

A Dialogue on Development Cooperation with Papa Amadou Sarr

Papa Amadou Saar is currently an Executive Director of the Mobilization, Partnerships and Communication Department at Agence Française de Développement (AFD) in Paris and in the past has been associated with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Dakar, at the OECD Development Centre in Paris, and at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle.

Development Cooperation Review (DCR): You have worked on development from all angles of triangular cooperation- from recipient to donor; as a minister in Senegal, or through your work at the Gates Foundation and multilateral organisations, and now at the French Development Agency (FDA). What lessons have you learned and what insights have you gained regarding the design of effective development strategies?

Papa Amadou Sarr: Well, that's a great question. Over the last 20 years working in France, the UK, the US, and Senegal, I've learned that development must consider both sides of the story. You can't just copy and paste what you think is best for people in developing nations. You need to account for their needs, particularities, specificities, history, and aspirations.

For instance, a few months ago I was talking to European ministers of French Cooperation about climate change and oil and gas exploitation in Senegal. They suggested we shouldn't develop oil and gas and should focus on renewable energies

instead. But I told them, you can't just tell people what to do. Look at France, the UK, Italy, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia — they have all developed their economies through oil and gas. Why prevent a country like Senegal or Nigeria from doing the same for their development?

Of course, one has to care about the environment and biodiversity, but also care about people's lives, education, healthcare, universities, SMEs, and industrialisation. You need more resources, and while you shouldn't harm the environment, you can develop new tools and methods to mitigate environmental impact. You can't come as a foreign or development professional and dictate actions. In many cases, people in developing nations have learned, studied, and experienced the same education systems. They return home to implement what they've learned for their own countries' development. Learning from experiences is good, but building from local realities and aspirations is key.

This is one of the essential learnings I've experienced. Working with the OECD, the Gates Foundation, and in governments, I've seen how people often prescribe solutions without considering local realities. It's not

about dictating solutions but understanding and working with local contexts.

DCR: It's becoming clear that all institutions' mentalities need to be revised, and your broad experience positions you well to help guide the various stakeholders. What are the key considerations or strategies that should inform development frameworks?

Papa Amadou Sarr: One key learning is the importance of institutional capacity building. Development partners, especially in the US, often bring projects with foreign technicians and experts who implement them. When these projects end, the local capacity to maintain them is often lacking. So, transferring capacities and knowledge to build local expertise is crucial.

BP has trained Senegalese engineers with MBAs in Senegal, France, or the UK. Once the projects end, these trained individuals can continue the work. Another focus should be on collective decision-making. Projects often fail because they're decided in capitals like Paris or Washington without involving local implementers. Involving local administration and the population ensures better appropriation and sustainability.

Additionally, considering economic, social, historical, and political aspects in the operational framework is vital. Among development partners, those that succeed are embedded within local ministries. For instance, USAID works within ministries, making fewer distinctions between their contractors and local officials. Japanese projects are also effective because they implement projects with local partners while controlling resources and procedures.

European projects often come with restrictive conditions, which limit local appropriation. So, taking local capacities and expertise into account is essential for sustainable development.

DCR: The more players involved, the harder it can become to implement projects. How long should a development plan last to be effective?

Papa Amadou Sarr: The right timing for a development plan is around 25 years. When we developed the plan for Senegal, we advised the president that sustainable development requires a long-term vision, similar to Singapore or South Korea. Shorter periods, like eight years, are often disrupted by changes in leadership and governance. So, a plan should last at least 25 to 30 years, with strategies and action plans renewed every five years.

DCR: Triangular cooperation has emerged as a promising approach to contribute to the SDGs, potentially outperforming multilateral or bilateral approaches. Based on your experiences, what have you learned from triangular cooperation? What are its benefits and challenges, especially in a diverse continent such as Africa?

Papa Amadou Sarr: Triangular cooperation allows for quicker and more effective development initiatives by combining resources and expertise from different regions. It avoids the lengthy processes associated with multilateral organisations and brings in concessional resources or grants that can make a significant impact. So, I deeply believe in the potential of triangular cooperation for achieving development goals.

With regard to Africa's specificities, you cannot have a one-size-fits-all approach. Depending on the countries, you have some in the Sahel where they have basic needs in education, healthcare, or higher education. Then you have where the focus is on structural transformation, industry, processing raw materials, oil and gas, like in Senegal and Nigeria, not to mention the different needs of advanced economies such as Egypt, Morocco, or South Africa. So, the focus shifts depending on the region of the continent.

If you have to prioritise, I would say that education, higher education, and vocational or professional training are crucial, as is agriculture, not just the primary sector but also processing and exporting refined products. Finally, the digital economy, which is booming and conducive to job creation, including e-health, agricultural tech, startups, blockchain, AI, and other new technologies to improve youth employment and women's economic empowerment. Focusing on these sectors will create jobs, growth, and improve living conditions.

For me, it's crucial that this model is consistent, well-deployed, and effectively publicised. We believe in leveraging our resources and maintaining strong bilateral relationships with governments and partners. Multilateral and bilateral agencies prefer dealing with familiar partners due to their established project pipelines. Over the past year, I have faced reluctance to work with new private sector donors, despite managing a 12 billion annual investment in developing nations, with 50 per cent allocated to Africa.

My colleagues often question our priorities, but even President Macron of

France has advocated for more triangular cooperation which allowed me to develop, deploy, and establish partnerships with Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Abu Dhabi. Recently, we finalised a 70 million partnership with Qatar for educational development in Senegal, Pakistan, and the Palestinian territories. Such triangular partnerships and grants enable us to achieve our goals.

While our 12 billion annual budget is substantial, the demand from countries is 50 billion. By combining our 12 billion with additional funds from partners like the Gates Foundation, Mastercard Foundation, Qatar, and Abu Dhabi Fund, we can effectively increase our capacity to 20 billion. It's a smart strategy for leveraging and catalysing efforts from various sectors.

Today, there is a replenishment of Gavi in Paris, with numerous heads of state, the private sector, and the Gavi Alliance, which has been instrumental in vaccine distribution globally. The collaboration between the private sector and US-based philanthropists like Bloomberg, Gates, and the Bezos Fund has been transformative. We must continue tapping into these resources to maximise our impact.

Triangular cooperation should include the private sector and major foundations. It's crucial not to view traditional donors as only from Europe and the US. Emerging donors like Turkey, South Africa, India, Brazil, and especially China, are also important to consider.

DCR: Within the realm of development efforts aimed at empowering youth and women, what specific measures or programmes do you consider essential to address the challenges faced by these

groups and foster their participation in sustainable development initiatives?

Papa Amadou Sarr: Africa is experiencing a youth boom. For instance, in my country, around 200,000 youths enter the job market every year. Across the continent, the figure reaches approximately 20 million. To empower these youths and women, we need good training programmes, both university-level and vocational or professional training.

For women, it's crucial to ensure they have equal training opportunities, access to property, credit, guarantee schemes, and the ability to inherit.

For instance, I made a speech defending women's rights, arguing that it's unacceptable for women to be relegated to a secondary status, without access to land, inheritance, and other rights. This is a reality in many sub-Saharan African countries, especially Francophone ones. Women need the right financial tools. Many youth and women lack the guarantees required for bank loans. In Senegal, we created a programme offering \$50 million in loans and grants annually to youth and women entrepreneurs without requiring bank guarantees. This has helped create over 200,000 entrepreneurs in various sectors. This government support is essential.

Increasingly, donors have recognised that they can assist women and youth entrepreneurs without competing against traditional banks. Historically, the Bretton Woods consensus suggested that governments should not provide funding, leaving it to the market. However, market failures exist, and banks often do not lend to the poor or to women who lack collateral. Governments, along with multilateral and

bilateral donors, now understand this gap.

One of the reasons I am here is that President Macron entrusted me with the Choose Africa program. This initiative supports youth and women entrepreneurs with 1 billion in funding, targeting ten pilot countries, including Benin, Senegal, and Togo. We provide these governments with 30 to 100 million to establish and promote entities that support entrepreneurship. Similarly, the African Development Bank is advancing the Youth Entrepreneurship Investment Bank to achieve the same goals.

DCR: As someone with extensive experience in governmental and institutional roles, what role do you believe development banks play in driving positive change within economies and societies? Do you think there's a need for reform within these institutions, and if so, what areas would you prioritise for improvement?

Papa Amadou Sarr: There are ongoing calls for reforms in commercial banks. Larry Summers made a report published during the annual meeting of the World Bank and IMF, and President Macron has also called for reforms of international financial institutions.

Discussions are centred around the membership of multilateral banks, capital increases, and delegating funding to development partners like the African Development Bank. Development banks play a counter-cyclical role, being crucial after crises, such as post-war reconstructions or the Covid-19 pandemic. They are regularly involved in important meetings to improve coordination and collaboration, such as the G7, G20, BRICS, COP, and the UN's SDGs meetings.

Locally, more development banks are being created, like the Rwanda Development Bank and the Nigerian Grand Bank, to address key sectors like climate, energy, education, and healthcare. I support this because we need a mix of tools, instruments, and funding. More collaboration and alignment with government priorities are crucial.

We need to adapt and no longer impose prescriptive programmes and doctrines from Washington, Paris, or London. We should respond to local needs, such as restoring beaches in Bali or building roads in Kenya and Senegal.

DCR: Considering the geographical impact of development cooperation, how important is a place-based approach for financial aid and resources? Should initiatives prioritise urban areas, rural development, or strike a balance between the two to prevent issues like mass urban migration?

Papa Amadou Sarr: It's about balancing both. Most people in sub-Saharan Africa

and Asia live in rural areas, so focusing solely on urban development will lead to rural exodus. Governments need to develop rural areas by providing water, electricity, roads, housing, and local agricultural development. If people in rural areas have access to these, they are less likely to move to urban areas.

If people migrate to cities without adequate housing and infrastructure, we risk creating slums and ghettos. This exacerbates internal migration issues and increases urban insecurity. While there's much talk about migration from Africa to Europe or the US, the reality is that 90% of migration is within Africa itself — people moving from Congo to Senegal, or Senegal to Morocco, for example.

Therefore, it is crucial to collaborate with government partners and local leaders to design programmes that address the needs of both urban and rural areas. This balanced approach can help manage migration and ensure sustainable development.