A critical discourse analysis on the concept of partnership in AU-EU relations

Safi Sabuni
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Abstract

Recent history on global north and south relations demonstrate years of inequality in the practice of development cooperation – a field often criticized for its Eurocentric ‘donor-receiver’ approach. In 2021, the African Union and European Union set out to renew their 20 yearlong partnership, and a new discourse of “partnership of equals” has been strongly promoted by the EU, suggesting a change of approach. This study analyses the EU’s Strategy for Africa through a critical discourse analysis (CDA). Deriving from development theory the study applies Fairclough’s three-dimensional model to better understand the concept of partnership and the relations of power. The findings suggest a problematic mismatch between the language used and the promise of equality. In addition to CDA, semi-structured interviews are carried out with young experts and coordinators who currently implement projects of the partnership and who contributes to this research by sharing their experiences and expectations.

**Key words:** critical discourse analysis, development communication, partnership, discourse, European Union, African Union, AU-EU partnership.
1. Introduction

The 6th African Union - European Union (AU-EU) Summit is scheduled to take place in 2021. This summit brings together the Heads of States from both continents to discuss future strategic relations in policy areas such as development, migration, peace, and environmental policy. The summits are both moments for negotiations about the future and a reminder and indication for how far the relation of the two continents have developed. Preparatory work for the summit has been carried out in 2020 and communication towards the public has been made in terms of press releases, social media posts and discussions regarding the partnership (European Commission 2020b; African Union 2020). In addition, The AU and EU have had bilateral meetings to prepare for the Summit that takes place every three years. The new EU College of Commissioners have made notable changes to their approach on development cooperation. The Commissioner’s first trip outside of the EU went to visit the African Union, a priority she refers to as a “natural choice”.

“When I came into office, I chose for the very first trip outside the European Union, to visit the African Union, and it was a natural choice. It was a natural choice and it was a clear message, because we are not just neighbours, we are natural partners.”
- Ursula von der Leyen, European Commission at the State of the Union Address 2020 (European Commission 2020c)

The very notion of ‘natural’ - a term connected to pure and organic - is the very contrary to how one would imagine Africa and Europe relations to be described. This new discourse is an attempt of the EU to move away from the previous donor-recipient relations and show a strong willingness to promote an approach of “partnership as equals” (Brachet 2021). In January 2021, the Commission renamed its department for cooperation and development to the Directorate for International Partnerships (European Commission 2020d). The African Union Commissioner on the other hand, when addressing the EU college of Commissioners he finished his speech by emphasizing on the need for EU to recognise their differences:

“The AU appreciates this multifaceted partnership with the EU because it is guided by shared values and common interests and because it is based on equality and respect. Certainly, we have some differences /…/ these differences are normal, given our
cultural, sociological and even spiritual diversity. Only the recognition and acceptance of these differences, the language of frankness will allow us to remove the obstacles that may hinder our cooperation.” - H.E Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission at the AU-EU College to College Meeting (African Union 2020)

A turn to a more equal footed partnership requires the sharing of not only resources but also power, argues Brachet (2021). Although the EU has this new ambition of equal footings in a partnership it continues to use the rhetoric of development and assistance, promoting itself as one of the world’s leading development funds. In the field of development communication, we know the immense power that lies within discourse - it constructs the way we understand reality, and the way it does so has consequences for our social and institutional practices (Foucault 1980; Fairclough 1989; Hall 1997; Ziai 2018).

As a participant of the AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub (Hub), a project of the AU-EU partnership, I have many times been inspired by its desire to reflect a strong co-ownership and co-creation between Africans and Europeans. For me, as a second-generation Congolese diaspora born and raised in Sweden, the racial and colonial history between Africa and Europe has been a very present narrative in my household. The Hub inflicted a sense of hope for me, that these two Unions are able to come together and work meaningfully as equals, but throughout the years of my engagement I have started to question whether this is actually what is happening and if the two institutions and its member states are ready to embrace a different discourse. This study will therefore look into the current discourse and the new approach of partnership that the EU proposes.

**Research Question**

The aim of this research is to analyse the presumed changing discourse around AU-EU collaboration and to which degree it promotes a new approach to development cooperation. The questions I address in this study are:

- What is/are the discourse/s promoted in the EU’s strategy for Africa? Are they normative with respect to sustaining power relations or creative in shaping new
discourses and transforming power relations?

- To what extent do these discourses exist in the implementation of joint AU-EU projects and how does it influence the collaboration?

By approaching these research questions, I hope to better understand the concepts of partnerships in development and under the AU-EU collaboration; and whether a new creative discourse can inspire new approaches to partnerships. In order to do this, I have conducted interviews with the participants and coordinators of the AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub - a pilot project of the joint partnership. The project sets young people as a driving force in piloting innovative ways of bringing Africa and Europe closer together through development cooperation on the two continents (AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub, 2020). I am myself a member of the Hub and have had the great opportunity to access the thoughts and impressions of my colleagues and the project managers of the AU and EU. In the section on research ethics (4.3) I further reflect on my own role in this study and the subjectivity I carry with me in the implementation of this research project.

Relevance and Limitations of the Study

The EU, oftentimes criticized by scholars for its Eurocentric approach to development cooperation, is today rebranding and trying to change the discourse around how it collaborates with its external partners. The development sector is full of buzzwords that has proven to create visionary strategies but complicate implementation on development policies and projects. The aim of my research is to evaluate to which extent a new development discourse might be forming, understand which key words that are being institutionalised and what this approach of “partnership of equals” might mean in the terms of development. I believe my research can encourage other scholars to continue researching the evolution of development discourse.

Unfortunately, my study is unable to consider more perspectives from the African continent and the African Union. The original idea was to analyse the discourse around the AU-EU summit that was supposed to take place in October 2020, however due to the ongoing health pandemic it was been postponed. The African Union has yet released its own strategy for the
partnership with the EU. Therefore, this study focuses mainly on analysing one perspective of the partnership - the EU’s, with the support of the Hub participants and coordinators to get a better understanding of the partnerships implementation.

2. Literature Review

‘Development is much more than just a socio-economic endeavour; it is a perception which models reality, a myth which comforts societies and a fantasy which unleashes passion.’ - Wolfgang Sachs (2010, p1)

Background

The African countries, many of whom claimed independence from the rule of European colonialists in the 1960s, gathered in 1963 to create Africa’s first post-independent continental institution, The Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The OAU was described as a manifestation of Africa being “…united, free and in control of its own destiny” the aim of the organisation was to promote a pan-African vision to African people and foster cooperation and solidarity (African Union n.d (a)). In 1999 the OAU declared the creation of an African Union as a strategic measure for Africa to play a unified role in the growing global economy. The African Union (AU) was officially launched in 2002 and gathers all 54 African states under the vision of “An Integrated, Prosperous and Peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena” (African Union n.d (a)).

The European Union (EU) was established through hardship as well. The first structure of collaboration was formed in 1950 after the Second World War and was an effort to unite European countries to secure lasting peace through economic and political efforts, under the European Coal and Steel Community. Out of these efforts came the Treaty of Rome in 1958, a joint declaration establishing the European Economic Community, today known as the European Union (European Union 2020a). Today the EU gathers 27 European states out of the 50 existing countries on the continent (European Union 2020b).
Africa - Europe cooperation

Africa and Europe have a longstanding relationship, most notably, the history of colonialism which has impacted the way the two continents engage with each other today (Whiteman 2012). The continents have come a long way in establishing their regional Unions, channelling diplomatic discussion in a multitude of areas. The AU and EU hosted their first summit between Heads of States in Cairo in 2000. This first AU-EU summit marked an important opportunity for the two regions to pursue a continent-wide approach, a policy which went under the slogan ‘One Europe, One Africa’ (Carbone 2013, p4). Albeit very different interests and diverging expectations, a declaration was agreed upon (ibid, p6). The collaboration following the first declaration was turbulent. Disagreement arose between the Unions on the interference of the EU in African matters (such as the attendance of former Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe at the second AU-EU Summit) and the lack of interest from many European countries to take accountability and apologies for the wounds that colonialism has left in Africa (ibid). This “diplomatic” crisis, lead to a postponement of the summit and a stall in the partnership, it showed on the inequality between the partners and their struggles to remain old power relations. De Sousa Santos (2014) a scholar who is known for his work criticising western hegemony, argues that the effects of colonialism are deeply entrenched in our public and private life. The scholar explains that to imagine the end of colonialism would mean to accept that colonialism ended with the independence of former colonies, and thus neglecting that some of the ideologies and ways of operating that we see today are rooted in colonialism. On the other hand, if we were to imagine that colonialism has no end, it would mean that we accept that it has continued to exist after independence until today, in an alternative form that is more widespread than before. De Sousa Santos claims that colonialism is not only visible through policies but also in the structure of our social discourse. This in turn affects our social relations, our mentalities and subjectivities as we continue to accept the unequal conditions shaped by the discourse, both those who benefit from it and those who suffer its consequences (ibid). The relation between the AU and EU comes with its challenges, and interference in each other’s operations show the struggles of power within the partnership.

Over the years, researchers have paid great attention to the AU-EU collaboration, and how the relation has developed in policy and implementation. The way African countries were
portrayed in the 1990’s was that they were marginalised and incapable of governing their countries, and that they needed saving (Carbone 2013, p10). The establishment of the AU contributed to a changing discourse, supporting Africa’s growing role in the world. In addition, the development of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other international development agendas provided African countries with several platforms for development cooperation. While this was regarded as positive, Carbone found that the positioning has depended, to a very large extent, on the assessment of international organisations such as the OECD, the World Bank and others, who apply a Western approach to indicators of success (ibid). The attempts of development cooperation have come at many costs. The EU has been accused of imposing its own agenda and principles on weaker partners to the point countries had to redesign their development strategy to be able to have access to European aid and market (Brown, 2002; Hurt, 2003; Nun and Prince, 2004, in Carbone, 2013 p10). Miyandazi et al have looked specifically at the implementation of the cooperation in various thematic sectors of development, and have found that in policy the work has appeared to give way for equal representation, while in practice implementation has been limited due to differences in perceptions and priorities (2018. Mthembu (2020) alongside other scholars, still accuses the approach of the EU of being paternalistic, connecting development funds with conditions based on norms (Browser and Le Ber, 2020; Carbone, 2016; Miyandazi et al, 2018).

The website of the AU-EU partnership reads that the aim of the AU-EU cooperation is to be able to build a platform in which the continents can meet as equals. The creation of the first Joint Africa Europe Strategy (JAES) in 2007 was regarded as the first genuine attempt where priorities of African leaders were reflected in the strategy. The difference this time was the emphasis of understanding common values and expectations for the partnership, with the aim of making the partnership more equal (Miyandazi 2018). Discourse has played an important role in the collaboration of the Unions, in the struggles over power and in the implementation of joint actions. In the lead-up to the 6th AU-EU Summit, it remains an important role. Scepticism however arises of whether the EU is ready to move from a donor-recipient relation to a partnership of equals (Islam 2021; Brachet 2021).
Youth in the Partnership

A demographic that has been increasingly important in the AU-EU partnership is youth. Africa has the youngest population in the world, almost 60% of Africa’s population is under the age of 25 (Mo Ibrahim, 2019; African Union n.d (e)). In 2030, Africa’s youth will account for 42% of the youth population in the world (African Union 2019). Europe on the contrary has a more aging population and the youth population is becoming smaller, the EU has however paid a growing interest to young people in Europe and the growing migration of young people wanting to live in Europe (Eurostat 2020; European Parliament 2017). The continents have a different reality which both pose future socio-economic challenges and this difficulty lead to the 5th AU-EU Summit in 2017 in Abidjan, to focusing on investing in Youth. One approach of doing so in the JAES strategy has been to host AU-EU Youth Summits in conjunction with the summit of Heads of state. The input from the Youth Summits have traditionally not generated much discussion, however the recommendations posed by youth to the Abidjan summit resulted in the creation of a 10 million budget for innovative projects to address development challenges between Africa and Europe. Mengistu (2016) explains that in many African countries, the discourse around young people is one of violence, youth have been excluded from many of the decision-making processes and politics have been seen as an unattainable effort. However, more and more African countries seem to include youth participation due to rising pressure from development cooperation and external relations (ibid). The AU-EU Youth Hub is therefore a welcomed development of youth participation and youth as experts in the implementation of the partnership. I have therefore chosen to link my critical discourse analysis with interviews of young experts to reflect on the current discourse and their ideas for what is needed in the future partnership of equals.

Development and Discourse

“Words make worlds” - Andrea Cornwall (Cornwall & Eade 2010, p1)

The way we come to talk about development has just as much to do with the policies and initiatives we implement in the name of development. The language of development defines worlds in the making, explains Cornwall and Eade (2010). The word ‘development’ itself is a
well-contested expression, it conveys an idea that more is better and that things will become better once one has fulfilled a set of criteria (Rist, 2010). This view, centred in western discourse of modernization, has been one of the reasons for why the world ‘development’ is so contested. The word and many like it used within the development discourse, are contested concepts, terms that are agreed on an abstract level, but where disagreement arises in the implementation of the concept. These words gain their purchase and power through their vague qualities (Sachs 2010; W.B Gaille (1995) in Cornwall & Eade 2010, p2). They jump in and out of relevance depending on their popularity and how well they explain a vision of a tomorrow where things will be better (Chandhoke, 2010). The many possible meanings behind these “buzzwords” as Cornwall categorizes them, combined with their performative qualities of the vision they promote, makes it difficult for anyone to argue against them. They become trans-ideological properties as Fox explains “one person’s transparency is another’s surveillance. One person’s accountability is another’s prosecution. Where one stands on these issues depends on where one sit” (2010, p245). The concepts are somehow understood to be above ideologies, but in essence they are powerful tools in language and often inspired by ideologies. Throughout history, institutions have institutionalised specific discourses as a way to manipulate language and communicate normative and ideological beliefs, and there is no difference in the development field (Standing 2010, p65). The language of development can be understood as a hybrid according to Fiona Wilson, it is a combination of several sciences with the aim to depersonalise the language for political agendas, and at the same time serve a multitude of internal agendas (Cornwall, 2010, p5). We can see how this has manifested through e.g. previous AU-EU partnership, where the implementations have come to show diverging interpretations of the Joint AU-EU Strategy (Carbone 2013).

The Discourse of Partnership in Development

In the previous section we have developed a better understanding for the AU-EU relations of the past 20 years, the power struggles and discourse that has navigated the relationship. In this section I would like to look further into the concepts of partnership. Jennifer M Birkerhoff has explored the notion of partnership in development and argues that the concept is in danger (2002, p2). According to the author, the concept is being implemented without having a clear pragmatic understanding of the foundations, the “why” and “how’s” of partnership.
To better understand how the concept of partnership has been applied in Development cooperation, we have to look back to the 1960s, back then the concept emerged from the understanding that poverty was a condition in countries where development aid was not provided. A package of strategies and recommendations would be provided for how to rebuild societies for industrialisation, urbanisation and economic progress (Giddens 1991 in Bailey and Dolan 2011). This form of cooperation became central to the ideology of development, how it was understood and implemented. The notion was that the western world was the formula for success and by sharing their superior knowledge and expertise the West would be able to raise entire countries out of poverty (Bailey and Dolan 2011, p32). This approach to development cooperation, known as the modernization theory, has been contested by scholars and civil society organisations for decades. Alongside it, several theories emerged, furthest in comparison is the post-development theory and dependency theory, which both argued that the nature of development cooperation is a way to ensure that the poor remain subservient. (Pieterse 2010, p25).

In 1996 a different concept of partnership became mainstream with the release of the OECD report on *Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Cooperation*. This report is what first shaped the concept of the Global Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that all 192 UN member states agreed to achieve by 2015 (Bailey and Dolan 2011, p31). This discourse of ‘The Development Decades of the UN’ as Jan Pietersen Nederveen calls it, framed development of countries in a linear scale from highly developed, developed, less developed and least developed countries. The discourse proposes a more neutral tone to previous formulations; however, the emphasis on aid efficiency and effectiveness lead to the excessive need to produce good numbers. The approach remained linear and ethnocentric, argues Pieterse. (2010, p24).

It is difficult to find a definition of partnership, and Miguel Pickard argues that there is no universal definition ‘... the word is constructed to generally mean equal standing among participants, with perhaps differentiated responsibilities’ (Cornwall & Eade 2010, p135). Pickard, much like Birkerhoff argues that ideological barriers are what is preventing true partnerships from prospering (ibid, p142). There are many things that can be said about AU-EU collaboration, whether it is a ‘natural partnership’, a ‘partnership of equals’ or a
partnership built on the donor-recipient approach. What is agreed however is that a partnership relation between unequals is rarely easy (Pharatlhatlhe, K & Vanheukelom J 2019, p12; Carbone 2013; Miyandazi et al 2018). The EU’s official development assistance budget is 75 billion euro, 47 of these billions are allocated to Africa and the neighbouring countries (European Commission:2). The African Union itself has a budget of 647.3 million dollars, roughly 544 million euro - a considerably smaller budget than what is received from the EU (African Union 2020b). This reality of economic resources poses a power imbalance within the partnership that has shown, in previous experience, to be difficult to navigate. Nevertheless, the quest for a “partnership of equals” can be interpreted as part of a struggle to change the way the aid system operates in order to regain its credibility (Fowler 2000, p10). It does however make me question what is meant by equality, in the context of development. Is there a new creative discourse that promotes a partnership in which equality is viewed in other terms than, e.g. how you rank in economic development indexes? Let’s explore the discourse of equality.

The Discourse of Equality in Development

In the Development Dictionary, the authors have had a closer look at the contested concepts of development, such as equality and the historical significance of the work and how it emerged in the context of development. Douglas Lummis (2010) argues that equality has two possible meanings, the indication of justice and fair treatment; or sameness and homogeneity. “Equality is presented in any notion that people ought to come under the same set of rules” (ibid p38). The varying ways of interpreting equality as a value statement (the notion of equality as justice, or a claim of fact) can become very complicated when it becomes attached to power and power relations such as a partnership, explains Lummis. In the field of development, equality was often connected to economic development, and the notion that a difference in wealth between countries could be described as inequality. However, to first be able to identify inequality, one would have to imagine a system in which equality could be achieved, a set of indicators or measurement to evaluate justice. A way of approaching equality in development was then to talk about it as an achievable opportunity, presupposing that everyone wanted to achieve the same goal, and those who were far behind just needed help in their path towards equality (ibid, p46). The key term in this notion is ‘help’, a term which Gronemeyer reflects on as a term that resembles ‘aid’ in development (2010, p55). Although the term appears innocent it has become an instrument for the exercise of “elegant
power” as she refers to it. Gronemeyer argues that the discourse around help as concept has become institutionalised and professionalised. This has in turn transformed the traditional conceptions of help into a “...careful calculation of one’s advantage than by the concerned consideration for the other’s need” (ibid p56). It has gone from being an unpredictable service to a full-blown strategy built on policy processes and negotiations. The gesture of giving is today categorised as help, regardless of the usefulness of the help to the recipient (ibid p57). And help has become aid in development discourse, that later on has resembled the concept of cooperation. Can we therefore assume that partnership is the new term for help in disguise - an elegant power – or is there is a type of equality in partnership that we do not see in help, aid and cooperation? Perhaps an exchange where the power balance of partnership is more equal to that of help.

3. Theoretical Perspectives and Key Concepts

The Concept of Partnership

The EU’s department for International Partnership described their mission as “We accompany our partner countries on their path towards sustainable development and always adapt our support to their evolving needs, including when their situation improves and they transition from bilateral assistance towards more targeted support.” (European Commission n.d (a)) While the African Union Commission describes their partnership activities as a means “...to cooperate strategically with other regional groupings, international organizations and states to market Africa’s position” (African Union n.d (e)) The notions around what partnership means to the two institutions differ, while the EU talks about accompanying their partner countries, a fairly top-down approach, the African Union talks about strategic cooperation to enhance Africa’s positioning in the world. When looking at the webpage of the joint partnership and the description of the Joint AU-EU Strategy, it says that the strategy has “…the intention of both continents to move beyond a donor-recipient relationship towards long-term cooperation on jointly identified mutual and complementary interests. It is based on principles of ownership, partnership and solidarity and its adoption marks a new phase in Africa-EU relations.” (European Union n.d (a)) The three, possibly diverging discourses
shows that there may be more than one way to look at this partnership depending whom you ask. When turning to a more academic definition, the Oxford dictionary explains partnership in terms of a relationship between people or organisations and associates it with the words: collaboration, participation, joint decision making and long-term relationship, nonetheless, there is little mentioning of the principles of a partnership approach (Bailey and Dolan 2011). Certain characteristics distinguish partnerships from other types of relationships such as shared responsibility, equality, mutuality and balance of power (Fowler 2000). These characteristics are partly found in the concepts of the JAES and therefore I have chosen to use the definition of Fowler alongside that of the EU to analyse the discourse around the AU-EU partnership.

**Development and Communication**

In order to discuss development communication, we have to deal with the relationship between two key concepts, development and communication. There are several social science paradigms that have influenced development theory and the lenses through which we look at the development, and I believe it is safe to argue as Manyozo that “development is not a known fact, it is not given, nor is it common sense” it is a concept that still needs investigation (2012, p4).

We explored the modernisation versus dependency theory in the literature chapter, another approach I would like to highlight is that which has been informed by the Marxist paradigm. Through a Marxist perspective, the history of development is in many ways influenced by the unequal relationship between the superior and the subordinate classes, and when analysing development, communication becomes an important part in understanding those relations. Marx and Escobar define development as a site of a conflict over representation, and the instruments and discourse of that representation (Manyozo 2012, p3). They argue that in order to define a development policy, a discourse has to be imagined and constructed. This discourse many times defined by a superior, points towards why a subordinate has to develop into a prevailing social standard (ibid). This notion of superiority and power relations can be seen today on a broader global spectrum and how countries and institutions engage. A prevailing Eurocentric discourse is what brought with colonialism and imperialism in which
the European societies were referred to as developed, mature societies, and “the other” underdeveloped societies, notably the global south, being linguistically referred to as backward, inferior and incapable (Ziai 2013, p128). This Eurocentric discourse has in many ways shaped the practice of development. The voice and representation of the underdeveloped rarely come forward in the discourse around development due to the power struggles where the underdeveloped don’t have the same means to steer national opinion, pose change and represent themselves at the table where development policies, frameworks and initiatives are being created (Manyozo 2012, p3).

Development and communication are two fields that go closely hand in hand. Communicating about development can be seen as a critical approach, according to Wilkins (2009), Enghel and Norske-Turner (2018). It can be seen as a way to reflect on how we frame problems and solutions, and what assumptions we make in the discourse that reflects aspects of power imbalance (Enghel & Norske-Turner 2018, p11). The concept of development communication, is not only about promoting a cause or raising awareness about the “good” that is being done, but more importantly contesting the very notion of development (Manyozo 2012).

In this research study I will be using two descriptions of development. The first one created by Pietersen (2010) “The organised intervention in collective affairs according to a standard of improvements” (p3), a definition that can be understood as being in line with that of the European Union as mentioned in the previous section. To counterbalance this definition, I have chosen to also apply the understanding of development of Escobar (1995) and Marx (1852/1937) “Development is a conflict over resource and over power” (Manyozo 2012, p3). I believe this second definition captures the problems of development and will help us navigate the concept of equals. By using these two definitions in understanding the discourse around the AU-EU partnership, it will support the analysis to not only interpret development as a practice but also contest the notions that define it as problematic.
Critical Discourse Analysis as a Theory

‘All things are subject to interpretation; whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power and not truth’
- Friedrich Nietzsche

Discourse refers to the different ways we use language to communicate thoughts, interpret and understand the world (Potter 2016). Discourse analysis is a cluster of methods for studying language use and its role in society. There are various disciplinary approaches to the study of discourse and in each approach, there are philosophical, theoretical and methodological considerations that one has to consider as a researcher (Potter 2016, p2). In this section, I will further elaborate on the approach to discourse analysis that will be employed in my research study - notably Critical Discourse Analysis, the philosophical and theoretical foundations of the approach and which considerations I aim to work with.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a collection of approaches that emphasise on social critique aiming to reveal discourse that sustain relations of inequality (Potter 2016, p5). With its base in linguistics, CDA draws from social theory and contributions such as Karl Marx and Michel Foucault in order to understand how power relations and ideologies manifest in discourse (ibid). How we speak and listen, how we form our sentences is influenced by our ideas and understanding of the world, essentially our ideologies. Norman Fairclough, whose approach we will use in this study, argued that the use of language is central in identifying power relations and struggles of power (1989, p17). In his book Language and Power, he describes the process of language-use, how it is affected with social conventions and in turn affects social relations. Fairclough developed an analytical framework built on this understanding called The Three Dimensions of Discourse, the framework distinguishes between discourse as text (description), as discursive practice (interpretation) and as social practice (explanation) (ibid).

Fairclough's three-dimensional model

Each stage of Fairclough’s model includes a critical discourse analysis:
**Description:** the analysis of text (verbal and/or visual). There are several ways to approach the ‘unpacking’ of a text by using the approach of linguistic analysis that can support in giving context and unpacking the meaning of the words used (Janks 1997, p332). At this stage one looks at the ways relational values are portrayed through words in the text, how metaphors are used to describe actions, and how sentences and grammar is structured and used to promote certain social practices.

**Interpretation:** the relationship between text and interaction. In this stage one has to view the text as the product of a process (Fairclough 1989, p26). This means understanding how a text is produced and interpreted and what assumptions the text includes. The interpretation phase does not necessarily explain all of the intricate dynamics within a relation, instead it aims to understand what potential situational and intertextual contexts that be found in a text and which discourse types these are drawn upon.

**Explanation:** the text in a larger context. The third stage speaks to Fairclough’s emphasis on placing the text into a larger context by looking at the situational (in this case a partnership strategy), institutional (in this case the AU-EU relations) and societal aspects (in this case relations between Africa and Europe) that help shape a text. This stage also looks at which elements of the found discourse types that have an ideological character and how this discourse may be creative in forming new relations or sustaining existing. (Fairclough 1989, p163).
Fairclough’s approach is useful because it allows us several entry-points for analysis and emphasises on the situational and institutional context that forms relations (see figure 1). In addition, it includes dimensions of Foucault’s work of identifying power relations within the discourse. In this research study we will be using development theory to complement the analysis and the merger of these two will be further explained in the methodology and analysis chapters.

4. Methodology

In order to understand the prevailing discourses around the AU-EU partnership and in which ways it aims to shape a partnership based on equals, a critical discourse analysis has been made of the EU official publication ‘Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa’ (European Commission 2020a). The strategy is a policy document that has undergone an internal process between EU institutions. The document was first drafted by the European Commission, it has been discussed and amended by the European Parliament and the European Council (heads of states) to later on approved by the two lateral institutions on 18 January 2021. The policy document outlines aim and objectives for the collaboration with Africa and the expectations the EU sets towards the partnership. I will be focusing on the first introduction pages of the strategy that describes the background and rationale for the
partnership and briefly addresses the ways of engagement. Due to limited time and resources I will not be focusing on the different policy priorities as I believe each priority requires a more in-depth thematic understanding of the policy priority and the previous work of the partnership in these areas.

In addition to the official strategy of the EU, I will carry out interviews with the participants and coordinators of a joint AU-EU project - the AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub, to better understand the experiences of the current discourse used in the implementation of joint AU-EU projects and how they perceive the suggestions for a more equal partnership. In this section I will outline the specific methods used for the critical discourse analysis and the gathering of impressions for members of the Hub.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

The first step of my analysis focuses on employing Fairclough’s three dimensional-model to understand the discourses promoted in the EU’s strategy. I have decided to look at the following three areas: how the concept of equal partnership is; how the AU and EU are described; and the proposed ways of engagement. By looking into these three aspects of the strategy I get a better sense of how the discourse is normative in sustaining current power relations and/or creative in shaping a more equal partnership. To support my analysis I will reflect on the following analytical areas:

**Description**

- **Relational values:** By looking at the wording used to categorise certain target groups or grammatical features such as ‘we’, ‘them’, ‘our’, which give indication of power relations.
- **Metaphors:** Not all metaphors carry an ideological attachment but those that do might suggest what discourse that prevails.
- **Experiential words:** What contested words are mentioned in description of the partnership and what are their different meanings.
- **Experiential values of words and grammar:** Are the sentences active or passive, positive or negative in describing the EU and AU respectively Africa and Europe?
- **Expressive modalities:** Grammatical features that suggest ways of engagement through forms of possibility, expectations and permission.

**Interpretation**
• **Context:** What interpretations (e.g. assumptions) are the producer and receivers of the text giving to the situational contexts?

• **Discourse types:** How is grammar, sentence cohesion and semantics used and what does it tell us about the current discourse types?

• **Differences:** Are there any differences between the context and discourse types?

**Explanation**

• **Social Determinants:** what power relations at situational, institutional and societal level help shape this discourse?

• **Ideologies:** what elements of assumptions throughout the text are drawn up by ideological characters?

• **Effects:** how is the discourse normative with respect to previous discourses or creative? And how does it contribute to sustaining existing power relations or transforming them?

**Semi-structured interviews**

The analysis of a segment of the EU strategy cannot fully give an insight into the various dynamics of the partnership. The text might suggest which discourses that exist, but it shows a European perspective and does not provide a insight from the AU. Several attempts were made to engage with AU representatives and collect their position on the future strategy, however at the time of writing their position has not yet been published. Therefore, I chose to include young experts and the project coordinators of the AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub. They bring a perspective on how the partnership works in practice and share reflections for how a more equal partnership approach can be attained.

I chose to interview eight young experts of the Hub, who were selected through an open call that went out to all participants of the Hub (see table 1). Everyone who showed interest in participating in this research study was chosen and additional efforts were made, e.g. personal invitations, to ensure that the pool of interviewees had a balance in terms of gender, Africa and Europe representation and various thematic areas for which they work in to ensure diversity of experiences. The leadership team of the project were also invited, two project coordinators were selected: the main project coordinator from the EU representation to AU
who has followed the AU-EU Youth Track since its beginning, leading up to and after the 5th AU-EU Summit in Abidjan; and the representative of the AU Commission’s Youth Division who follows the Hub project.

The interviewees were invited to read the strategy and the interview questions were formulated in a semi-structured approach to gather both their impressions of the strategy and their experiences of the partnership (interview guide can be found in Appendix 1).

Table 1. Demographics of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Demographics</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young Expert (YE) 1</td>
<td>Female, African</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Expert (YE) 2</td>
<td>Male, African</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Expert (YE) 3</td>
<td>Male, African</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Expert (YE) 4</td>
<td>Male, African</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Expert (YE) 5</td>
<td>Female, European</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Expert (YE) 6</td>
<td>Female, European</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young Expert (YE) 7</td>
<td>Male, European</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Expert (YE) 8</td>
<td>Female, European</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Coordinator AU</td>
<td>Female, African Union Commission - Youth Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Coordinator EU</td>
<td>Male, European Union representation to the African Union</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Ethics

To ensure that the study respects research ethics the following precautions were made to allow for the interviewees’ participation. All interviewees were invited to participate and had to sign a consent form allowing for the interviews to be used. The consent form clearly states that the interviewee has the possibility to retract, clarify or change any statements used, they also have the possibility to withdraw from the research project at any time. Each interview
took place via Zoom and was recorded for transcription purposes. The interviewees received the transcriptions and had the possibility to retract, clarify or change any statement. Due to the potential sensitive position of the young experts, as voluntary participants of the AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub, the young experts are merely referred to their titles and which continent they identify with. Any information that could possibly identify their contribution has been concealed to respect their anonymity. The public servants of the EU and AU are not referred to by name but merely by their position in relation to the Hub project.

My research study is an embedded research - an approach in which the researcher belongs to the community that it aims to research. I have a close proximity to my research subject as I am myself one of the 48 young experts of the Hub, a voluntary commitment I have had since 2018. I understand that my experience brings with it a form of subjectivity to the topic, therefore I have chosen to combine the analysis of the text with the experiences and opinions of the young experts. In addition, I have continuously reflected on my own biases and assumptions throughout the research process and in the analysis of my findings. Nevertheless, I believe that my positioning has been of value in the conversations I have had with the interviewees and it has allowed for a candid reflection on the implementation of the partnership.

5. Analysis

Policy texts are well crafted and a lot of thought is put into the formulation of sentences and the use of words (Apthorpe et al, 1992). Not only should the text be general enough to allow for flexibility, but at the same time, the use of words should be well-selected to restrict that something is misunderstood (ibid). This part of the process in the AU-EU partnership is essentially about sharing expectations of the future of the partnership. To this day I only have the strategic positioning of the EU. Unfortunately, I cannot take into account the official perspectives of the AU and its member states in this analysis as they have not yet published their position.

The analysis is divided into three sections. In this first section I look at the discourse of partnership and the relational values described between the EU and AU. In the second
section, I explore how the EU and AU are positioned in the text to better understand the EU’s discourse about Africa and itself. In the third section I look at the ways of engagement, by exploring how the EU perceives the implementation of the partnership to reflect its ambitions of a partnership of equals. Each section is coupled with an interpretation of the textual findings and a reflection of the situational, institutional and societal contexts in which these discourses take shape. These reflections support in the understanding of how these discourses are normative and/or creative in shaping and transforming power relation. To support this analysis, the experiences and impressions of the young experts of the Hub and representatives of the coordination team from the EU representation to AU, and the African Union Youth Commission, will be mentioned throughout the analysis.

The EU’s policy strategies generally have a similar structure, it starts by explaining the context of the policy area and giving reasonings for why the topic is important. It then continues on to describe the different priority areas. In this analysis, I focus on the introduction of the strategy where intentions and background information are given about the partnership. This part of the text is significant in introducing the reader to the topic, and in this analysis, it will give us a better understanding of the language used in describing the partnership. I will not be exploring the various priority areas of the strategy due to the limitations of this study (see section Relevance and Limitations of the study).

The strategy (Table 2) is an official document between the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Council. The document was published as a draft in March 2020 and has since been discussed by various European stakeholders but also by the media and the general public. The European Union is transparent with these procedures in which anyone on the internet can access the draft documents, the records of discussions and the final document. This strategy has since 18 January 2021 been approved by the EU institutions. As this text is a written piece, it is indeed still a communication towards other European stakeholders and towards the African Union and its member states. To differentiate between the various stakeholders involved in this discourse production and interpretation I will refer to the EU as the producer of the text and AU and its member states as the receivers of the text.
Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa

Africa is Europe’s closest neighbour. The ties that bind Africa and the European Union (EU) are broad and deep as a result of history, proximity and shared interests. With the 6th Summit between the African Union (AU) and the EU and the conclusion of the negotiations of the new partnership agreement between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, 2020 will be a pivotal year in living up to our ambition of an even stronger partnership. In Africa, new prospects and challenges are emerging from economic, political, social, technological, demographic, climate and environmental changes. We need to partner with Africa, our twin continent, to tackle together the challenges of the 21st century and to further our common interests and future.

Africa, in all its diversity, is home to over 1 billion people. It boasts the youngest, fastest-growing middle-class in the world. Africa’s young people have the potential to transform their continent’s political, economic and social prospects, but for this they need decent jobs, a place in society, access to social services, energy and infrastructure, and an active role in determining their countries’ future. In particular, African women are key drivers of sustainable growth, development and peace. Responding to their aspirations will determine the future of the continent.

Africa has been recording steady economic growth. In 2018, six of the ten fastest-growing economies in the world were African. Thirty African States are middle-income or high-income countries. The continent’s economic expansion has the potential to accelerate and drive broader social and human development with new opportunities arising from the digital transformation, the demographic dividend, low-cost renewable energy, the green transition and a low-carbon, blue and circular economy. This reflects the vision of the African leaders’ transformative initiatives, including the African Union’s Agenda 2063, the African Continental Free Trade Area, the African Visa-free Area, a Single African Digital Market and the Single African Air Transport Market.

At the same time, a number of challenges remain. Thirty-six of the world’s most fragile countries are in Africa, often weakened by conflicts. The continent hosts 390 million people living below the poverty line. Growth has not always been inclusive, notably due to governance challenges. Africa, as the rest of the world, is also affected by the consequences of climate change, environmental degradation and pollution. The EU and Africa can work
together to seize the opportunities and address these challenges and develop actions that ensure stability, peace, security, human rights, democracy, gender equality, sustainable livelihoods, sustainable economic growth based on healthy ecosystems, social cohesion and good governance.

To benefit both continents, our partnership should be based on a clear understanding of our respective and mutual interests and responsibilities, reflecting the comprehensiveness and maturity of our relationship. These interests include:

- developing a green growth model; improving the business environment and investment climate; boosting education, research and innovation, the creation of decent jobs and value addition through sustainable investments; maximising the benefits of regional economic integration and trade; ensuring food security and rural development; combating climate change; ensuring access to sustainable energy and protecting biodiversity and natural resources; promoting peace and security; ensuring well-governed migration and mobility;
- engaging together on the global scene to strengthen the multilateral rules-based order, promoting universal values, human rights, democracy, rule of law and gender equality.

Positive developments in one of these areas depend on progress in other areas. Such progress can only be achieved by working together on the basis of shared global commitments, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and Agenda 2063.

Africa’s potential attracts increased interest from many players on the world scene. This is a welcome development, as it increases Africa’s options and creates room for synergies. It also means that Europe, with the EU and its Member States working together in unison, must adapt the way it engages with Africa, ensuring its positioning is in line with our mutual interests, and giving more prominence to values, key principles, and good regulatory practices. The EU and its Member States are Africa’s biggest partner on all accounts, be it in terms of investment, trade, official development assistance, or security. This reliable, longterm, multi-faceted partnership should now also translate into a strong political alliance.

Stronger political, economic and cultural ties between Europe and Africa are crucial in a multipolar world where collective action is sorely needed. Enhanced cooperation on global and multilateral affairs will be at the heart of our common action.

To strengthen the EU’s strategic alliance with Africa, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union are proposing to engage discussions with African partners in view of jointly defining at the upcoming EU-AU Summit a new comprehensive EU strategy with Africa that could be built on five partnerships:
1. A partnership for green transition and energy access;
2. A partnership for digital transformation;
3. A partnership for sustainable growth and jobs;
4. A partnership for peace and governance; and
5. A partnership on migration and mobility.

This new strategy and these partnerships are in line with the common priorities set by the EU and the African Union at the 2017 Summit in Abidjan. It takes inspiration notably from the very fruitful discussions between the European Commission and the African Union Commission, which took place in Addis Ababa on 27 February 2020 and reflects the EU’s proposals for the ongoing exchanges with African partners in view of defining a joint partnership agenda at the upcoming EU-AU Summit in October 2020. EU-Africa engagement will continue at bilateral, regional and continental level.

**The discourse of ‘Partnership’ in AU-EU relations**

In this chapter, I will look closer at the discourse used in describing the AU-EU partnership. This will be done by analysing the text and interpreting the intertextual meanings and assumptions. The discourse will be further explored by looking at the social and institutional contexts that reproduce it, and by understanding how it is being implemented in the framework of the Hub.

A text’s choice of wording helps create social relationships between those who are addressed in a text, therefore a lot of careful attention is put on finding the right definitions in policy texts to describe various groups and stakeholders, and this publication is no different. Fairclough stresses that when producing a text, one has to reflect on what can be left unsaid and what can be implied through other formulations, essentially imaging the interpretation process of the receiver. Not only is the producer often unaware of the ideological assumptions that fuels their discourse, but they are in addition also unaware of the assumptions that are used when interpreting the text (Fairclough 1989, p141). we will take this into account throughout the analysis as we try to understand the producer’s discourse.
By analysing the wording that is chosen we can better understand what relational values are linked to those addressed in the text (ibid, p116). The producer has used several inclusive manners to create a sense of commonality. The pronoun ‘our’ is used on lines (11-12) (38-40) (57-63), and only used when addressing the collective action of the EU and the African countries. Whenever reference is made to the EU and its Member States, they are addressed in full by ‘EU and Member States’ instead of using ‘our’ in an exclusive manner. Similar words, such as ‘mutual’ (39)(57), ‘shared’ (5)(50), and ‘joint’ (66) (76) have been used as alternatives to the pronoun ‘our’ in describing the collaboration and previously agreed priorities between the AU and EU. Similar words were expressed when the young experts of the Hub were asked to explain what partnership means to them:

“Equal representation and equal voice are the two themes I believe are most important. The aim of a partnership is working together, the result doesn’t have to be 100% as long as there is a good way of working together.” - YE 6 (EU)

The majority of the experts agreed with Pickard’s definition of partnership which emphasises on equal standing between participants as one of the cornerstones of what makes a partnership what it is (p22). One young expert reflected on the notion between development and partnership, as explored in the literature review, and agrees with scholars that the balance of representation in the partnership is far from equal.

“Most often it is the EU that prepares documents that the AU follows. I don’t see the footprint of the AU in these strategies. There are quite a few things I want to see. I look after a conversation that actually moves from development to partnership.” - YE 3 (AU)

To better understand whether there are signs that point to traditional donor-recipient relations, we look at the ways in which the producer has further described the relationship between the two partners. The producer is not shy of using a mix of stylistic devices such as metaphors to emphasise the relational values. The first is to note the bond between the two continents.

“Africa is Europe’s closest neighbour. The ties that bind Africa and the European Union (EU) are broad and deep as a result of history, proximity and shared interests” (4-5) If it came down to distance only Asia and Africa would be at a tie and neither would be closer than the other, the sentence continues with suggesting that proximity is a way to note shared
experiences, alongside with shared interests, and making a nod to the history of the two continents. Another phrase that supports this is that the writer refers to Africa as Europe’s twin continent’ (11). This goes closely in line with the rhetoric used by Commissioner von der Leyen where she refers to Africa as “…the European Union’s natural partner” (European Commission 2020b). The wordings ‘neighbour’, suggest someone of close proximity, while the use of the words ‘ties’, ‘natural partner’ and ‘twins’ all suggest that the two partners are bound to each other, a bond that would be hard to break. ‘Twinship’ refers to two pieces matching or having the same corresponding parts. It refers to having the same birth and creation, a sibling who shares a genetic bond (Oxford Dictionary 2021). The assumption that is made here is that Africa and Europe belong together because they are closely connected. The connotation that the term ‘twin’ invokes in me is a connection to a happy family, a strong bond between siblings, hence an overall positive manner, but the way in which the term ‘twin’ or even ‘natural partner’ might be understood by different receivers of the text is hard to predict. These words, in a situational context of developing a partnership strategy, and in the institutional context of politics and diplomacy, might very well express how the producer feels about their relationship with African. I assume the producer wants to portray a sense of comradery and familiarity and promote the discourse of “partnership as equals”. However, in a broader social context, these connotations might suggest neglect of the colonial history, of which the relationship between Africa and Europe was not just a banter between siblings. The connotation that the terms invoked in the young experts suggests the same.

“It's funny and almost ridiculous that ‘natural’ is being used. Nothing that happens between Africa and Europe will ever be natural. These unions work now because they have to work together. It can never be natural, it can never be smooth, it can never be without apprehension.” - YE 2 (AU)

“Africa is no longer the continent that sits in the back seat, we have a voice and we want to be respected as such. The European side would really have to change its perception, narrative and approach. /.../ We are not really understanding each other as continents, as institutions, and people, our narratives are very disconnected. So going forward we would really need something that changes the narrative about each other.”- YE 1 (AU)
“the truth of the matter is that when the AU and the EU come to work together, it's a great thing. Um, but we must never sweep under the carpet some of our historical racial differences on issues because that created bumps in the carpet that trips us up all the time. Um, and we often wonder, what are we fighting about, where are we not trusting each other? We know what these things are, it’s because we don't really address some of these issues. And this is my personal opinion. I think sometimes we need to acknowledge that in the partnership as well. We need to acknowledge that there are some historical wounds, there are some, um, stereotypes, there are some differences that we carry around with us and that affects how we partner with each other. And it's not “diplomatic”, you know, to bring up these wounds. And it's really less than fun for lots of us in this space to watch how we do this really strange dance around each other when we all know what we're all thinking.” explains the AU Project Coordinator.

The observation that the AU Project Coordinator makes can be linked to the findings in the theoretical perspectives (p.15) where the EU’s and AU’s respective partnership definitions diverge. Here the young experts and project coordinator strongly emphasise on the mismatch between what the EU communicates and what they as African’s and participants of the joint partnership, interpret as the discourse. Within a political context we can assume that this is merely a persuasion technique to emphasise similarities as a way of negotiation, but it makes us reflect on how jargon and discourses are developed, especially in terms of partnerships that span not only between institutions but the relations between organisations and beneficiaries across continents. As reflected on by the project coordinator from the AU side, the historical wounds still affect the ways in which the partnership engages. Trying to address these wounds, might suggest a more candid approach, despite the limits of the current diplomatic discourse. In order to move away from the current normative discourse, the institutions have to be creative in creating new discourses that can fully embrace a vision of a partnership of equals. This attempt might be one way of capturing the essence of the partnership the EU envisions, but we will look deeper into the strategy and reflect on the positioning of the subjects to better understand how this glimpse of a changing discourse might be changing the partners position of power.
The subject positioning and the discourse of Africa and Europe

In order to better understand how the EU and Africa are positioned in the text I have looked at experiential words, grammar and values and in which way sentences are declarative in making a statement, providing facts, explanation or convey information. These sentences trigger our assumptions and presuppositions about the world around us and this reflection might help us understand how the EU perceives Africa.

Throughout the strategy, the producer has focused very little on the description of the EU as a partner. The primary target group of the strategy is the EU institutions; hence one can assume that the reason for this lack of explanation is that they are aware of the situations of their own countries and that of Europe. Nevertheless, the lack of representation of the EU in the text also speaks volumes. Let’s first look at the places in which the EU is mentioned before exploring what the lack of EU in the text might suggest as their subject positioning.

In one of the few instances where the EU is addressed, the producer of the text does portray the EU as a partner of Africa through a positive declarative sentence “The EU and its Member States are Africa’s biggest partner on all accounts, be it in terms of investment, trade, official development assistance, or security’ (58-59). The use of the terminology ‘biggest partner’ can be understood as a positive part, from the perspective of the producer, in the size of financial contribution from the EU and in terms of importance. No emphasis is made on the results of the partnership and what they have accomplished together or the potential challenges they might have overcome to strengthen their partnership. Just the commitment, whatever it may be, in these thematic areas seems to justify this “title”. Throughout the same paragraph the producer describes the potential of collaborating with Africa by using metaphors connected to games: “Africa’s potential attracts increased interest of many players on the world scene. /.../ It also means Europe, with the EU and its Member States working together in unison, must adapt the way it engages with Africa, ensuring its positioning is in line with our mutual interests (53) (55-58). This can be connected with language related to a competition, noting Africa’s collaboration with other partners, such as China and The United States. These metaphors can invoke different interpretations. It may connote the popularity of collaborating with Africa and the need to strengthen their partnerships, “the biggest partner” being a way to compare the EU’s engagement in Africa with other regions of the world - a statement to reinforce that position in writing. However, it
may also invoke connotations of an EU that wants to dominate the world scene, “win the game” and Africa being one of the prizes in that mission. The way Africa is described in this metaphor gives little emphasis on what it is that makes Africa an interesting partner for Europe and why Africa is one of their main areas for investment. Simply referring to ‘Africa’ as the one with potential, instead of the partnership as being the thing of potential, diminishes Africa’s position. It places Africa subordinate to the EU and its member states. The two interpretations are however not mutually exclusive, as both discourses can exist at the same time.

When reflecting more in detail on how Africa is portrayed in the text, the continent’s successes and challenges are dedicated one paragraph each. Africa is perceived as a continent with potential; the continent’s youth population is perceived to have the potential to transform Africa (14-15), African countries are described to have the potential to accelerate economic expansion (22-23). Besides its potential, African countries are also pictured to not be fully able due to a number of challenges with conflicts, poverty and governance (30-32). This framing of challenges contributes to the characterization of Africa as a partner. “Thirty-six of the world’s most fragile countries are African, often weakened by conflicts. The continent hosts 390 million people living below the poverty line. Growth has not always been inclusive, notably due to governance challenges” (29-30). Words such as ‘weakened’ are used to describe causes and effects but also suggest the loss of power and strength. In addition, the producer has chosen to focus on the outcomes of these challenges but avoids to reflect on the potential root causes that might have influenced the way in which African countries operate and why thirty-six of them find themselves in this situation (Debuysere, 2020). To take an example, one of the outcomes, and a measurement for success in this sentence, is the poverty line - a contested concept developed and implemented by international institutions such as the World Bank. The current ways of measuring poverty have been criticised for not sufficiently capturing and acknowledging the complex and multidimensional characteristics of poverty to ensure a reflection of the reality of many countries who are defined as “undeveloped” (Gweshengwe 2019, p38). Yet again this concept is used as a way to describe Africa, similar to tendencies reflected on by Carbone (p9) one where Africa is weakened and incapable to succeed without help.

When analysing the text further EU and Europe is mainly pictured through positive and active sentences. They are pictured as a partner who is ready to address ‘world problems’
through each partnership (32-33), and one who is ready to collaborate to ensure ‘sustainable development’ on all accounts (38-48). In the same paragraph as Africa’s challenges are listed, the EU is ready to help. Although the producer showcases a lot of generosity through the sentences, it suggests institutionalised gesture of “help” – an elegant power as xx referred to it. The positioning of the EU, to be able to support, is a position of superiority regardless of what intentions it may have. It suggests that the EU have the knowledge and instruments for how to attain “success”. The lack of describing the EU’s own challenges and how this partnership can support the exchange of knowledge and solutions, suggests a different partnership discourse. The reproduction the discourse of superiority, of donor-receiver relations, the producer continues to normalise a Eurocentric ideology sustaining old power relations.

“You know Africans, we are really used to putting our issues on the table and being very upfront about our issues, while the Western world is more about talking about how great they are and their achievements. That really, it's very evident. So there needs to be some balance, you know, there's a lot that they [EU] have to learn and there's a lot we [AU] also have to learn. How can we help each other? Where are the exchange elements? Anything where we cannot be mutually beneficial to each other should not be on the table as far as I'm concerned.” - Project Coordinator (AU)

If the producer had reflected more exchange elements, that would have supported the creation of a transformative discourse, suggesting equal partnership with a “give-and-get” dimension. In the next chapter I will look into the rules of engagement and if we can find any indications that point to a changing discourse in the implementation.

Ways of engagement in the partnership of equals

This policy document aims to work as a guiding document for the negotiations, it is merely the agreement between the EU and its Member States on how they would like to proceed. Nevertheless, expectations for how the partners should engage are expressed in the text through grammatical features such as expressive modality. These help us understand the way in which possibility, permission, certainty and obligations are expressed.
The producer starts off by listing a set of possibilities for engagement by using more suggestive forms such as ‘can’ when referring to the priority areas of the partnership “the EU and Africa can work together to...” (33-34). A stronger suggestive form ‘should’ is used when emphasising on an expectation, e.g. in this case where the EU has expectations of what the partnership should generate: “This reliable, longterm, multi-faceted partnership, should now also translate into a stronger political alliance” (60-61). The same goes for the sentence “…our partnership should be based on a clear understanding of our respective and mutual interests and responsibilities.” (39-40). The paragraph continues by listing ideologically contested concepts such as; the creation of decent jobs and value; promoting peace and security; ensuring well-governed migration and mobility; and promoting universal values (42-48). These concepts, although contested, are referenced to global frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Agenda 2063 - African Union’s own strategy which provides them an agreed definition.

However as reflected on the literature review (p12) these concepts are oftentimes agreed on a general and abstract notion, with less clarity of what they actually mean in practice (Sachs 2010; W.B Gaille (1995) in Cornwall & Eade 2010, p2). We can presume that although the strategy is vague in these areas, more specific indicators will be agreed on once the negotiation with the African Union commences.

When looking at the stronger expressive modalities, such as ‘need to’ and ‘must’, the producer has chosen to only use these when referring to actions that the EU should perform “We need to partner with Africa /.../ to tackle together the challenges of the 21st century” (10-12) and “… the EU and its Member States working together in unison, must adapt the way it engages with Africa” (55-57). The use of stronger expressive modalities are addressed to the areas in which the EU has negotiation power, within its member states, and can therefore expect or even steer certain outcomes. The fact that this text has been voted on by the EU institutions and approved, suggests that the phrasing of ‘need to’ and ‘must’ are commitments the EU are ready to promise Africa.

Another expressive modality ‘can only’ is used to express exclusivity. The producer writes “progress can only be achieved by working together on the basis of shared global commitments” (49-51). The sentence suggests that if Africa would try to work on these areas themselves, they would fail, only by working together would they be able to succeed. This assumption that the task is too difficult for one, supports the negotiation of the need for a
partnership and the need for support. The term ‘together’ in this sentence can be understood as within the partnership of the AU and EU, most preferably, and not as advice to partner with other countries and regions in the world. The sentence, although phrased in a positive way with words such as ‘progress’, can be interpreted as an obligation, where the EU implies that they are indispensable to the ‘positive development of Africa’ - essentially a position of power. In broad terms, the introduction text shows openness to discuss the ways of interaction by the use of non-restrictive modalities, but the ways in which the AU is positioned in the text, suggests that the expectations of the EU are the correct ways to engage. In addition to these, the producer suggests five areas for engagement (68-72), each heading includes a vague buzzword and because of its trans-ideological properties, they leave little room for interpretation and disagreement with the vision, as reflected on in the literature review (Cornwall & Eade 2010, p245). To further understand the priorities the receiver has to continue reading the strategy.

When looking at the implementation of the partnership and how in the past two years, the Unions have engaged through the Hub, a pattern of power struggles can be identified. The Hub, being the flagship of the AU-EU youth initiative, has been implemented since 2018, with the same set of young experts, leadership team from the institutions, and supporting secretariat. When interviewing the two coordinators of the project they both recognised the lack of involvement from the AU’s side, mainly due to a shortage of human resources in the African Union Commission that implements the institution's youth initiatives. In addition, all young experts recognised the absence of the AU in the project, one expert preferred to refer to them as “guests” instead of partners and several young experts both from Africa and Europe believed that this project is overrepresented by the EU. Essentially it is a project that the EU finances, the leadership team and supporting secretariat are mainly Europeans, and the slight appearance of the AU is “more of a way to check a diversity or co-representation box”, as one young expert referred to it (YE 4, AU).

“Politically and at the highest level, the dynamic is great. You know, we do a newsletter and the [AU] Commissioner co-signs it, and anytime we do a high-level event, they [the AU] are there. For the day-to-day running the business, putting your hands in the engine, that's where it's been more challenging because it is mainly a question of capacity.” - Project Coordinator (EU)
“...with an AU-EU partnership, you want everyone to be at the same table, but in the end it's me, [another European colleague], the lady from [European country] and the project manager who is [European nationality]. It's all these white Europeans around the table who are in the end talking about something happening in [an African country]. I don’t think it's very equal or the way it should be.” - YE 5 (EU)

“...by the time we found ourselves within the thick of this internal realignment, coming back to the hub was interesting because it seemed like some priorities were a bit out of step, and there was a need to just realign as well. So it's been really interesting trying to make sure that we get ourselves back to the place where the Hub is meeting the EU goals, but it's also meeting the goals for the AU, and is meeting the goals for the partnership, which sometimes are three different things.” - Project Coordinator (AU)

The reflections of the young experts (5) suggests a form in which the EU and Europeans provide support without much notion of the realities of, in this case, the receiver. It shows how something branded as a partnership of equal standing, looks more like the traditional development of “…organised interventions for improvements” (Pietersen). While the project coordinators reflect on the project from a situational context, the young experts have looked at the ways of engagement from an institutional perspective. They observe that the lack of representation of the AU has come to affect the participation of African CSOs and the representation of various needs and approaches in the partnership. This in turn may have effects on the ways in which ownership is perceived, taken or shared.

“Partnership has to do with commitment, both financial commitment and otherwise. If financial commitment is not involved from one hand, it should be compensated from another hand, for example bringing technical know-how, other elements that operate relationally, which means the one’s finance cannot change the policy, the content nor the technical know-how. If this was the case, whoever brings the finance will not matter. If this could be established in financial policy that would make an impact.” - YE 3 (AU)
“...the CSOs that received funding [are] generally European CSOs but the actual project implementation is in Africa. That could have been done differently. Also, to change the narrative that African are not always in need or always out to be perceived as beneficiary, we also have expertise and we also want to have ownership over our projects somehow. We don’t just want to have an international CSO to come and just WOW us with this project, with a narrative that we are benefiting from it” - YE 1 (AU)

What we can learn from this text and what the interviews suggest is that partnership is indeed more complex than the commitments listed in written words. How we understand partnership in a situational context of developing a policy text, might look different to how it is interpreted in an institutional and social context where this partnership has to be implemented. A more careful look at the aspects of ownership and representation is needed when discussing the ways in which to engage. Perhaps a way to ensure “a partnership of equals” is to understand the structural dimensions that might challenge the partners in taking ownership and in being meaningfully represented, not only in terms of issues but also in terms of contributions.

6. Conclusion

The collaboration between the AU and EU has been pictured over the years as an opportunity for the two continents to find meaningful ways to engage with each other as equal partners. However, despite the two decades of strengthening this partnership, there is a lack of representation in the issues dealt with, there is a question of ownership of the initiatives that the partnership sets out to do, and a critique of sustaining normative Eurocentric discourses.

The research has found that there are mentions in the strategy that suggest an intention to strengthen the relation between the two unions; the use of expressive modalities that suggest openness in defining priorities and the use of relational and expressive values that suggest the desire for a stronger bond. The mentions are however few, and more signs of struggles over power fill the strategy. What I have found throughout this process is that the concept of
‘partnership of equals’ is not based on what you can bring to the table in terms of material resources, it is more founded on the action of walking to the table with humility, being ready to reflect on your own shortcomings and welcoming support for your own further development. The way in which we apply diplomatic skills and measures in development has to come from a place of honesty and critical self-reflection. Being inclusive and establishing relations of equality are not merely values we hang on the door, they should be seen as action-words that we should always aspire to implement as we reflect on how we can improve and be creative in our discourse and practice.

Suggestions for further research

As the AU-EU collaboration continues, there is a need for a broader structural reflection of North/South partnership and which discourses we continue to reproduce. Due to the limits of time and resources this research only looked at the EU’s proposal and the AU-EU Youth Hub project. There is room left to evaluate the discourse surrounding the partnership by including a perspective from the African Union itself, and perhaps going more in depth on the various priority areas that will be defined by the partnership in 2021. On a more general term, reflection should be given to the discourse around development today and not only in which ways it is problematic, but also in which ways it can be creative to support relations based on equality.

“Linguistically we must never forget that language can be used as a means of resistance” - Guy Standing (2010)
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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Interview Guide

Introduction to the research study
Mentioning of the terms of engagement, consent, approval, anonymity.

Questions - Semi-structured interview

- What made you motivated to be a part of this Hub?
- Tell me about your experience in the Hub so far?
- What is your impression of the dynamic between the young experts: Africans, Europeans and Diaspora?
- What do you think makes an ideal partnership?
- What is your impression of the dynamic between the AU and EU in the framework of this project?
- What does each partnership bring to this collaboration [the Hub] that makes it good?
- What is your impression of the Africa - Europe representation in the pilot project of your thematic area?
- Do you have any recommendations for the future partnership between the AU and EU?