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An Overview (Part 1)

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Fifty Years of French Cooperation with Sub-Saharan Africa

An Overview (Part 1)

Pierre Jacquemot

For 50 years, France's commitment to aid in Africa was never seriously questioned; it was simply taken as a given. However, France's unique approach, supported by a development policy energized and defined by this uniqueness, gradually shifted. The country aligned itself first with prevailing international theories, then with the reforms of the last 15 years. This profoundly diverted the original focus of development policy, with more attention paid to organizational constraints than to the needs of the intended beneficiaries. A tremendous legacy of know-how, forged through committed practice, has emerged from this political and human experience.

Keywords: Cooperation – France – Africa – Development – Aid – Public policy – Reforms – Structural adjustment

Born in the wake of decolonization to help maintain close ties with newly independent “young nations,” development cooperation with sub-Saharan Africa has been a pillar of French international policy for 50 years. Nonetheless, even as a clearly stated priority, development cooperation has always been controversial. Depending on the circumstances, it has become a fairly opaque public policy, difficult to explain and hard to evaluate in terms of results. In the first part of this paper, we aim to assess how policies evolved, at first entangled in innovative practices, then progressively becoming more aligned to prevailing international practices. If, in response to periodic criticism, many reform projects mark the history¹ of French development cooperation, these happened increasingly seldom on the basis of an explicit policy and have instead been dictated more by structural compromises and budget constraints. In the second part of the paper, we will identify the lessons to be learned from development cooperation with Africa, and public assistance as its tool, in light of current concerns.

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Intertwined Doctrine and Practices

An unwavering preference for Africa. Active cooperation can only be circumscribed in terms of a specific geography, otherwise it is blind. Historically, French aid turned towards Africa because of economic, cultural, linguistic, and political ties with former colonies. This priority has never been seriously questioned. For half a century, sub-Saharan Africa received between 40 percent and 50 percent of the total French bilateral aid, making France the leading contributor to the continent; but this has been in declining proportion over the last decade.

Table 1 – Average disbursement of French aid to Africa (in millions of USD, at 2010 prices and exchange rates)

Period	1970–1979	1980–1989	1990–1999	2000–2009	2010–2012
Annual average: France	2,870	3,900	4,700	4,100	4,300
Annual average: OECD nations	9575	18,275	19,350	24,000	30,000
Percentage	29%	221%	24%	17%	14%

Source: OECD, *Development Aid at a glance, Africa, 2012*.

In 2010, French aid to sub-Saharan Africa (with Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Senegal, Congo, and Mali at the top of the list) was USD 4.4 billion, or 41 percent of the total amount of bilateral aid (USD 8.9 billion) and 28 percent of total aid (USD 12.9 billion). This rate is expected to increase in the period 2011–2013, as the French government's budgetary target is to provide 60 percent of the state's financial effort to the sub-Saharan region.²

The historical mindset. From the very beginning, French development actors mobilized to convince Africans of the depoliticized nature of their approach (Meimon 2005). Formally, it was based on the model of a noble "cause without opposition," put into practice in a timely manner by 8,700 agents, many of whom came from the colonial administration. Yet these instruments of the new policy were to a considerable extent placed in the service of hegemonic dynamics, at least from the point of view of preserving strategic interests.

1. There are more than 50 official reports on French aid (from the Jeanneney report in 1963, then Gorse 1971, Abelin 1975, Hessel 1990 [unpublished], Vivien 1991, Michailof 1993, Tavernier 1999, Gabas 2005, to the Vedrine report 2013).

2. Source: Ministère des affaires étrangères et Européennes (MAEE), 2011.

3. From the name of journalist Raymond Cartier, who defended a preference for France: "The Corrèze instead of the Zambezi!" (Paris Match 1956).

4. "Pré carré" refers to the French zone of exclusive influence in Africa.

5. Benin, Burkina Faso, Comoros, Ghana, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, DRC, Central African Republic, Senegal, Chad, Togo.

From the outset, analysis marked by pessimism co-existed with determination bursting with optimism. For a long time this attitude remained a fundamental of quasi-militant positions (Berg 1981; Giri 1986; Michailoff 1993). In contrast, others regularly attempted to end cooperation because of its incurable passion for Africa, seen as a major flaw and a suspicious, even unhealthy choice. Would Africa not remain the Africa of “business”; of “FranceAfrica,” (*Françafrique*) guided by mercenary and corrupt motives and vehemently denounced by François-Xavier Verschave (1998); of the shock-and-awe type tyrants who became rich with impunity thanks to crooked intermediaries? Later, there were some who slumped into radical Afropessimism (Smith 2003).

Despite the vehemence of the controversies and the regular return to Cartierist arguments,³ French aid policy's preference for Africa remained in place, generating even today a form of admiration from the British (Chafer and Cumming 2010). Jean-Pierre Cot's attempt (1981–1982), combined with the desire to escape the “*pré carré*”⁴ aspect of the Franc Zone and open up to the rest of Africa (including English- and Portuguese-speaking countries), was opposed by former Minister for Overseas François Mitterrand. After that, the political effort to “de-Africanize” French cooperation was openly abandoned. In the early 1990s, the geographical “domain” of the Ministry of Cooperation covered 37 nation states, obtained successively in small increments. But non-francophone African states were still excluded from the group, and a third of the 37 countries were island micro states, which in reality limited the actual extension of the domain. Fifteen years after Pierre Cot's failed attempt came the creation of the ZSP (Priority Solidarity Zone), considered an important innovation of the 1998 reform. Its scope was stabilized in 2002 to 55 nations, of which 43 were African. The ZSP ceased to exist in 2009, with preferences focusing once again on a priority group of 14 poor African nations,⁵ most of them members of the original “*pré carré*.”

The compassionate approach. Why preserve this leaning toward Africa for such a long time? Was it to satisfy an irresistible “need for Africa” (Fottorino, Guillemin and Orsenna 1992)? Fascinating observations were soon voiced on the art of reconciling the universality of democratic values with recognition for each culture. The humanist aim was to bet on Africans' motivation to attain modernity, in a context of respect for their authenticity.

Memories of past obligations also had their place; some felt a necessity to compensate for colonization, while others wanted to continue its unfinished civilizing mission. There was a duty born of solidarity as well: people remembered the powerful images of the great Sahelian drought of the early 1970s, the images of those stunted children with bulging bellies, looking at the camera with huge, piercing eyes; of farmers, poor since the dawn of time, growing a few hundred square meters of millet and groundnut; of poignant women dying of starvation by the roadside with a baby in their arms. Compassion,

fueled by guilt, was a regular occurrence, giving rise to the “White Man’s Tears” (Bruckner 1983), sometimes cleverly stirred up via fundraising campaigns by International NGOs. The question lingers: how could one not remain benevolent and helpful, then as now, before a continent whose poor were ceaselessly increasing in number (by more than one hundred million per year between 1990 and 2010); how could one remain indifferent to the misfortunes and conflicts that invariably plunge Africa into mourning?

Mutual self-interest. In a system of aid, there is always the coexistence of an altruistic model meeting the needs of recipient countries and a foreign policy model meeting those of donor countries. “Helping the Third World is helping oneself”: Mitterrand’s formula eloquently illustrated the reciprocal nature of the relationship with the countries in the South. Commercial incentives were always a consideration. Over time, however, the argument lost some of its strength, with Africa’s diminished importance in French trade (only 15 percent of France’s exports and 12 percent of its imports in 2012). It was thus possible for the dismantling of French aid to be carried out relatively painlessly after 2000.

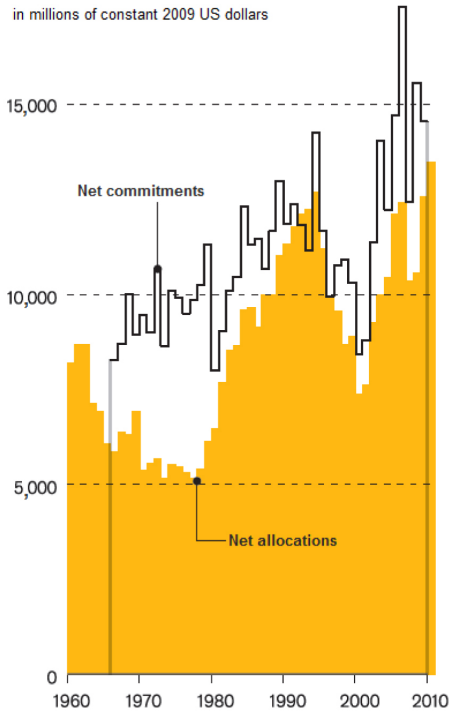
The situation has changed over the last decade. Africa’s economic performance as well as its identified potential brought to light new grounds for justifying aid to the continent. Considered the largest reserve of natural resources and the largest emerging market, with 2 billion people in 2050, Africa has become essential to strategic investment—for example, the 2008 “Cape Town initiative,” which called for support of the private sector through the mobilization of significant amounts of financing and for support of hundreds of companies.

The perspective has also expanded. Today, French development aid is linked to new concerns: climate change, deforestation, depletion of water resources, major pandemics, security, various forms of trafficking, etc.—in short, many issues and threats. Africa is also central to a key subject of public debate, namely immigration. Without the development in the countries of origin, uncontrolled migration is likely to continue to be a scourge for Africans and a risk for France. The policy orientation is therefore one of “concerted management of migration flows,” which aims to support return projects for migrants.

Finally, it is well known that in addition to economic arguments there have always been other considerations, including diplomatic considerations, which remained attached to the Gaullist notion of “Greater France”; by increasing the number of countries espousing its democratic values, France has always tried to broaden the number of its allies on major issues, at the United Nations and in other forums. In return, France has rather skillfully been able to gain support for African priorities on international forums, such as recently in the G8 (at Gleneagles in 2005) and the G20 (African Partnership Forum, Paris, 2011), to engage Africa in dialogue about its prospects and challenges.

France's ODA (official development assistance) to Africa

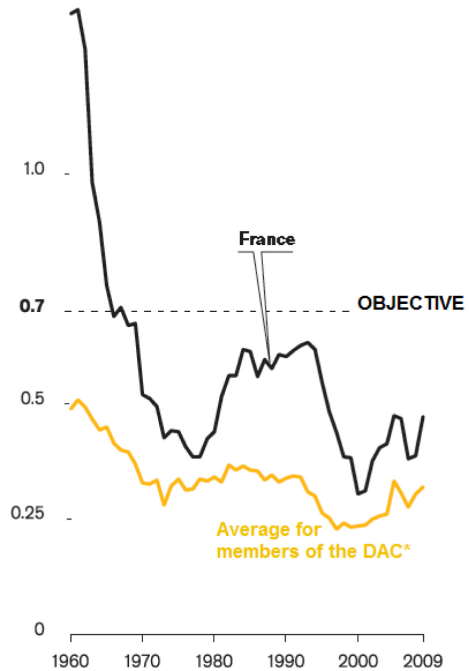
in millions of constant 2009 US dollars



* DAC: The OECD's Development Aid Committee

A rarely attained objective of 0.7 percent (1960-2009)

Total ODA as % of Gross National Income



Source: OECD, www.oecd.org

A preference for Africa diluted in Europe. For 20 years, France has routed part of its overall aid effort through the EU, to the tune to 20 percent of its total. France thus contributes about 20 percent to the EU aid budget, in second place behind Germany (22 percent). It does more for the EU than it does for other multilateral institutions. These data are stable, because they benefit from strong institutional irreversibility. The argument originally in favor of this option was based on the principle of symbiosis: economies of scale, reduced transaction costs, increased ability to negotiate with multilateral institutions, reducing the weight of the leader of the oligopoly of global aid represented by the World Bank, etc. Notwithstanding this significant EU involvement, the European channel still raises questions. There are few topics related to development assistance that are of as much interest to French parliamentarians as assigning relative priority to bilateral, EU, and multilateral aid (Ameline 2010). For some, the Europeanization of aid is seen as a step backwards in African relations. Some admit their preference for bilateral aid, which helps manage aid to countries with which France must maintain a special relationship. Others find that the influence of France on EU aid policy has gradually decreased. It made a weak attempt, with the Cotonou Agreement

signed in 2000, to preserve the benefits of reciprocal trade access arrangements and of the Stabex (stabilization of export earnings) and Sysmin (stabilization of export earnings from mining products) mechanisms. However, the arguments were drowned out by multilateralism, and European commitment to Africa, because it had not been redesigned, has gradually receded, as demonstrated during the 2000s with the fiasco of the EPA (Economic Partnership Agreement) negotiations, meant to replace the preferential agreements deemed incompatible with WTO rules.

French Doctrine Put to the Test: Helping the Virtuous, the Poor, the Weak?

The choice of Africa is a legacy, on a scale that France could and knew how to handle,⁶ combining military, diplomatic, economic, and environmental aspects, to ensure its “global security.” Various strategic, charitable, and self-interested viewpoints have clashed, without any single one taking precedence over another (Jacquemot 2000). Over time, French development cooperation policy has absorbed all the influences that have to varying degrees shaped its wide spectrum of discourse and action, combining to produce a unique concept of cooperation with Africa. Then, over time, this concept lost much of its originality and strength, embracing the policy framework that prevailed internationally.

The fertility years of 1960–1985. During the period of national independences, France, projecting its model of post-war reconstruction, recommended entrusting a prominent role in development to the central government. The preoccupations that took center stage during the years 1960–1985 (the most prosperous years of cooperation) were human capital, basic health care, education for all, and, uniquely French, the promotion of identity and cultural diversity within a francophone context. This commitment on the part of France could be seen in the actions it undertook that gave an important place to land planning and development, recognizing sensitive areas’ right to protectionism and giving ad hoc preferential trade treatment to African countries (Cappelaere 1982).

This was the era of agricultural agencies, stabilization funds, public companies, regional development projects (in the basins of Senegal, Niger, Congo), research institutes (in public health with Bobo Dioulasso’s OCCGE⁷

6. “Africa is the only region in the world where France can believe itself to be a great power, capable of changing the course of history with five hundred men.”—Louis Guiringaud, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1978

7. Organisation de Coordination et de Coopération pour la Lutte contre les Grandes Endémies.

8. Institut international de recherche et de formation éducation et développement (IRFED); Institut de recherches et d’applications des méthodes de développement (IRAM), Agriculteurs Français et développement international (AFDI), Comité Catholique contre la faim et pour le développement (CCFD), Groupe de recherche et de Réalisations pour le Développement

rural (GRDR), Groupe de recherche et d’échanges technologiques (GRET), Solidarité agricole et alimentaire (SOLAGRAL).

9. The Prime Minister issued this warning in Cotonou: “If some countries prefer to stay away from the international community and the rules of good management, France can do nothing for them.”

network and Pasteur institutes), specialized international engineering schools (Ouagadougou, Bamako, Dakar, Yaoundé), military schools with a regional focus; and original micro achievements with specialized teams with an activist disposition.⁸ People also remember operational input such as the effects method designed to grapple with the various impacts of a development project (Chervel and Legall 1976; Bridier and Michailof 1980). This method was later skillfully used during the fierce debate with the World Bank on the future of the cotton sector in West Africa.

At the end of this intellectually dense period marked by an abundance of field projects, results were not negligible: tens of thousands of executives and engineers had been trained, economic and social infrastructure put into place, and institutional capacity created. There was increased access to drinking water and energy, school enrolment had gone up, and food security had increased in many areas. Preventive vaccination campaigns had eradicated smallpox; river blindness had disappeared from West Africa; and the improvement of maternal and child health care was significant.

And yet in most cases, a painful observation could be made of the gap between developmentalist rhetoric and the implacable logic of African societies, which were engaged in a complex process of maturation and transformation that could not be reduced to a model and that was a source of multiple conflicts. Demo-economic determinants had been underestimated; accelerated urbanization, with its various implications, was integrated too late as a decisive process in social organization; and resistance to reforms was misinterpreted due to excessive voluntarism. Public policies' grasp on reality continued to be neither broad in scope nor long term. French aid after 1985, failing to reexamine itself, gradually turned into a system of charity, government subsidies, and people living without working (Bayart 1989).

Structural adjustment and intellectual alignment. French thought was less fertile. Debate on development narrowed; and as public opinion generated doubt as to its effectiveness, so-called aid fatigue set in, as it did in all OECD countries. Whenever voiced, France's development stance was gradually perceived abroad as paternalistic loyalty toward still immature powers. Structural adjustments took the form of summaries of policies that were proposed everywhere. In the face of previous failures and increasingly excessive downward spirals on the part of the government machinery, "shock therapy" was advocated—the forced reinstatement of macroeconomic balances by severe austerity cleanses, the abandonment of large infrastructure projects, the renunciation of self-centered national policies summed up the programs; all of it embellished with a dose of moralism about "good governance."

Faced with such insidious standardization, France only put up weak resistance, aligning itself, in 1993, with the "doctrine of Abidjan" (also called "Balladur doctrine"⁹), with the liberal train of thought that had been formalized in the "Washington consensus," a toolbox for nations in crisis from the

Bretton Woods institutions. In keeping with this attitude, the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994 represented a brutal split. The countries of the Franc Zone lost their automatic drawing rights and France became a second-rate lender for Africa.

The failure of conditions built on adjustment programs became obvious. They proved to be too numerous, too formal, too impatient, and unrealistic. We may recognize French cooperation for having often carried the voice of Africa to Washington to amend programs inspired by exogenous and blind orthodoxy. Although hampered by the Balladur doctrine, France boldly led the way in criticizing their formalism, their reference to an identical body of proposed reforms, their denial of local specificities, and the analytical inconsistency of the policies being advocated, which were aligned with a basic, neo-classical orthodoxy, with its anti-state bias (Jacquemot and Raffinot 1993). It took 10 years to admit that structural adjustment, which may have led some countries back onto the bumpy road to macroeconomic sustainability, had been regressive and cruel to the populations, and that it had destabilized some of the most fragile African states (Hugon 1999).

The indeterminacy of the choices. Some still want to see Mitterrand's 1990 speech in La Baule ("France will align all its aid efforts to efforts that will be made toward greater freedom.") as a turning point. Was the allocation of French aid consistent with the doctrine on display at the time, namely fighting poverty and rewarding reform? When we look over the long term, it appears that the poverty criterion was not the most decisive. Econometric studies suggest a slightly better position on the part of France, which adjusted three qualitative elements: unfettered aid, more selectivity towards poor African countries, and playing on the recipient's quality of governance (Roodman 2004). Instead, the elasticity of French aid compared to the quality of policies and institutions (including respect for civil liberties), and compared to the level of income, shows that at best these two criteria were not taken into account, and at worst, that France, although demonstrating a slight bias in favor of the poorest countries, gave preference to "soft" countries, offering a political environment for the least mediocre (Amprou and Chauvet 2007).¹⁰

In an operational approach, did rewarding reform mean losing interest in African countries whose governments are guilty of bad practices? Evaluation of France's actions in the extreme cases that made it necessary in the past to put an end to aid (in DRC, Togo, Niger, Guinea-Bissau, and also in Haiti, a country always associated with French aid to Africa) shows that the complete dismantling of the cooperation arrangement makes it very difficult to reinstate aid once

10. Based on a certain number of criteria, the Center for Global Development has created a "commitment to development index" to assess the positive or negative

impact of a country's development efforts (aid operations, trade and investment). France is ranked 17th out of 22 countries with an index of 4.6 (for an average of 5.9).

The overall bad score is, however, offset by its third place in its commitment to sub-Saharan Africa, behind Ireland and Portugal (Roodman 2010).

conditions are met again. Drawing lessons from these many unfortunate experiences, the La Baule doctrine was refined: in places where there is a probability of growth and where the influence of cooperation can be decisive, it is best that the objective be to assist in the implementation of “good” policies and to support the democratic process (“give them a chance”). France has tried, whenever possible, to maintain local assistance focused on the populations (including the Social Development Fund, which was established in 1993 after the devaluation of the CFA Franc and which remains a remarkable tool), while ensuring that the ruling classes responsible for the stagnation do not hijack this assistance.

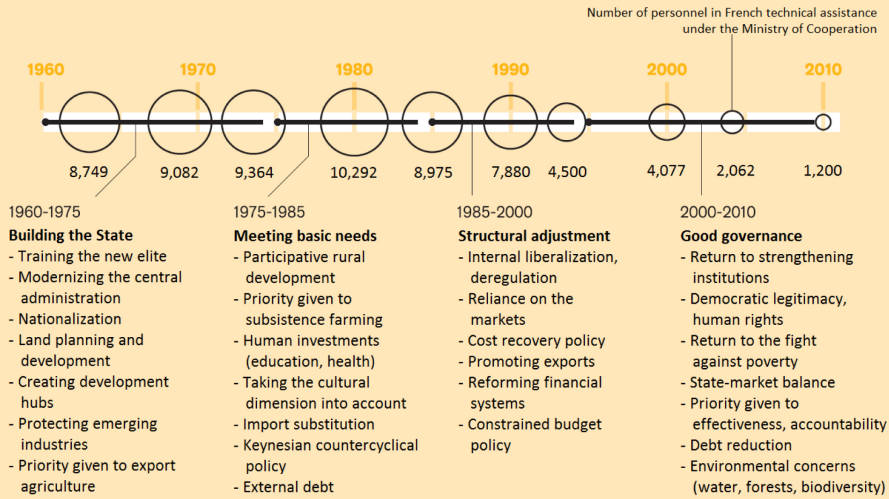
Efficiency called into question. Very soon, international aid and its policy developers (“the little sisters of the rich”) were subjected to relentless accusations. Criticism turned beliefs upside down. Former international official Tibor Mende voiced one of the most scathing accusations: “Foreign aid is like an artichoke. When it is in bloom, it is pleasant enough in its form and color. Over time, it becomes a prickly plant with only one edible part” (1972, 67). Other attacks were more mortifying, like the one by Cameroonian Kabou Axelle (1991), then the one by Zambian Dambisa Moyo: “Aid, as an object of greed, encourages corruption and undermines power” (2009, 101). No one came out of that debate unscathed.

In France, policy developers have always had to answer to one accusation: their wastefulness and inefficiency, with the topic of aid wastage a staple in public debates. Admittedly, the “Carrefour du Développement” (Development at the Crossroads) case in 1986 (Pesnot 2011) did a lot of damage, tarnishing the image of an honest system of cooperation. The accusation, which to this day is still sometimes the object of gloating by bad journalists (and certain politicians) is not tenable, because it ignores what the reality of cooperation in the field really was. With an extensively developed system of expenditure control in cooperation missions (MAC then MCAC – *Mission de coopération et d’action culturelle*;) and the agencies of the “*caisse*” (CCCE then CFD – Caisse centrale de coopération économique), it was almost impossible to divert public funds. Almost all projects were subject to specific directions and tight assessment, and if some escaped the rigidity of the checks, they made up only a very small percentage of the total.

The question of the effectiveness of development cooperation is nonetheless crucial. It is a difficult exercise that falls under the category of an epistemological challenge. A proper assessment would require us to understand (in the felicitous words of A.O. Hirschman in 1984) the “black box” of development; and to imitate the complex and long-term relationship between the increase in human and physical capital, economic growth, the influence of sociopolitical factors, and the role of exogenous factors (climate, world prices). These relationships are largely elusory. Faced with the complex reality of Africa, a policy developer is a stakeholder full of negative certainties. The problem of the approach comes up constantly.

Decrease in technical assistance and change in focus

French Cooperation in Africa, 1960-2010



Sciences Po Cartography Studio, May 2011

Sources: Gaud 1994, Meimon 1995, Sadoulet 2007.

The French exception disappeared in the mid-1990s. At the same time, aid began to decline drastically. Between 1994 and 2000, aid decreased by half and went from its highest rate of 0.63 percent to its lowest rate of 0.31 percent of national income, to be joined by Britain, which had long been at the rear when it came to public aid. Whereas French aid accounted for about 12 percent of total DAC (Development Assistance Committee) member states' contributions since the 1960s, it stabilized at around 8 percent after 1994. Reaffirmation of the major goals by successive governments was akin to incantation.¹¹ The French developmentalist way of thinking quickly withered away in the face of discourse that claimed superior rationality and announced the arrival of a new universalism informed by the market and by good governance; to be unavoidably profitable to Africa one day, provided the region opened itself up to unrestricted globalization. In that context, why would it be necessary to worry about the "social dimension" of development? This was just feedback produced on the actors in the process through the implementation of external requirements, and thus malfunctions that could produce unintended consequences,

¹¹ At Gleneagles, in 2005, the French government had promised to increase OPA to 0.5 percent of GDP in 2007 and to 0.7 percent in 2012, with two thirds earmarked for Africa. Two years later, the commitment was

called into question and the rate stagnated at 0.4 percent. The government then cautiously changed the objective to 0.5% in 2012 and 0.7% in 2015, with 60% for sub-Saharan Africa, indicators that the "Juppé-Schweitzer" White Book

(2008) found "difficult to maintain for reasons relating to the structure of the aid and the state of public finances."

inexplicable “deviances,” by domino effect. The reality of Africa would eventually take revenge on structural adjustment.

Vulnerability, fragility, sustainability: the new concepts. Critical reflection that followed in the 2000s had the merit of placing certain fruitful concepts such as “vulnerability” back on France’s agenda (Guillaumont 2004), as a characteristic of the majority of LDCs (low income, low economic diversification, structural weaknesses). Under this approach, the effectiveness of aid depends primarily on the environment: the more vulnerable a country, the stronger the marginal contribution of aid. Aid to Africa, an area with so many concentrated weaknesses, was thus able to find greater legitimacy in a role of support, insurance, and compensation for losses due to extreme dependence (climate disasters, loss of foreign exchange, loss of export resources).

The French approach to “fragility” (Chataigner and Magro 2008; Gaulme 2011), which was perfectly complementary to the approach to vulnerability, was based on a relevant observation grid that includes various considerations: no rule of law, operational impotence on the part of the State, informalization of the economy, and social fragmentation. At various times, Niger, Mali, Chad, Guinea, the DRC, the CAR, and Sudan found themselves in that category. The concept of the fragile state has undeniable merits since it can mobilize resources around a real rationale: rebuilding the state, a perpetual project.

A new paradigm was gradually restored, with the return to policy (governance), the environment (sustainability), and social issues (the “new dimension”). The questioning of the liberal orthodoxy returned to the forefront of the social voluntarism associated with institutional approaches, making some of the themes of 1970s African development cooperation popular again.

The new, so-called “public goods” approach simultaneously redirected aid, and specifically French aid, towards the construction of “public policies” (Severino and Chanoz 2005). The issue thus had a different focus: how to combine aid with the distribution of international public goods such as security, medicine, information, education, equity and justice, and the protection of natural heritage (Pacquement 2009).

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