



Will the JAES Really Work?

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In the past, Africa has witnessed many initiatives that were meant and designed to make Africa come out of its abject poverty. These initiatives were usually well-funded and one would normally expect them to succeed and have high impact. The opposite is in fact the case: African communities are continually sinking into deeper depths of poverty, and this forces economists of the world to go back to their drawing boards and come up with more packages like the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (**JAES**). Now many are asking questions: Will the **JAES** work? Is this another strategy that will fail, or will it work this time? It is also important to analyze why past initiatives have failed. In these, three sins of development may have been committed: the sin of commission – some things could have been done that were not supposed to be done; the sin of omission – some things that were supposed to have been done, were not done; and the sin of ignorance – some things ought to have been known, but were not, and hence not done.

A critical review of **JAES** shows that it has all the hallmarks for success since it is designed to avoid the mistakes of the past. It is built on the experiences of similar initiatives in the past; the civil societies are central in the discussions and its implementation; it is built on equal partnership between Africa and Europe; it integrates many ideas. In the past, civil society organizations (CSO) have been given little room to influence policy and decision-making when governments are involved. To their credit, the CSO try as much as possible to make their voices heard – at all major events they hold parallel or pre-events where they come up with resolutions and communiqués which are largely ignored by the governments' delegates. In fact the greatest impediment to lobbying and advocacy has been making governments listen to civil society. A frustrated African farmer once said: *“Our governments are like stones, they are there apparently listening but in the end they do not make any ‘move’ to show that they have heard what they have been told.”*

As the **JAES** gets under way, many Africans are wondering: will the Europeans really talk to Africans and regard them as equals among equals? Will African governments be consistent, by sending the same delegates, who can then follow up on what is agreed at the negotiating tables? Are African governments also willing to “clean their houses” by instituting strong management, governance, and democratic systems so as to raise their integrity and worthiness at negotiating tables? Will the governments in Europe and Africa really listen to civil society voices? Many CSOs have good links to grassroots

farmers and communities and bring relevant inputs to consultations in the discussions. Ignoring them is like ignoring 75 % of the target beneficiaries.

The discussion about EPAs has raised a lot of suspicion between Africa and the EU. In fact many people view the **JAES** more positively than EPAs. Africans are worried that the EU is a key partner in both – many people in Africa are wondering about the double speak. It is also on record that the CSOs in Europe did not adequately support their African counterparts as they wrestled with the EPAs threats. Can they rise to the occasion in case there is need for serious lobbying?

As the implementation of the **JAES** goes on, all efforts should be made to make it successful and the pitfalls of past initiatives should be avoided like the plague. All the stakeholders should work hard to make the **JAES** work and prove that Joint Partnership can be made to work. Unless this is done, this will be another golden opportunity trodden on and development in Africa will continue to remain evasive.

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