

TURKEY AS A DEVELOPMENT PARTNER IN AFRICA

BY MICHAEL ASIEDU

BACKGROUND

Irrespective of Turkey's lack of colonial history in Africa, Turkey's foreign policy has progressively evolved to include a key focus on Sub-Saharan Africa in terms of development and humanitarian assistance. As a new donor country in the development arena Turkey's activities towards Sub-Saharan Africa has enjoyed significant boosts. This policy brief takes a snapshot of Turkey's involvement on the continent in terms of political, economic and the development aid dispensations citing why the continent remains an attraction for many emerging donor countries. It gives options to further solidify Turkey's relations whilst highlighting a key challenge that might hinder Turkey's pace on the continent.

A SNAPSHOT OF TURKEY-AFRICA INVOLVEMENT

Political front

The aftermath of Turkey's "Opening to Africa Action Plan" alongside a further solidification by the Justice and Development Party through its "Strategy for improving Economic Relations with Africa" have birthed significant progress. It has witnessed Turkey's acceptance as the 26th non-regional member of the African Development Bank (Özkan, Akgün, 2010).

Other notable dividends include Turkey co-chairing with Egypt on the "International Conference for the Reconstruction and Development of Darfur" in Cairo in 2010. Istanbul on the other hand hosted the "Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit". A similar event, "Turkey-Africa Partnership Summit" was held also in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea in 2014. Istanbul was also the main convener of the Somali Conferences in the framework of the UN in 2010 and 2012 respectively with a third in February 2016. Turkey also capitalized on her opportunity during her G20 presidency in 2015 to hold the "High Level Conference on Access to Energy in Sub-Saharan Africa" in connection with the African Union's Agenda 2063.

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On the diplomatic front, Turkish embassies in Addis Ababa, Abuja, Dar-es-Salaam, Lusaka, Libreville have also been given accreditations to various institutions in the respective countries. They include the Intergovernmental Authority on Development Partners Forum (IGAD), Ethiopia, Economic Community of West African States, (ECOWAS), Abuja, East African Community (EAC), Tanzania, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Zambia and Economic Community of Central African States, Gabon. From a paltry 12 Turkish embassies in Africa in 2009, the number has increased to 39 on the continent with a further 26 commercial consulates in 19 African states. African embassies on the other hand have moved from 10 to 32 in Turkey.

With regards to UN Missions in Africa Turkey contributes both personal and finance. Additionally, Turkey has since the turn of 2009 been contributing \$1 million dollars to the African Union (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011).

The economic dimesnion: trade

The economic sphere has also seen a lot of activities, for instance in 2000 Turkey's bilateral trade with Sub-Saharan African countries was worth \$742 million dollars, by 2008 it had leapt to \$5.7 billion dollars and \$17.5 billion dollars in 2015. Africa's trade with Turkey on the other hand stood at \$813 million dollars. There have also been significant investments in the communication arena with Turkish Airlines now flying to 38 destinations in 23 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, Turkish contractors enjoy at least 21 percent stake on the African continent having undertaken more than 1,150 projects worth over \$55 billion dollars (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011).

Development aid

Turkish International Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) is Turkey's chief development channel and has seen its operations increased with 15 coordination offices in Africa. It has key development projects in Sudan, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Democratic Republic of Congo and Gambia.

Significantly also, while Official Development Assistance (ODA) fell in 16 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development-Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) countries, Turkey's net ODA increased by over 38 percent. This is noteworthy for a country listed as both provider and recipient of ODA herself (OECD, 2015).

Indeed, even though Turkish governmental organizations' aid to Africa stood at \$44 million dollars in 2009, it increased to \$772 million dollars in 2012, (Kurban, 2013). The private sector is another beneficiary. Somalia in particular received \$365 million dollars in 2011 from the Turkish private sector, the government on the other hand donated \$49 million dollars, higher than any European country excluding UK (Özkan, 2010).

The key development programmes rolled out for Africa by the Turkish government hinges on three areas. The first is “Agricultural Development Programme for the Continent of Africa”, second, “the African Health Programme” and third, “Vocational Training for Africa”. These programmes over the years have seen a number of activities. For instance, Turkey has signed health cooperation agreements with 20 African countries with TIKA building a Turkish-Sudanese Research and Training Hospital which is run jointly with the Sudanese Ministry of Health. Additionally by the end of 2014, over 280,00 Africans had undergone various health screenings including the operation of 53,000 cataract patients by Turkish health personnel (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011).

On the education front, Turkey has awarded 5,619 scholarships to African students between 1991 and 2016 either to pursue tertiary education or other vocational training ventures. Other activities Turkey has embarked on on its Africa trajectory include Turkey hosting the Fourth UN Conference on Least Developed Countries in 2011 and the Mid-Term Review Conference of the Istanbul Programme of Action in 2015.

THE AFRICAN APPEAL

Economic projections indicate Africa to be a \$29 trillion dollar economy by 2050. Currently the continent has four of the world’s fastest growing economies, it was six in 2015 with Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d’Ivoire, Mozambique, Tanzania and Rwanda in the fore (World Economic Forum, 2016).

In terms of governance, the Mo Ibrahim 2016 Index gives the continent an increase by a point in “Overall Governance”. However, “Safety and Rule of Law” include the areas slightly on the decline over the last decade. This should be an area for cautious optimism for many development partners including Turkey as it seeks to expand its involvement on the continent (Mo Ibrahim Governance Index, 2016).

A direct offshoot of Turkey’s recent engagements in Africa also is when the former used its newly acquired leverage to back its candidacy for a non-permanent UN Security Council seat for the 2009-2010 period obtaining the votes of almost all of the latter (Bilgic, Nascimento, 2014).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Turkish foreign policy towards Africa has evolved to hinge on two foundations, the erstwhile connection of historical ties via Ottoman expeditions and its anti-colonial ties. It has also recently taken a “multifaceted dimension” (Davutoğlu, 2008).

Turkey’s lack of colonial involvement on the continent could augur positively as one of its strengths. However, beneath could be further suggestions for an increased involvement on the continent and

this should be in line with Turkey’s new model of “Partnership for the Strengthening of Sustainable Development and Integration”.¹

Firstly, there is a general lack of information about each other. Essentially bridging the information gap between Turkey and Africa that will inextricably spearhead the developmental trajectory in the latter will not rely on a few exchange programmes among same. A concerted effort is required, for instance Turkey could through its governmental scholarship program carve out a specific quota for African students and encourage them to return to their home countries after completion of their studies in Turkey.

This has been a model used by other western countries including emerging development partners such as South Korea, India and Taiwan. In this dispensation the goal is not to invent the wheel but to garner from the experiences of other development partner models that have worked on the continent. Thus, students return home knowing more about the grant giving partners’ culture and systems; effectively sowing the seeds for future leaders who will understand each other better. With the EU nearing steps of recognizing Turkish as one of its official languages, African countries on the other hand can start incorporating Turkish studies into the schools of languages just as French and German alongside Chinese have almost been integrated in many parts (Daily Sabah, 2016).

Secondly, equally non-negotiable is the fact that whatever progress Turkey has attained in Africa needs to be sustained. In line with her multi-faceted foreign policy approach it should balance between democracy and security at home alongside promoting democracy abroad- a demonstration of Turkey’s core soft power apparatus. To allow domestic issues to affect its pace thus far in Africa is to give the blue print away to other emerging development partners such as India and Taiwan.

Furthermore, development also requires many partners; the experiences of traditional donors including the US, Japan and countries in the EU could remain key. Inasmuch as the lack of colonial history in Africa on the part of Turkey augurs well for its perception from many African leaders, learning from the mistakes of traditional development partners on the continent could be a huge propeller thereby eschewing the critiques associated with development aid.

Finally, one of the distinctive features of a relationship between two countries is the presence of each other’s embassies or consulates. Essentially, notwithstanding the recognition that Turkey has chalked an increase in this sphere it must keep up the pace to ensure it is fully represented on the continent through its embassies.

¹Under Turkey’s new model of “Partnership for the Strengthening of Sustainable Development and Integration”, African delegation and Turkish state officials commit to promote investment exchanges and encourage establishment of direct trade relations between Africa and Turkey, without prejudice to International treaties and agreements

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