

Trading places: The role of trade with Africa

The wealth of Africa has always drawn the attention of outsiders. Trade between Europe and Africa goes back to at least Roman times, when gold, salt, ivory, wheat and exotic animals were traded. After the fall of the Roman empire, this trade continued by caravan routes across the Sahara. However, trade started in earnest after direct contact was established by European explorers, most famously Vasco da Gama. In the wake of European conquest and occupation, companies were lining up to discover this land of opportunity, as 'trade follows the flag'. Not all this attention was equally welcome. The infamous 'scramble for Africa', which gained its full momentum after the Berlin conference of 1885, heralded the beginning of an era of colonization by European powers.

Today, Africa is trading more than ever. Private companies are no longer merely drawn to its wealth of natural resources, but increasingly targeting its burgeoning consumer market. Local involvement requires local presence, which is evident from fast growing foreign direct investment, which amounted to \$57 billion in 2013 (UNCTAD, 2014). Increasing local presence means private companies are having a more direct impact on African society. This impact can be both positive and negative. Increased use of ethical standards such as fair trade is widely believed to have positive impact on income and the environment. At the same time, media reports of land grabbing, oil spills, and mining strikes are increasing. There are clearly two sides to the coin.

With increasing involvement of private companies in areas traditionally considered the domain of public policy, often under the flag of corporate social responsibility, the line between trade and development is blurring. Businesses are increasingly partnering with NGO's and local governments in so-called public-private partnerships for the development of infrastructure or to include vulnerable populations in their business models. The idea of business for development is gaining popularity in public policy circles, under the umbrella name of inclusive growth. In the wake of the financial crisis, mixing trade and development also serves national governments, which consider it an opportunity to use the aid budget to stimulate the business sector. Although trade is generally considered an opportunity to spur development and economic growth, many remain sceptic. A recent example of this are the comments of Merkel's advisor on the recent Economic Partnership Agreements between the European Union and African countries, which he considered to undermine the development agenda.

Trade is more than a simple exchange of goods for money. Trade requires investing in relationships and building mutual trust. Its impacts should not only be measured quantitatively, in terms of per capita income, but go beyond wealth creation, as through continued interaction it shapes ideas, ways of thinking and behavior. The impact of this interaction is reflected at all levels of society, as foreign ways become adopted and adapted by, and embedded in, local culture. These changes are endless and far-reaching, including literature and arts, the way cities are planned and new buildings are designed, modes of governance, dietary patterns, appreciation and protection of the natural environment, and many more. Opening borders stimulates mutual exchange, but is certainly not without risks. This risk was painfully demonstrated by the reaction to the recent Ebola outbreak in West-Africa.

The opportunities and challenges for the relationship between Africa and Europe, created, sustained and intensified through trade, are far from clear and deserve further and greater attention. In the

ninth edition of the symposium of the Ghent Africa Platform (GAPSYM9), we invite papers from all disciplines touching upon the impact of trade, and more generally economic globalization, on Africa and African society.

Potential topics include, but are certainly not limited to, analyzing the impact of

- the diverse effects of treaties with Africa;
- trade or development policies conceived by nation states, multilateral organizations or NGO's;
- specific economic mechanisms such as micro-financing and fair trade;
- issues of land grabbing;
- the proliferation of informal vs formal trade;

on:

- political policy making and urban development planning;
- changes in the built or natural environment;
- physical and psychosocial well-being, particularly of vulnerable groups or minority populations;
- changing socio-cultural patterns, behavior and conceptions of modernity;
- the role and responsibility between trade partners, the state, and private citizens;
- the reactions and responses within different groups of societal actors.

Contributions can explore these effects both in relation to the African context and to the European one, and take a historical perspective or focus on contemporary practices and issues. Thus, GAPSYM9 seeks to critically investigate and scrutinize the complex interactions (both human and material) that are brought about by trade with Africa, in order to better understand and judge the opportunities and the challenges it offers for the future.

Important dates

1 August – deadline abstract submission (maximum 500 words, excluding references)

15 September – notification of acceptance

15 November – deadline full paper submission (maximum 15 pages, excluding references)

17 December - symposium

Abstract submission

Proposals for presentations or posters should not exceed 500 words (excluding references) and should be written in English or French. Abstracts should be submitted before 1 August 2015 to the GAP secretariat (Gap@UGent.be), mentioning "GAPSYM9 – proposal name". Posters do NOT have to stay within the topic of the symposium. Through these poster presentations GAP seeks to give an overview of all current, Africa-related projects and doctoral research at the Ghent University Association. By 15 September the scientific committee will notify which papers have been accepted. The posters (A0 format-portrait) should be delivered to the GAP secretariat (Mrs. Dominique Godfroid, Ghent University – ICRH – K4 – 6th Floor – De Pintelaan 185 – 9000 Gent), by Monday, 14 December 2015.

Discussants

Each presenter will be asked to act as a discussant for one of the other presentations in the same session. Discussants provide the opportunity to give more in-depth feedback to presenters and encourage lively discussion. As a discussant, you are expected to thoroughly read the paper beforehand and motivate what, in your opinion, is the biggest contribution of the paper and the biggest weakness. In addition, you are required to prepare one question to open the discussion. You are not expected to prepare any slides. Papers will be allocated by the scientific committee and sent to discussants at least one week before the start of the conference.

Best paper award

An award will be given based on the evaluation of the full-text paper by the scientific committee and the quality of the presentation. Nominees will be notified before the conference, and awards will be handed out during the closing ceremony.

Special issue

The 2016 autumn edition of our international and double-blind peer-reviewed journal Afrika Focus will largely be devoted to the theme of GAPSYM9. Regular speakers as well as guest speakers are invited to submit their papers for publication in this special issue of Afrika Focus. The deadline for submitting the manuscript is 1 January 2016. If the paper is accepted, it will be published in the autumn of 2016.

GAP secretariat

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