

E. Nwokedi*

A large number of existing literature on France's economic relations with francophone Africa recognises the dependence of the latter group of states on this erstwhile colonial power.¹ Dependency, as it has very often been evoked within the context of the North-South dichotomy, is not peculiar to the francophone states. However, it is generally acknowledged that no other ex-colonial power in Africa surpassed France in meticulously structuring and institutionalising relations with the former colonies on their attainment of independence. Hence, the comprehensive bilateral and multilateral co-operation accords signed by France and the francophone African states (except Guinea) in 1960 are thought to perpetuate, more to the detriment of the latter states, the unequal division of labour which was the dominant feature in their bilateral relations during the colonial era. This scenario was completed when, at French initiative, the same group of states was associated with the European Economic Community (E.E.C.) through the Younde Convention.

Considered from the perspective of the current debate on the need for a new international economic order, the web of institutionalised relationships just highlighted formed a part of the sub-systemic component of the 'old' international economic order. Under successive Presidents, France has manifested an extraordinary zeal in promoting the quest for a more 'equitable' international economic order. Recent trends in France's African policy reveal a definite and deliberate search for recognition as an undisputed and privileged interlocutor between the industrialised west and the rest of the continent on these issues of mutual interest.² Drawing then from the prevailing pattern and structure of economic relations between France and some francophone African states where 'privileged relationships' with the former still persist, this paper will examine the extent to which France has sought to translate its concern over these issues into concrete actions. It will equally examine the possibility that 'generalised co-development' as a new model of North-South interaction proposed by President Francois Mitterand could represent a more meaningful, indeed, a more beneficial relationship for the co-operating partners. In the face of keen competition for access to scarce raw materials and markets between member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (O.E.C.D.), and in so far as these states prefer an elusive common policy to effective unilateral readjustments, concessions granted by France to the African states in their bilateral/multilateral economic arrangements are more likely to reinforce rather than restructure significantly the existing *status quo*.

Co-operation and Generalised Co-Development: Models of Interaction

Being central to this paper, the concepts of co-operation and generalised co-development merit a closer examination. Generally, 'co-operation' is seen as consisting of much more than the network of links between two or more consenting

partners. It is at once a philosophy and a gamut of special relationships between France and, specifically, the sub-Saharan afro-malagasy states almost all of which had participated in the short-lived France community (1958 — 1960) and which still share with France distinct patterns of cultural similitude (language, education).³ Although efforts had been made in the past and continue to be made by the French government to expand co-operation to other Third World countries, care is taken to emphasise that expansion will in no way dilute or compromise the intensity and intimacy of 'co-operation relations' with the sub-Saharan African states. Indeed, the specificity of Franco-African co-operation remains distinguishable from any other since, as has been rightly pointed out by Nouaille-Degorce:

Co-operation accords signed as from 1970 with non-francophone countries belong more to the realm of general politics of good relations (with such countries) than to that of a *real extension of French co-operation* (emphasis mine).⁴

Generalised co-development, however, is hypothetically the ultimate goal of a new international economic order. Enunciated on President Mitterand's official trips to Mexico and Africa, it is his perception of what ought to emerge as the dominant pattern in North-South relations.⁵ As a structure of interaction, it is expected to belie the present "fallacious and sterile distinction between developed and under-developed countries",⁶ by emphasising their perceptible complementarities. Given this option, one sees the recent reforms of the French co-operation ministry described by co-operation minister, Jean-Pierre Cot as a "decolonisation of co-operation"⁷ as a movement towards the attainment of this objective. What were the discernible rationale, in the first place, for the co-operation ethic?

(i) Between Altruism and Historical Responsibility

A content analysis of French official publications and pronouncements on this subject reveals a conceptualisation of co-operation as a necessary machinery for economic assistance from France to the African states concerned. The common denominator permeating the reports of the officially-sponsored studies on co-operation (Jeanneney, Gorse, Pignon, Abelin etc), is a justification of this arrangement on grounds either of 'international moral duty' or of 'international solidarity'.⁸ To some like Taton, co-operation expresses a certain "... spirit of generosity towards (African) countries who had shared the life of the (French) nation".

Doubtless, France is well-placed as an industrialised economy to offer assistance to the sub-Saharan francophone states ten of whom belong to, indeed constitute a third of, the 31-nation club of least developed countries designated by the United Nations.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the justification of co-operation on humanitarian or altruistic grounds has a double significance. Firstly, it serves to condition the African states into accepting France as a benevolent donor. Secondly, it is a direct appeal on the moral conscience of a minority but critical French domestic opinion — cartierist or not — which questions the logic of such assistance especially where this has tended in the past to favour the elites in such assisted countries.

**TABLE I. FRANCE'S EXPORT TO AND IMPORT FROM SELECTED AFRICAN STATES
1975 — 1979 (MILLION FRENCH FRANCS)**

TO AND FROM	1975		1976		1977		1978		1979	
	EXPORT	IMPORT	EXPORT	IMPORT	EXPORT	IMPORT	EXPORT	IMPORT	EXPORT	IMPORT
IVORY COAST	171 ²	1625	2362	2321	3259	3782	3813	3269	4723	3336
SENEGAL	987	1019	1364	1224	1464	1346	1395	898	1655	1035
NIGER	270	234	299	375	464	425	589	584	839	1201
CAMEROUN	1029	638	1257	796	1578	1058	1884	1293	2355	1324
GABON	1439	1060	1877	1411	2024	1820	1235	1600	1327	2053

Source: "Commerce Extérieur de la France", Official Statistics of the Centre Français du Commerce Extérieur (C.F.C.E.), Paris (French Foreign Trade Centre)

But the morality of assistance itself is directly related to the question of historical responsibility brought to the foreground by the socialist countries. If France as an ex-colonial power is deemed responsible for the initial underdevelopment of these countries, runs the argument, it is only natural that it should seek to bear the restitutive cross gallantly. This philosophical argumentation masks the real essence of co-operation.

(ii) Strategic Choice and Interests

As a zone of 'privileged relationships' by virtue of the co-operation accords, the sub-Saharan francophone states offer France immense opportunities. First, a steady supply of raw materials is guaranteed to French industries and a ready market assured for its industrial goods and machinery. Since transactions between these partners take place within the franc zone losses occasioned by fluctuations in the rate of exchange are eliminated. The rule of 'limitless convertibility' which governs the operations of the franc zone encourages French entrepreneurs first to invest and subsequently to repatriate their profits to the metropolis without hindrance. The pursuit of co-operation relations appears then to be a deliberate strategy for promoting French industrial expansion. This point will be discussed later in the paper.

But it should not be assumed that France operates with very reluctant partners. Although it has been asserted that the acceptance by the African states to abide by the terms of the generality of the co-operation accords was the only condition on which independence was granted,¹¹ the scarcity of benevolent donors was soon to convince them on the importance of close economic co-operation with France. At least, the experiences of Guinea and Mali — the so-called 'intransigent nationalists' — are there to serve as a lesson to others: the consequences of a spectacular rebuff of France without clearly thought out alternatives are bound to be unpleasant. Even with the clamours by these states in the early 1970s for a reform of the co-operation agreements, the basic position that their long-term hopes for economic development seemed inextricably tied to French assistance was not called into question. Thus, the so-called 'Ivorian miracle' while it lasted was accomplished as a result of the deliberate choice of Ivorian leaders to 'assume a dependent situation' vis-a-vis France dictated by 'existential realism'.¹² As President Houphouët-Boigny once remarked:

Ivory Coast came out of political dependence in friendship with the former coloniser. We equally hope to come out of economic dependence not in bitterness (*haine*), but on the contrary, in friendship, confidence and in close and durable co-operation with all men of good-will.¹³

Indeed, it is partly because these states perceive co-operation as an indispensable mechanism for their economic development that some of them have manifested outright hostility towards recent French efforts to expand co-operation to the non-francophone areas; an expansion which they feared might jeopardise the enormous attention which France lavishes on them. Thus, Sedar Senghor as head of state of Senegal was to complain that France was becoming "more dynamic in Nigeria than in the black francophone countries".¹⁴ What has been the dominant pattern of co-operation relations and why has 'expansion' become a necessity?

Dominant Patterns of Interaction

An analysis of trade links between France and its major sub-Saharan francophone trading partners reveals, with minor exceptions, a general upward trend in the value of both imports and exports within the period under review (Table I). Again, with one or two exceptions, notably in the case of trade with Gabon from 1978 to 1979, the overall balance of trade for this period has been in favour of France. What is even more striking is the percentage share of each of these African states of the total volume of French commercial transactions. Thus, commercial relations between France and these countries represent, with the exception of trade with the Ivory Coast from 1970 to 1977, less than one percent in each case and year of overall French global trade transactions (Table II).¹⁵

TABLE III

PERCENTAGE SHARE OF EACH COUNTRY IN THE TOTAL VOLUME OF FRENCH EXPORT-IMPORT

Country	% of total volume for									
	1975		1976		1977		1978		1979	
	Export	Import	Export	Import	Export	Import	Export	Import	Export	Import
Ivory Coast	0.78	0.70	0.89	0.75	1.04	1.09	1.10	0.89	1.13	0.73
Senegal	0.44	0.44	0.51	0.40	0.47	0.39	0.40	0.24	0.40	0.23
Niger	0.12	0.10	0.11	0.12	0.15	0.12	0.17	0.16	0.20	0.26
Cameroun	0.46	0.27	0.47	0.26	0.51	0.32	0.55	0.35	0.56	0.29
Gabon	0.64	0.46	0.70	0.46	0.65	0.53	0.36	0.43	0.32	0.45

Source: *Ibid.*

As small as these percentages are, France remains the dominant trading partner of each of these countries. Over the years, this French dominance is increasingly being challenged by other West European powers and the United States. Nonetheless, France remains both the major supplier and customer. The significance of trade with France for the African states can be gleaned from the percentages which this trade represents within the global commercial transactions of each African state. Thus, for example, for both the Ivory Coast and the Republic of Niger, France's share of their total import/export transactions is as follows:

TABLE IV

FRANCE'S EXPORT/IMPORT TRANSACTIONS WITH IVORY COAST AND NIGER

Country	Importation (%)				Exportation (%)			
	1976	1977	1978	1979	1976	1977	1978	1979
Ivory Coast	38.4	39.4	39.3	36.5	25.5	25.7	23.4	23.9
Niger	1974	1975	1976	1977	1974	1975	1976	1977
	37.1	30.4	43.4	51.9	54.5	63.7	54.0	45.9

Source: *Ibid.*

It has been suggested that the large proportion of imports from France in the case of Ivory Coast and, by extrapolation, in that of other francophone countries, is due to the fact that the "most import substitution industries (in these countries) are directly linked to French parent companies"¹⁶ This ensures that most components used in the manufacturing process come from France.

An analysis of the structure of commerce between each state and France brings out more poignantly the asymmetrical pattern of their trade relations. Whereas primary raw materials (coffee, groundnut, timber, cocoa, uranium and oil)¹⁷ constitute, from one African state to the other, between 80 per cent to 90 per cent of total commodity exports to France the bulk of imports from the same country is made up of heavy machinery, vehicles and other manufactured consumer goods. Trade in raw materials almost always compromises the chances of the emergence of an indigenous manufacturing sector in these countries and this is in addition to the well-known attendant vagaries in the prices of these raw commodities in the international market.

Financial and technical exchanges have not yielded spectacular dividends. Following representations made by the African states, the operations of the franc zone were somewhat modified in the 1972 and 1973 reforms of the central banks of the central and west African states respectively. Much of the reforms (for example, the Africanisation of the banks' personnel) was cosmetic in so far as the fundamental issues in the financial relations, viz fixed parity, limitless convertibility and compulsory deposits, were never called into question.¹⁸ However, a significant reform must be the disposition granted to these central banks to freely place 35 per cent (west) and 20 per cent (central) of their external reserves in any country other than France. Even this is somewhat circumscribed by the proviso that, in the event of a run on the reserve standing of these African states, these minority percentages placed outside the franc zone must first be exhausted. The current difficulties of the metropolitan franc which have necessitated three devaluations in one year are eloquent testimonies to the kind of vulnerabilities to which these African states are susceptible of their balance-of-payments' positions.

French aid, whether or not disbursed through the investment fund for social and economic development (FIDES), aid and co-operation fund (FAC) or the central office for economic co-operation (CCCE), is usually tied to purchases from French industries or from their subsidiaries in other francophone countries. Indeed, the technical formation of indigenous Africans which has gradually replaced the so-called 'substitution co-operation' (management by French nationals) and is often seen as a show-piece of the transfer of technology from France to the African states appears a costly exercise. First, this mechanism guarantees ready employment to thousands of young French school leavers whose job opportunities back home diminish continuously under the prevailing economic recession. More important, however, is the fact that whereas in the case of the Ivory Coast, the number of French technical assistants to this country has risen from 1,346 in 1960 to 3,390 in 1974 costing France an average of 2.2 billion franc c.f.a. per annum, the corresponding cost to the Ivorian government has risen from 1.3 billion franc C.F.A. in 1960 to 12 billion franc C.F.A. in 1974 as its share of stipends to the technical co-operants.¹⁹ As salaries, much of this money could freely be transferred to their country of origin, France. In fact, former co-operation minister, Yves Bourges once claimed, in a bid to reassure domestic critics of co-operation, that serious studies on the advantages of this arrangement:

estimate that 80 per cent of the sum granted as aid to the Third World finds its way back to the donor country in the form of salaries, purchases from its firms, reinvestments of personal savings and the profits of the enterprises.²⁰

It is clear then that the crux of the matter between the co-operating partners is not so much reciprocity as its nature which clearly operates to the disadvantage of the African states.

Expansion and the New Order

Much of the analysis made so far on the economic aspect of co-operation relations has shown a clear French dominance even if this has somewhat slackened to the advantage of other E.E.C. partners. Either by sheer coincidence or by design the bid by France to expand co-operation arose at the same time as the African states were calling for reforms in these 'privileged' co-operation relations. Considered on their individual merits some of the francophone states (Chad, Upper Volta and Mali for example) have proved, at least in the short-term, more economic liabilities than assets. Apart from the political instability which has jeopardised meaningful economic activities in the first two countries, the severe drought which affected all the Saharan states was a supplementary clog on the wheel of economic progress.

Under the circumstance, the immense potentialities represented by the 'giant' Nigeria in terms of mineral resources and market density could not have left France indifferent especially as, in the midst of an unprecedented oil boom in 1974, the spending propensity of the former country was as gargantuan as its petroleum revenues. Under Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, France was to accelerate the overtures towards the anglophone countries initiated by the late President Georges Pompidou. But the extension of co-operation to these areas which, *stricto sensu*, meant the normal good relations between two countries, was not different in its content and approach from the usual pattern of relation between the developed and the developing states.

While this expansion was being undertaken, the French government was playing down the seething discontent in the francophone countries over co-operations. It was being put out that after fourteen years of operation it was only normal that these co-operation accords should be revised. More concretely, the grievances of the African states centred both on the loss of control over their resources and on the nature and content of French aid and technical assistance to them. For challenging the monopoly exercised over its uranium deposits by the French Atomic Energy Agency, which also fixed prices, the government of Niger came under pressures from France.²¹ Sedar Senghor, the ex-president of Senegal was so embittered about the quality of French technical assistance that he charged that instead of sending experienced men, France

sends us, more often than not, boy scouts, that is to say, young people who come to black Africa by curiosity and to while away the period of their military service or, at best, in order to acquire experience.²²

Although the new co-operation accords in force have been welcomed because they conform more to "the normal principles of international law guiding the rapports between sovereign states";²³ these do not, evidently, represent the finality in franco-african relations. They have been seen, according to the 1975 Abelin Report on franco-african co-operation as a "constitutive element of the new international economic order demanded by the Third World".²⁴

Yet, in spite of these assertions, it is clear that the new accords do not meet the expectations of the African states. France's continuous quest for a more beneficial economic order is an explicit recognition of both the legitimacy of the demands of the African states and of the glaring shortcomings of its own unilateral approach.

Paradoxically, these French quests for a new order seem to suggest that this country would go no further in seeking comprehensive accommodation with its African partners so long as the global community is unable to agree on the objectives of and the modalities for attaining this new arrangement.

On what then should one base optimism that generalised co-development will not only be achieved but will, at the same time, meet the aspirations of the francophone states and, by implication, of the Third World countries better than co-operation has done so far?

Much of the response must remain hypothetical since no definite pattern or direction has been imprinted on this new objective. Nevertheless, it has to be realised that the motivating factor is, as with co-operation, the economic self-interest of France. The ability of this country to concretise generalised co-development must be seen as a function of varying and often conflicting variables. Foremost is the political will of the present French administration to embark on this 'original' path to developmental relations with the Third World countries, a path that is certainly strewn with ample scepticism if not outright hostility from other industrialised nations. At present, France seems to be speaking with too many voices on this issue as ideological squabbles within the ruling socialist party impede substantial reforms in favour of the African states.²⁵ Although President Mitterand is convinced that "aiding the Third World is to aid oneself overcome the present economic crisis", the crisis itself imposes severe constraints on the capacity of a middle industrial power to effect, unilaterally, a satisfactory outcome given the nature of the challenge.

The francophone African states, or the Third World countries in general, the supposed beneficiaries of the envisaged framework, may be sceptical about this new initiative in so far as unilateral concession from France or those granted them under the ACP — EEC Lome accords fell short of expectations despite contrary views expressed by some European leaders.²⁶ The sad fact, however, is that there has been no concrete evidence so far to suggest that France is about to abandon the policy of selective bilateralism — 'bilateralisme a la certe'²⁷ — which by permitting France to enjoy the best of both worlds, contradicts its quest for a new international economic order.

It seems clear then that the attainment of this lofty objective will, as in the past, involve painful negotiations between the North and the South, between France and the African states; a scenario that perpetuates the existing *status quo*.²⁸ In any case, the final outcome of such French initiatives should, in order to be meaningful, enjoy universal acceptability and applicability. Such an outcome is not guaranteed in advance. Given then, the present situation of hazy propositions, the other end of the tunnel is not yet in sight.

Conclusion

††The dominant pattern of co-operation relations between France and the francophone African states operates, even after extensive reforms of some of its mechanisms, more to the advantage of the former. The displeasures expressed by the African states about certain aspects of this arrangement, indeed, their acceptance of piecemeal reforms from French authorities only confirm a general

willingness to go along with this French renovative approach. This endorsement is dictated, no doubt, by self-interest and by the fact that these states equate unfamiliar alternative arrangements with uncertainty.

French efforts to expand co-operation indicate an awareness that co-operation, within the very narrow francophone conceptualisation, imposes limitations on the industrial expansion of this European power. But its proposition that generalised co-development could and should constitute a new framework of relations reconciling at once the interests of the francophone states with those of other Third World countries on the one hand, and the aspirations of both the industrialised and the developing nations on the other, remains at the formulatory level. At present, nothing permits a confirmation that, once achieved, the structures of this new framework will constitute a 'revolution' in franco-African relations.

While the search for a comprehensive and more lasting global arrangement continues, it may be worthwhile for countries like France who are committed to this outcome to demonstrate their credibility by granting, even at the risk of hurting their domestic economic programmes, trade, financial and indusro-technical concessions to their African partners beyond the optimum limits stipulated in the present unsatisfactory bilateral/multilateral arrangements between them. In accepting this option as a moral and a practical challenge, the industrial 'giants' would unwillingly be laying the foundation of a more 'equitable' global order. After all, the global economic order is but the sum of these myriad bilateral/multilateral transactions.

1. See, for example, Bourgi, A; 1979 *La Politique Francaise de Cooperation en Afrique: le Cas du Senegal* Editions LGDJ Paris; also, Joseph, R; 1976 "The Gaullist Legacy: Patterns of French Neo-colonialism" *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 6, May — August 1976, pp 4-13 Sheffield.
2. See, Nwokedi, E; 1982 "Franco-African Summits: A New Instrument for France's African Strategy?" *The World Today* Vol. 38 No. 12 December 1982 p. 482 London.
3. The ex-Belgian colonies (Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi), being French-speaking countries have been gradually but systematically absorbed into the co-operation ethic. For a fuller analysis of this concept, see, Nouille-Degorce B 1980 "La Politique Francaise de Cooperation avec les Etats Africains et Malgache au Sud du Sahara: 1958 — 1978" Unpublished Doctorat d'Etat Thesis University of Bordeaux pp 10 — 11
4. *Ibid* p 59
5. See, *Le Monde* 21 October 1981 p 3 Paris; also, *Jeune Afrique* 2 June 1982 p 24 Paris
6. President Mitterand's speech as reported in *Le Monde* 21 October 1981 p 3 Paris
7. According to the Minister, this means in essence, a restructuring of his ministry from one exclusively responsible for relations with France's former colonies to that responsible for relations with the Third World. See, interview in *Jeune Afrique* 4 August 1982 p 73 Paris.
8. See, "Rapport Abelin 1975" in *Europe Outremer* No. 543 April, 1975, Paris; also, Nouille-Degorce *op. cit.* pp 266-268.
9. Taton R 1977 "Refaire de la Cooperation une Grande Cause Nationale" "*Europe Outremer* No. 564 January, 1977 p. 11 Paris
10. For a list of the 31 states which attended the Paris Conference for the least developed countries (LDCs) in September, 1981 see, *Le Monde* 2 September, 1981 Paris, P. 3.
11. Moshe Amni-Oz 1977 "Les Imperatifs de la Politique Militaire Francaise en Afrique Noire a l'Epoque de la Decolonisation" *Revue Francaise d'Etudes Politiques Africaines*, No. 134, February, 1977, Paris, p. 80.

The Producer in the Palm Oil Export of South-Eastern Nigeria in the Era of 'Legitimate Commerce'

Njoku*

By the 1840s, when the export of slaves from south-eastern Nigeria had, for all practical purposes, ceased, palm produce had emerged as the dominant export of the region. The new trade ultimately turned out to be far more lucrative and positive in its impact than its predecessor. And from very humble beginnings, within a matter of a few decades, Nigeria attained world leadership in the export of palm produce, more than three-fourths of it coming from south-eastern Nigeria. In the quinquennium 1865—69, for instance, Nigeria's export of palm oil and kernel stood at 5,288 and 11,871 tons, respectively. By the quinquennium 1906 — 1910, the figures had rocketed to 70,435 and 143,301 tons.¹

The problems posed by the transition from the old trade to the new and the strategies by which the problems were tackled have attracted considerable attention in the literature — as far as they affected the European supercargoes and firms and the African coastal middlemen of the Niger Delta and Old Calabar.² However, the same type of attention is yet to be extended to the farmers who did the primary production and without whose sweat the orchestrated 'achievements' of the Europeans and the African middlemen on the coast would have been impossible.

Two main reasons could be suggested for the omission or neglect. One is the absence of documentary evidence to encourage the attempt. The production of palm produce was done in the hinterland far out of the reach of the Europeans on the coast, who could have left written information on the producers. When the British colonial administration was established in the hinterland, it was soon embroiled with the trading firms in an idle debate about the *pros* and *cons* of mechanised means of palm produce production *vis-a-vis* the indigenous system. In the process, insufficient attention was paid to the farmers' actual modes of production.

The second, and perhaps more important reason, is that there was a general belief in influential European circles that the production of palm oil and palm kernel was easy and created no problems to the indigenous farmers. In 1926, Allan Mcphee, regarded as a pioneer authority on British West African economic history, asserted that only a small amount of labour was necessary to prepare palm oil and get it to waiting British ships.³ Twenty-three years later, the United Africa Company (U.A.C.) added to the matter the weight of its eminent position when, in its *Statistical and Economic Review*, it asserted that

the production of palm oil and palm kernels requires little or no labour other than that involved in gathering the fruit, expressing the oil and breaking the nuts to extract kernels.⁴

Although most writers these days no longer share the opinions of Mcphee and the U.A.C. on this matter, it does not appear that sufficient efforts are being made to investigate the strategies by which the indigenous farmers were able to effect such massive production of exports. This is the issue this paper intends to explore with focus on the adaptations and innovations which the producers made to increase production. It argues that in responding to the changing economy

*Lecturer, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.