

# Spain in Africa: The Reluctant Newcomer

Stefan Meyer

»» Spain's engagement with sub-Saharan Africa is one of the most dramatically improved areas of foreign policy under the administration of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. However, the impressive commitment to fight hunger threatens to become political rhetoric when improvement of capacities to engage with Africa is ignored and short term domestic interests are prioritised over a more strategic orientation.

## SPAIN DISCOVERS AFRICA

In 2004 Spain discovered sub-Saharan Africa, after five centuries of living with its back to the continent. Since then, the government has been striving to establish diplomatic and economic outreach and deploy assistance via development aid and security cooperation.

In terms of development aid, Spain has dramatically increased its bilateral funds to sub-Saharan Africa from EUR 158 million in 2004 to more than 1 billion in 2008. Nearly 60 per cent of these funds are implemented via multilateral channels. If North Africa is included, Africa now absorbs 35 per cent of Spanish aid funds, compared to 38 per cent which go to the traditional recipients in Latin America.

In terms of military presence, Spain has been involved in the EUFOR peacekeeping missions in Congo and Chad, and an EU security sector reform mission in Guinea-Bissau. It also forms part of the EU naval operation against piracy (Atalanta) in the Indian Ocean. Economically, sub-Saharan Africa has gained weight, as Spanish exports to the region have doubled in the last ten years. Spain imports

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Spain is a newcomer to Africa. To have influence within Europe on relations with sub-Saharan Africa, it must focus on fewer issues and improve coherence between government departments.
- Spain has been substantially supporting UN agencies in Africa, but has a naïve approach to multilateralism on the continent.
- Spain still fiercely defends its immediate economic and other interests in a way that seriously undermines the progressive aspects of its policies in Africa.

»»»»» approximately four times as much from the region as it exports to it. However, only 1 per cent of Spain's total imports come from sub-Saharan Africa and Spain is responsible for just 4 per cent of all EU trade to the region.

Spain's 2006 Africa Plan was an honest stocktaking of values and interests. While it did not set measurable goals or establish mechanisms to reconcile interest and values, it raised the profile of sub-Saharan Africa within Spanish foreign policy. Remarkable diplomatic, development and defence efforts have been undertaken since then. The section dealing with sub-Saharan Africa in the Foreign Ministry has been upgraded to a Directorate General; six new embassies and field offices of the development agency have been opened in the region. Multilaterals have been generously supported – the African Union with a EUR 30 million fund for security, ECOWAS with EUR 20 million for immigration policies and NEPAD with EUR 10 million for gender projects. The previous interest in lusophone Africa is slowly shifting towards a new focus on West Africa. In early 2009, a new Plan was drafted for the next four years, reiterating the aims of the 2006 plan and adding additional priorities of human rights, gender equity and environmental sustainability.

Spain has become an important actor in Euro-African relations. It has promoted certain agendas – such as migration – ahead of its European partners and has indicated a high-level political commitment to fight hunger and strive for gender equality. As a newcomer largely free of a colonial legacy in the region, and as the seventh largest DAC donor and an increasingly important contributor to the UN system, Spain is an attractive partner for Africa.

### **REACTIVE SELF-INTEREST**

Notwithstanding the progress, Spain's potential has remained largely unfulfilled. Its Africa policy is not as progressive as the government suggests. It has been driven as much by short-term self-interest as by an enlightened and sophisticated commitment

to help long-term African development. The Spanish government has not yet been able to integrate its various branches which impact on Africa into one coherent framework. It has not been able to get its priorities mainstreamed within European, regional or UN structures.

There are a number of explanations for these shortcomings.

The over-riding reason is that the Zapatero government has been reactive rather than proactive. The June 2006 Africa Plan was rushed through due to an immigration crisis, when the border fences of the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla were scaled by African migrants and many would-be migrants arrived on the beaches of the Canary Islands in converted fishing boats. In November 2009, the crew of the fishing vessel 'Alakrana' was freed after being held hostage by Somali pirates for 47 days. In both cases, the Spanish government saw its attempts to establish a more strategic orientation towards Africa overtaken by events, pushing it into a reactive mode. Pressure from opposition parties compounded such defensive reactions.

Zapatero has emphasised the first of the Millennium Development Goals, namely the reduction of hunger. Significant amounts have been pledged at a number of summits; EUR 500 million at the food security summit in June 2008 and EUR 75 million for the Horn of Africa at the follow-up summit in November 2009. But these commitments have been cancelled out by the government's other actions. Zapatero's bid to fight hunger worldwide does not prevent the Minister in charge of Agriculture and Fisheries from adhering to the group of EU countries most fiercely opposed to any change in the current regime of agricultural subsidies and fisheries policies.

Spanish fishing policy acts strongly to the detriment of African development. Within the EU, Spain is the main beneficiary from the quotas negotiated in the fisheries agreements with third countries and its fleet pockets an estimated 80 per cent of the financial benefits. Spain has by far the

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largest fishing fleet in terms of tonnage, and more than a fifth of all fishery related jobs in the EU27 are based in Spain. Spanish vessels dominate the European catch in the waters around the African coast. The Ministry of Environment and Rural and Maritime Affairs takes a protective stance, fighting to maintain Spanish access to fish. Spanish MPs from all parties in the European Parliament's Fisheries Committee are loyal spokespersons of domestic lobbies.

The Fisheries Partnership Agreement (FPA) instrument not only has social and environmental dimensions. It also has a political impact. The

FPA is a contract that trades access to coastal fishing water for monies channelled to the state budget. In sharp contrast to development aid it represents a contractual obligation for payment between the

EU and the southern country. This becomes particularly delicate when the funds seem to bolster authoritarian regimes – exemplified recently by the coups d'état in Mauritania and Guinea.

Another reason for Spain's unfulfilled potential is the government's rather naïve approach to multilateralism. A disconnect between the high-level declarations of political will and a lack of delivery is evident in government-backed civil society programmes. The 'Women's Network for a Better World', an initiative established in 2006 by Vice-President Fernandez de la Vega, is a women-only club conceived as a 'space for sisterhood among African and Spanish women' which holds annual meetings and programme activities. The initiative commits to putting gender equality and poverty at the top of the agenda. However, its 'women in development' approach is rather outdated, and after the initial media hype in 2006 and 2007 its profile has gradually faded. The envisaged summit in Namibia in 2008 was hastily moved to Monrovia in Liberia and merged with an

analogous initiative headed by the (female) presidents of Liberia and Finland. The network does not include any European partners and has no links to the Joint Africa-European Strategy. The initiative follows a more general pattern where initiatives are launched and institutions set up in parallel to existing UN or regional structures, but there is then a lack of substance to sustain them.

To fill the gap between aspiration and impact in its Africa policy, the Spanish government must reach out to civil society and business. Announced in the 2006 Africa Plan, an 'Africa table' was to establish a consultation mechanism between the administration and activists and academics. But this has been convened only once. Now, the 'Casa Africa', an institution of public diplomacy established in 2006, is charged with overcoming this gap. However, its peripheral location in the Canary Islands impedes this role.

The Spanish development agency AECID currently operates as a one way channel in which a small number of staff implement or oversee a large number of projects in many sectors. If policy coherence for development is to be pursued in a more systematic manner, a two-way channel should be established. Alongside the implementation of projects, AECID would then empower local analytical capacities on how Spanish or European policies actually impede African governments and generate poverty.

## SECURITY VACUUM

Africa still does not figure prominently in Spanish security policy. While Spain is involved in police cooperation in anti-terrorist activities in North Africa and the Sahel, the security of Africans ranks much lower.

While Spanish troops have been integrated into EU missions to the region, Spain has been reluctant to develop integrated responses to development-related security challenges. Dialogue between the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Ministry is poor. AECID has expanded



## Spain's Africa policy is not as progressive as the government suggests

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»»»»» its activities mainly in social service oriented areas, but neither military nor police capacities are linked to these in order to conduct much-needed security sector reform (SSR) initiatives. Equally, civilian capacities for crisis intervention are not made available in deployable personnel pools, making Spain a laggard in meeting the EU's civilian headline goals.

Although Spain heads the EU SSR mission to Guinea-Bissau, no mechanisms of lesson learning have been established and this mission is massively under-staffed. Development cooperation with Guinea-Bissau is restricted to a large number of social service projects and a significant budget support operation, but it lacks a governance or security orientation. Spain is the eighth largest contributor to the UN Peace Building Fund. Guinea Bissau is the only Spanish partner country where an operation is taking place. However, no strategic communication between Madrid, New York and Bissau is established to add content to the financial weight of Spanish multilateralism.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a similar case, where an understaffed AECID field office oversees a large number of minor projects. Here Spain entrusts multilaterals with the execution of funds and no links are established to the Spanish presence in MONUC. A bitter taste was left by the unexpected resignation of Spanish General Díaz de Villegas, MONUC Force Commander, in October 2008 when fighting reassumed in Eastern Congo. On the one hand, this questioned the preparedness of Spain and its armed forces for top positions within UN peace keeping machinery, while on the other, some used it to criticise MONUC's ineffectiveness in delivering on its vast mandate.

In addition, Spain has failed to incorporate sub-Saharan Africa fully into its energy security planning. Algeria is a major partner, but Nigeria is becoming increasingly important. Despite this, Spanish energy security policy in Africa remains largely separate from a joint European strategy. The Spanish government takes a particularly soft

stance towards the kleptocratic Obiang regime in Equatorial Guinea, a former Spanish colony. European partners expect Spain to take the lead here in speaking out against human rights violations, vote rigging and the scandal of utter poverty given the vast income from oil sales. However, when foreign minister Moratinos visited Equatorial Guinea in July 2009 along with a planeload of business representatives – mainly from oil companies – he displayed a strategy of unconditional engagement, much to the embarrassment of some of the parliamentarians who accompanied him.

#### **THE NEXT STAGE**

The fight against hunger in Africa and the political engagement with an emerging region represents an honest bid to reorient Spanish foreign policy away from its exclusive concern with the Maghreb and Latin America. It is one dimension pushing Spain towards a more global outlook. The above examples of the fisheries policy and the security strategies towards DRC and Guinea-Bissau highlight the need for improvements to such an approach. On the one hand, high-principle political declarations become anaemic when other government departments act to protect Spanish interests. On the other, when it comes to delivering on the commitments, the structures to do so are not yet in place, neither in development cooperation, nor the military. It is to be hoped that these represent mere teething problems in Spain's new focus on Africa. To move to the next stage and fulfil its potential in the region, Spain should focus on its strengths, ensure government coordination in order to achieve policy coherence and become more strategic in its multilateral engagement.

*Stefan Meyer is researcher  
at FRIDE*

**e-mail: [fride@fride.org](mailto:fride@fride.org)  
[www.fride.org](http://www.fride.org)**

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