Analyzing the European Development Fund: An English School Account of How Presumed Statehood Undermines (Development in) Sub-Saharan Africa

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Submitted to Central European University
Department of International Relations and European Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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(word count: 90,141)

Budapest, Hungary
September 2011
Abstract

This thesis engages in an analysis of the European Development Fund (EDF) in order to show how the underpinning theoretical and conceptual frameworks fail to enable a sufficient understanding of Sub-Saharan African (SSA) statehood and development practices. The thesis argues that development failures in SSA are inherently linked to donors’ misunderstanding of partner states. Equally important, this thesis claims that development failures are connected to donors’ incapacity to connect to local SSA governance and social realities. The puzzle is not only that there is an evident mismatch between donor policies and local social realities, but as well that western donors appear to be incapable of understanding SSA governance and social realities while claiming to sustain their development. An interpretive research design has been employed for uncovering the perceptions and beliefs of policy-makers and non-governmental organizations (NGO) employees involved in EDF-related processes.

The findings show that the European EDF policy-makers, while being responsible for designing development policies, encounter substantive difficulties in understanding the way partner governments and more broadly SSA states and societies function. Therefore, the thesis explores the EDF policy-makers’ lack of understanding of SSA states and societies, in an attempt to uncover its implications for international relations theory and development policy. In more detail, building partially on the previous literature, the thesis looks into the implications of lack of empirical sovereignty of SSA states for statebuilding and development efforts. The thesis shows that SSA states continue to be seen as states by western donors because of the incapacity to observe and translate at a policy level the meanings-in-use that state-like institutions acquire within the local socio-cultural contexts in SSA. On a conceptual level, the thesis claims that the centrality of western understandings of statehood, while making all other forms of governance irrelevant, obscures furthermore our capacity to conceptualize and run analysis beyond the theoretical boundaries of western statehood, leading to policy incoherence.

The thesis aims to empirically illustrate discrepancies between western conceptions of statehood- and development-related practices and SSA experiences. It does so through a single case study research design analyzing the perceptions of policy-makers and NGO employees involved in EDF-related interactions. A specific focus is shed on the negotiations carried out between the European Commission and SSA governments. Based on 76 interviews, carried out in Brussels, Burundi, Kenya, Mali, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda, the empirical analysis reveals the perception of substantial inconsistencies and discrepancies between various meanings attributed to development and state-related norms, institutions, and practices. The thesis shows how the discrepancies observed at an operational-policy level are connected to discrepancies at a general conceptual level and how both such discrepancies are partially determined by the western ethnocentricity of the conceptual frameworks underpinning EU development policies.
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