Swedish regional cooperation with sub-Saharan Africa

Africa is the second-largest continent on Earth in both area and population. It provides a home for more than a billion people in over 50 countries. The majority of the population are found in sub-Saharan Africa, where improving people’s living conditions presents particularly serious challenges.

Here, the nation states are young, challenges abound and often cannot be solved by one country alone. Here, regional collaboration has a key role to play in preventing and resolving conflicts, in strengthening democracy, promoting economic growth and alleviating poverty. In this context, Swedish regional support constitutes a result-oriented contribution to the development of the continent.

Sweden’s regional cooperation with sub-Saharan Africa has been underway in its present form since the early 2000s. Cooperation is guided by a strategy adopted by the Government, usually for a five-year period. The current strategy covers the period 2010-2015 and is based on the perspective of the poor as well as a rights perspective with the overall goal of:

"Contributing to increased capacity and political accord among the African intergovernmental communities and the countries concerned in order to manage transborder challenges such as regional stability, trade and economic integration, and sustainable development."

Cooperation must focus on regional cross-border challenges or problems experienced by several countries where regional development cooperation is expected to exert more impact than bilateral efforts. The following thematic areas constitute the focus of Swedish cooperation with sub-Saharan Africa for the period 2010-2015:

- Peace and security
- Environment and climate
- Economic integration
- Combating corruption
- Institutional capacity building.

Swedish regional cooperation is almost entirely carried out jointly with the continent’s own actors. Foremost among these is the African Union (AU) and its specialized agencies as well as five of the continent’s sub-regional economic communities. Other partners include interstate river commissions, regional organizations from African civil society, a number of associations of a professional character, African think tanks and the UN Economic Commission for Africa.

The period 2010-2015 is nearing its end and a new strategy will soon be drafted. The purpose of this publication is to give some illustrative examples of what regional cooperation can and does do, and to provide a brief overview.

PEACE & SECURITY

The number of wars in Africa has declined since the Cold War ended in the early 1990s, however armed conflicts still continue to cause considerable destruction and suffering on the continent. The civilian population are the primary victims in areas of conflict, especially women and children. Large-scale refugee flows within and between countries often create serious problems and sometimes even lead to new conflicts.

Consequently, the prevention and resolution of armed conflicts - as well as managing their consequences - is a key task, for humanitarian and other reasons. Peace
and stability is a prerequisite for economic growth, sustainable reduction of poverty and democratic forms of government.

**It is therefore extremely positive** that, over the past decade, the African countries’ own organization - the African Union, AU - has become increasingly active in this field. Today, the AU usually leads peacekeeping on the continent with troops coming predominantly from the African countries themselves. This brings a higher degree of legitimacy than was the case in the previous traditional UN operations with troops from faraway countries. AU can also make decisions and initiate peace-keeping operations faster than the UN, and in most conflict situations speed is crucial to success.

The first operation by peacekeeping troops led by the AU with African personnel took place in 2003 in Burundi, with a force of around 3,500. Today approximately 30,000 peacekeeping troops are recruited and led by the AU on the continent, spread over several conflict zones, Somalia being the main deployment.

AU’s increasingly prominent role in this context is based on political decisions made by the continent’s leaders, as well as on greatly enhanced capabilities. This particularly applies to the AU Peace and Security Department, which is the organization’s largest unit. Here, the long-term Swedish contribution - in combination with support from other donors - has played a major role in improving coordination within the AU and with UN. The department’s financial management has also been strengthened.

Other parts of the AU structure for peace and security have also been developed using Swedish and international support. This includes the organization’s twelve liaison offices in fragile or failing African states which play a crucial role in the provision of good-quality analysis and timely reporting to the AU Security Council.

Swedish support has also achieved promising results in terms of mechanisms to prevent armed conflicts. One good example is the WANEP network in West Africa which, through its over 500 national member organizations, has built up local early warning systems for risk of conflict. This is combined with dialogue and exchange of experience between key stakeholders, primarily to prevent conflicts from escalating and becoming violent but also to contribute to good intervention design in cases where conflict has already broken out.

**ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE**

The majority of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa live in rural areas, with simple agriculture and animal husbandry as their predominant occupations. Here most people are poor and live in harsh conditions. Lack of access to water and an increasingly variable climate pose serious problems, to both food security and overall economic growth. Much must be done nationally, but regional initiatives are also necessary for the protection and proper utilization of joint natural resources. Not least in the water sector - Africa has over 60 rivers that are shared between two or more countries.

Swedish support to African countries’ regional cooperation bodies aimed at managing and developing the water resources of the River Nile (the Nile Basin Initiative) is a good example in this context. The Nile River system encompasses 11 nations with a population today amounting to almost 300 million people. The Nile accounts for a significant share of these countries’ access to fresh water - for domestic use, agriculture and industry. This river system is also an important resource for the production of hydroelectric power.

The population’s requirements as concerns water and
Electricity are still far from fulfilled and without progress in these areas, it is difficult to achieve sustainable growth and reduce poverty. At the same time there is great potential to increase utilization - if it is carried out in a coordinated and rational manner. In addition, it is essential to control water flow so risks of water shortage and flooding can be reduced.

Here, the Nile Basin Initiative has achieved a number of concrete improvements. An inter-African mechanism was created to jointly manage the river’s water resources, identify problems and agree on solutions. Furthermore, a knowledge base has been built up to provide countries’ decision makers with a quick and reliable assessment of the social and environmental impacts of proposed hydroelectric and irrigation projects. The exchange of hydrological information is also used to alert the populations to risk of flooding. Support from Sweden and other donors has also been used to facilitate new investments for hydroelectric generation, electricity transmission and irrigation. So far the Initiative has succeeded in attracting investment which corresponds to 13 times the amount financed through development cooperation.

Another interesting result is the establishment of the African Risk Capacity (ARC), which is a continental insurance mechanism against extreme weather events - mainly droughts and floods. An absolutely essential function given that the number of droughts in Africa has increased considerably ever since the 1980s.

The ARC Technical Secretariat is located within the African Union and reinsurance occurs through a special insurance company. In order to become a member, each country pays an insurance premium and also presents an action plan to be used in case of a disaster. ARC reduces long term dependence on foreign aid, strengthens domestic capacity for analysis of meteorological data and means that the people affected can get help faster. The encouraging results so far have led to proposals that this insurance should be extended to cover the impact of epidemics.

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Increased trade usually strengthens a country’s competitive edge, creates jobs and promotes economic development. Trade with neighbouring countries is often the first step towards participation in world trade. Regional trade is also an effective tool for achieving economic integration between countries. Agreements on simplified trade regulations can lead to both enhanced exchange and political stability. This has previously occurred in Europe as well as in many other parts of the world.

Now governments, intergovernmental bodies and other stakeholders in the East African Economic Community (EAC) are...
Long waiting times for customs and border control increases the cost of transport substantially, leading to reduced volumes of trade between countries. Through concerted action, Trade Mark East Africa succeeded in reducing shipping time for a container from the port of Mombasa (Kenya) to Kigali (Rwanda) from 18 to 4 days.

In this context, increased trade and regional economic integration are usually mentioned as important elements of development policy. However, trade between EAC countries currently averages only 13%, while the corresponding figure for Europe is 60%. Causes include high transport costs due to limited infrastructure, cumbersome procedures and high tariffs at the borders. Transport costs in East Africa today are among the highest in the world. In addition, an extensive grey zone concerns a number of other permits affecting local entrepreneurs - often women - who engage in small-scale border trade. Overall, these circumstances create major barriers to cross-border trade, both within the EAC and with foreign markets.

Changing this situation is the primary task of the sizeable project entitled Trademark East Africa (TMEA), through coordinated efforts between the EAC countries’ governments, the private sector and eight donor countries, including Sweden. By the end of 2016, the aim is to achieve 10% growth in all exports from EAC countries and a 25% increase in trade between the countries. The cost and time of transporting a container between countries (as well as to the ports of Kenya and Tanzania) will be greatly reduced. The programme also supports the institutional development of the EAC and the organization’s efforts to create a customs union and common market between them.

Thanks to the programme’s interventions the infrastructure along major transportation corridors has already been strengthened. A number of trade barriers have been abolished and simpler border procedures have been introduced, especially for trade in food. A new, simpler and less corruption-prone system of customs and border crossing is about to be introduced and EAC’s regional capacity to address these issues has been strengthened. The outlook for programme success is considered good.