. This relation will therefore also in the future go via helping to and enhance confidence in the UN and its purposes and activities. One way of doing so is to help place in the UN agenda issues of African interest.

3. Suggestions for concrete action

On a practical level, partnership implies a Swedish Africa Policy that is guided by a long term vision of a stronger Africa in which various sectors of Swedish society collaborate with African partners “in the arts, research, trade, societies and associations, the environment, etc., in roughly the same way as collaboration with European or American opposite parties takes place today. One may refer to alliances between Swedish and foreign stakeholders at all levels” (MFA, 1997). This is then elaborated upon in the Government Bill presenting a long-term focus on promoting “alliance forging” co-operation, in order to strengthen contacts between Swedish and African societies.

A special emphasis is placed on the promotion of trade and investments between Sweden and Africa, tourism, cultural exchange, exchange between churches and popular movements, trade unions and voluntary organisations all reflecting the focus on some reciprocal relationship that is a crucial element of partnership (MFA, 1997/98). But in the end, the most important aspect of a partnership lies in the creation of a different and less unequal aid relationship – a factor that the Government Bill dwells on in detail.

This is the first comprehensive policy statement on Africa directed to Parliament by a Swedish government, which is an important indication of the increased importance of Africa in Swedish domestic as well as foreign policy. Will Sweden act in line with the important message conveyed in the Government Bill and in all the reports leading up to that document? I genuinely hope so, and at least the people in Sweden who requested the report are sincere in their quest for change. But, unfortunately, when such a policy has to compete with other interests, it is often too easy to forget even the best of intentions (Wohlgemuth, 1999).
Swedish membership in the EU limits to a large extent its possibilities to act bilaterally on African issues. EU thus sets rules, particularly on trade. But perhaps more importantly it also gives Sweden a possibility to contribute actively to the debate within EU on future relations with the countries of Africa, and the partnership issue discussed above is therefore high on the Swedish agenda for inclusion in the political guidelines of the EU. Many issues such as e.g. greater coherence between different policy areas becomes much more efficient when they are implemented by EU than on bilateral basis.

References

### Imports and exports to/from the Nordic countries to/from Africa, 1970, 1980 and 2000

(Million $)

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The amounts for 2000 has been changed from EUR to USD according to the exchange rate 0.920920648 EUR on 1 USD.
Net ODA disbursements from the Nordic countries to Africa, 1980 and 2000
(Million $)

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Source: DAC and Iceland (for Iceland)
About the authors

Steen Christensen, Cand. phil. in History, Copenhagen University, 1972; was a lecturer at the Esbjerg Højskole (Trade Union College), 1974–1980; International Secretary of the Social Democratic Party, 1980–1984; General Secretary of the Social Democratic Party, 1984–1997 and since 1997 has been General Secretary of the LO/FTF Council for international Development. Since 1997 he has been Chairman of the Social Democratic Party’s Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, and since 1980 the party’s representative on the council of the Socialist International. He has written several books on Africa and domestic and international social democratic topics, the latest of which is “Mod undertrykkelse – for frihed. Socialdemokratiet og befrielsesbevægelserne i Afrika, Latinamerika og Asien efter 1945”, København 2001.

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Thórdís Sigurdardóttir has a BA from the University of Iceland in Anthropology and Sociology and an MA in Anthropology from the University of Aarhus, Denmark. She has worked for the Icelandic International Development Agency (ICEIDA) since 1991 and is currently the Country Director of ICEIDA in Malawi. She has previously taught as a part-time lecturer at the University of Iceland and has published numerous articles on development issues in local magazines and books. She has also done several consultancy jobs on writing educational materials for primary schools in Iceland.

Arne Tostensen, trained as a sociologist and is currently a senior researcher at the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Bergen, Norway where he co-ordinates a programme on urbanisation and development in Africa. He was previously employed at the Nordic Africa Institute. His research on labour migration, regional integration, urbanisation, poverty, democratisation and human rights has been conducted predominantly in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Lennart Wohlgemuth has been the director of the Nordic Africa Institute since 1993. Prior to this he worked for many years for Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency), most recently as Assistant Director General and head of the Sector Department. Between 1992 and 1998 he was a board member of the African Capacity Building Foundation and from 1989 a board member and from 1993 to 1999 Chairman of the International Institute for Educational planning (IIEP).