Brexit, Development Aid and the Commonwealth.

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Abstract

Development cooperation relations between the European Union (EU) and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states has provided a vehicle for the UK's ongoing relationship with the majority of the Commonwealth, although this has been widely overlooked in the run up to the UK referendum and its aftermath. Membership of the EU has provided the UK with the opportunity to collectivise its obligations to ACP Commonwealth states and a framework for its development cooperation relations across the Global South. This has augmented British leadership in global development and the alignment of development policy and practice at the global, regional and national levels. This paper argues that withdrawal from the EU would be a lengthy and costly process that threatens to undermine the UK's position in global development, current levels and sources of development funding and existing and nascent trade relations. While this will present particular challenges for ACP commonwealth states, there may also be opportunities to propose and advocate for alternative frameworks. However, recent changes to the UK's post referendum political leadership does *not augur well for those hoping for a roll back of pressures for liberalisation and associated reforms.*

Key Words: EU-ACP, Lomé, Cotonou, Economic Partnership Agreements, Commonwealth, Brexit.

Much of the public debate in the run up to the UK referendum on European Union (EU) membership harked back to a bygone age of Empire. The special relationship that Britain has with the Commonwealth was portrayed as abandoned or neglected due to the UK's EU membership which had supposedly diverted British attention solely to its near European neighbours. "We should reflect on how Britain's continuing membership of the EU is holding the nation back from fostering stronger trading links with Commonwealth countries" (Chabe 2016). Brexit therefore was presented as an opportunity to re-engage with neglected partners for mutual benefit, with UK interest in the Commonwealth re-invigorated.

This discourse, however, neglected the deep and long-standing relationships that the UK has enjoyed with Commonwealth countries *via* its membership of EU. The EU has supported development cooperation relationships with countries across the Global South, linking it and its member states via a policy framework based on trade and aid. The most long-standing of these relationships is the partnership between the EU and the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of states. Of the 53 Commonwealth states, only 11 are not part of the EU-ACP partnership.[1] This paper therefore argues that the EU-ACP relationship has provided an important framework for development cooperation relations between Commonwealth states. In addition, and particularly in the wake of the inertia of the Doha Round of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations, the UK, as part of the EU, has developed a range of bilateral trade relations with non-ACP Commonwealth states, including the much vaunted EU-Canada agreement (now held up as a potential model for the UK's post-Brexit future).

The lack of recognition of the UK's relationships with third countries conducted via the EU has become evident in post-referendum analyses of the complexity of Brexit and the arrangements and negotiations that would be required to enact it. This is particularly evident in the area of development cooperation, and the debate about how to replace the broad range of relationships that the UK is currently party to as a EU member state. This article therefore aims to contribute to that debate via an exploration of the remit of the EU's relationship with the Commonwealth via the EU-ACP partnership, and the likely impact of Brexit on the UK's relationship with the ACP Commonwealth states.

[1] These are the Asian Commonwealth states (Bangladesh, Brunei Darassalam, India, Malaysia, Maldives, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka), Canada, Australia and New Zealand. All other Commonwealth states are either members of the ACP or the EU (in the case of Malta, Cyprus and the UK).

The Commonwealth ACP and the European Union

The relationship between the EU and Commonwealth states in Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific was a direct result of the accession of the UK to the EU (then EEC) in 1973, and the need to accommodate the UK's existing trade and development relations with its former colonies. The model for this relationship was already established as two of the founding members of the European Coal and Steel Community and then EEC, France and Belgium had had their extensive relations with colonies and former colonies accommodated via the Treaty of Rome in 1957. This had resulted from France's insistence that the newly established common market would be open to its dependencies. The Europe–Africa Association Agreements provided the trade and aid framework for these relations, with the granting of colonial trade preferences to the wider EEC arguably acting as a 'carrot' for the maintenance of a 'Franco-African Union' (Langan 2016).

The Association Agreement included a European Development Fund (EDF) for the provision of aid to the associated countries. This collective arrangement for the original European six (Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg) was the cause of some dispute. Germany in particular queried whether it should be required to support a development funding pot that in effect collectivized the costs of French and Belgian colonial administrations among the EEC Six. Additionally, there were conflicts over the spending within the EDF which was regarded as supporting colonial interests. Indeed, Nkrumah viewed European provision as a mechanism for collective neo-colonialism, acting as a ‘Trojan Horse’ for the interests of former colonial powers (Langan 2015:113).

In 1963 The Association Agreement was replaced by the Yaoundé Accords (1963-1975*)*, which provided for reciprocal market opening and trade between the signatories. There was dissatisfaction, particularly from African leaders, about the emphasis on liberalization which was feared would undermine prospects for industrialization and value addition in developing countries. This dissatisfaction, coupled with the accession of new member states to the EEC in 1973, prompted the reformulation of the relationship from the Yaoundé Accords to the Lomé Convention.

Prior to its accession to the EEC, the UK had conducted trade with colonies and former colonies via a System of Commonwealth Preferences. The decision to join the EEC prompted the reformulation of this system. Through the creation of the ACP group, Commonwealth states in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific were combined with those already associated to the EEC to form a new alliance of states in the Global South that would partner the EEC in the area of trade and aid. This group shared a collective identity as former colonies, and in spite of their heterogeneity, have continued to maintain a collective identity. Ravenhill (1985) suggests that through this alliance the ACP enacted a collective form clientelism, to maximize outcomes from an unequal and neo-colonial partnership. The UK in turn had, like France before it, collectivized responsibility for its former colonies (and the associated financial burden), while at the same time securing access to a significant market.

The newly created Lomé Conventions were based on non-reciprocal trade preferences coupled with commodity stablisation mechanisms. Each agreement had a five-year duration, and were renegotiated five times 1975 and 2000. The ACP were required to negotiate and agree as a bloc, however the EEC was often accused of utilizing divide and rule tactics to broker coalitions in order to achieve support for their position. While formerly a partnership of equals it was often critiqued as an asymmetrical relationship in which the EEC/EU was able to leverage its position. While the regime maintained the UK's influence and relationship with its former colonies it also brought special access for those states to the European Market and the newly created Single Market in 1985.

In addition to Lomé’s trade provisions, development aid continued to be provided through the EDF. While initially this was mainly in the form of grants ‘with no strings attached’, over time aid became increasingly conditional and accompanied by an associated shift to programming, which was justified on the basis of weak efficiency and progress. Programmed aid became conditional on commitments to free market reform, Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), and core ‘political’ elements of good governance, the rule of law, democracy and human rights. Recently there has been a perception that EU aid, in the Post Washington Consensus era, has been untied from structural adjustment, however Langan (2015) argues that, particularly via budget support mechanisms, it remains tied to ‘premature trade opening and economic liberalization’. The EU therefore has been able to leverage free market reform to the detriment of the needs of the poor (Nunn and Price 2004; Langan 2013).

EU pressure for liberalization was particularly evident in the reform of the Lomé relationship and its replacement by the Cotonou Partnership Agreement in 2000 (Nunn and Price 2004). Under the guise of WTO compliance, non-reciprocal preferential trade was replaced by a reciprocal free trade regime based on

Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and regions within the ACP. While formally the ACP group remains as a partner of the EU, the EPAs have subdivided the group into 7 regional groupings each with their own negotiating schedules and trade arrangements with the EU. As with all international agreements concluded between the EU and the third parties, the European Commission negotiated these partnerships on behalf of the EU and its member states, although individual states retain the authority to conclude commercial agreements with external partners, such as the UK's 2015 trade deal with India (Peers 2015).

The UK has been central to the ongoing liberalization of the EU-ACP trade regime, in concert with the European Commission and Germany which both have also been key advocates of free trade (Elgstom 2008). The UK's position however combined liberalization with an explicit focus on social development and pro-poor strategies. In 2005 Peter Mandelson, EU Commissioner for Trade proclaimed "I believe in progressive trade liberalisation. I believe that opening of markets can deliver growth and the reduction of poverty" (quoted in Elgstom 2008). This position would bring the UK into conflict with the Commission, but was ultimately successful in foregrounding social development concerns within the reform of the EU- ACP agreement (Elgstom 2008).

The Cotonou Agreement had set a schedule for the conclusion of the EPAs as 2008, however this vastly underestimated the complexity of the negotiations. This was intensified as the regional associations within the ACP bloc required reform and restructuring at the same time as the new EPAs were to be negotiated. As a result, the EPA process remains incomplete and is subject to ongoing negotiations and agreement.

Notwithstanding, through this framework the UK, via its membership of the EU, currently has free trade agreements (either awaiting ratification, adoption or already in force) with 32 commonwealth countries of the ACP. In the majority of cases, these relationships are embedded in regional groupings that encompass both commonwealth and non-commonwealth states, as well as a range of development levels. This will add complexity to the UK's attempts to withdraw from the EU trade agreements and formulate its own separate arrangements. Moreover, the range of the trade relationships between the EU, the ACP and beyond, reveal the extent of agreements the UK would be required to replace should it decide to leave the EU. Brexit therefore presents much uncertainty about how this will impact on future relationships.

In the event of a UK exit from the EU, the EU will maintain its relationships with the Commonwealth via the Cotonou Agreement and EPAs while Cyprus and

Malta will remain EU member states. For ACP Commonwealth states this will be important. While traditional patterns of trade remain, UK accession to the EU had diversified Commonwealth trade patterns. Since 2000 EU-ACP trade flows have more than doubled, representing 5% of EU exports and 5.4% of EU imports, up respectively from 1.5% and 1.8% in 2000 (European Commission 2016). The ACP is the EU's 7th most important trading partner, and it accounts for 24% of ACP imports and 17% of ACP exports (Commission 2016). ACP exports to the EU are dominated by Africa and minerals, for example in 2014 Africa accounted for 97.6% of ACP exports to the EU and South Africa alone for almost a quarter (21.6%). Only 4.2% of ACP exports to the EU originate in the Caribbean and 0.3% of the Pacific region (European Commission 2016).

These aggregate figures mask the continued reliance of the ACP Commonwealth states on the UK market. For example, the banana market the UK, which consumes more bananas per capita than any other EU member state, is the prime export market for Caribbean states such as St Lucia, whose main export commodity is bananas (Flood-Beabrun 2016). The current EU-ACP trade regime provides ACP bananas with duty free access to the UK and EU market, which is an advantage not enjoyed by largescale Latin America exporters. Without this concession bananas produced on small family farms 'would not be able to hold their own against the banana produced on the vast continental plantations' (Flood Beabrun 2016). Brexit therefore could threaten the livelihoods of small-holders and undermine wider sustainable development objectives. ACP Commonwealth countries will undoubtedly seek to maintain their preferential access to UK markets, and expect the UK to match the trade benefits that are enjoyed with the rest of the EU. This pressure to at least mirror existing agreements will be relatively unproblematic for the trade in primary commodities, however the complexity of EU Rules of Origin will have an impact on the negotiations and the shape of the new agreements. If the UK does not provide a trade framework to replace these relationships on similar terms, these markets could be lost. This is a particular concern for commonwealth states in the Caribbean, not least as this group of states has already secured and established their EPA arrangements with the EU.

For other ACP countries, the referendum has provided a breathing space in the current EPA negotiation and ratification process. ACP states, particularly in Africa, have been concerned about the impact of EPAs and trade liberalization, something that in part explains the length of time the new relationships have taken to complete. While the EU presented a forceful and unified front in the negotiations, the sub-groupings of the ACP were in a relatively weak position to counter pressures for liberalization. The Brexit referendum however has given some pause, with for example Tanzania quoting Brexit as a reason for its decision not to progress with its EPA negotiations (Crawford 2016).

There might be some optimism that a post-Brexit UK could offer a new and preferable alternative to the EU-EPAs. Yet the UK has been a keen advocate of liberalization and an agent of change in the EU's development cooperation relations. Commentators such as Siles-Brugge (2016) and Murray-Evans (2016) have argued that it is likely that the shape of the UK's post-Brexit trade relations will be underpinned by increased liberalisation rather than less. Furthermore, given the range of relationships that the UK will need to renegotiate, the ACP Commonwealth are unlikely to be at the forefront of UK concerns (Siles Brugge 2016). Although Africa has some of the fastest growing economies in the world, the negotiating priorities will be focused on states with significant economic might, such as Canada. Within the discussions for these new relationships the capacity of the UK as a trade negotiator is likely to be tested. Siles Brugge (2016) argues that, the UK's negotiating leverage will be diminished due to its reduced size and attractiveness of the British market (outside the EU). While this might be the case for relations with economically larger states, the UK will still wield power in relation to economically smaller and more dependent states, particularly if its aid regime continues to be tied to trade provisions.

The implications of Brexit for UK - ACP Commonwealth Aid Relationship

The uncertain future of UK trade relations in the context of a withdrawal from the EU is mirrored in relation to the provision of development aid via the EDF. The EDF is funded by direct contributions from EU member states, and sits outside of the EU budget. The allocation of EDF financial assistance has increasingly been tied to the concept of Aid for Trade with a focus on trade development and private sector growth. In accordance with this the current 11th EDF is based on the objectives of poverty eradication, sustainable development and the gradual integration of the ACP states into the world economy with special treatment for LDCS. It also has a commitment to the provision of €30.5 billion of development assistance to the ACP between 2014-2020 (EU Commission 2016). In 2014 the UK contributed approx. 15% of the EDF (€ 4.5 Bn), making it the 3rd largest contributor after Germany (€6.28, 20.58%) and France (€5.43 billion, 17.81 %) (Ransome 2016, Commission 2013). The UK's national aid budget is primarily delivered via DFID, which then provides aid bilaterally to selected focus countries and to a wider range of countries via multilateral delivery systems. Within this distribution, the European

Commission is the largest recipient of UK multilateral funds (UKAN 2016) (see Figure 1) .

Through this multilateral provision the UK has secured a key leadership position at both the regional and global level. It has been at the forefront of directing EU external assistance towards its own pro-poor priorities and coordinating approaches within the Millennium Development Goals, the Sustainable Development goals and the framing of the post 2015 climate. This prime position at the EU level has in turn secured the UK's position as a global leader in development, not least as the EU 28 are largest donor group in the world providing half of all international aid (Watkins 2016)

Rather than diminishing the UK's global role, EU membership has enhanced its position. Watkins (2016) argues the British contribution to European development funds represents a good investment as it extends the geographic reach of UK aid, including to places where the UK has a limited and declining aid presence. Moreover, UK leadership in EU development cooperation has allowed it to leverage EU aid to enhance Dfid's objectives, and in turn to achieve its national goals (Watkins 2016). Certainly the close correlation of policy orientation between the global, regional and national level is evident, with DFID recognizing its developmental outcomes 'result from the collective action of countries and diverse development partners' (Department for International Development [DFID] 2013).

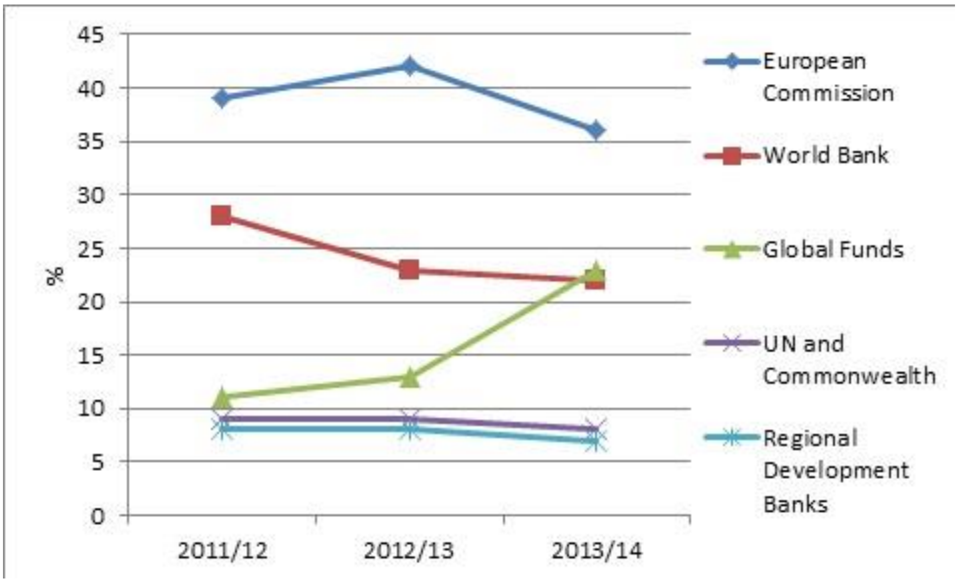

Figure 1 Share of UK core multilateral aid going to the main multilaterals.

Source: 'DFID Annual Report and Accounts 2011-12', DFID, June 2012, p201 reproduced in UKAN 2016.

Within the EU, the UK has been able to forge important partnerships with 'like-minded' states, such as Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, that have both augmented the UK’s position and reinforced their collective identities as development advocates (Elgstrom 2008). Laurant (2016) argues that Brexit would mean “loss of the valuable, progressive and pro-development voice and perspective of the UK in framing EU development policy”. Moreover, the benefits and efficiency of coordination, for example joint planning by EU donors in 40 countries and joint programming in 16, would be lost (Watkins 2016).

The UK currently has spending commitments to the 11th EDF for the next 4 years. It is uncertain what impact Brexit would have should it occur before 2020. While there is no provision in the EDF for the event of an exit by a contributor member state, it does provide for the situation of a new state acceding to the EU. In that case the contributions of member states can be amended by unanimous Council decision acting on a Commission Proposal. Whether, in the event of a UK exit, the Council would unanimously agree to increase other member states’ individual contributions to cover the shortfall is questionable. By implication, the EDF might be facing a potential reduction in the next four years and then after, or the UK might be expected to respect its commitments as part of the Brexit negotiations.

There is also uncertainty about how Brexit might affect the European Investment Bank. The UK is currently the institution’s biggest investor, with 17% of EIB capital. Brexit is therefore likely to cause instability and uncertainty for this institution which will be compounded by currency volatility. Mendez-Parra et al (2016) have predicted Brexit could provoke a 10% devaluation of the pound. In addition, they predict that there could be a lowering of UK gross domestic product (GDP) (-3%) and British exports to developing countries. Their predictions imply a reduction in the value of aid by $1.9Billion with the combined cost (through aid, trade and remittance) of the devaluation for developing countries to be $3.8 billion (Mendez-Parra et al 2016). This is in the context of conditions in which many developing countries are already facing multiple shocks, lower oil and commodity prices, a stronger US dollar and a slowing Chinese economy (Aglionby 2016). Kenya's central bank governor predicted that Brexit could pose a greater risk to his country than China's slowdown, due to the impact of financial market volatility and reduced investment (Aglionby, 2016).

In the event of Brexit there will be pressure placed on the UK to transfer its current commitments from the EU either to its own bilateral funding or to alternative multilateral funding mechanisms such as the World Bank. For example, Flood-Beabrun (2016) has called for the lost UK contribution to EDF to be replaced by bilateral development finance, particularly increased Aid for Trade. However, there has recently been a significant reduction in the number of recipients of UK bilateral aid. DFID's Bilateral Aid Review reduced the number of recipients from 78 in 2010/11 to 28 in 2012, with Pakistan, Ethiopia and Nigeria targeted as the key recipients for 2014/15 (UKAN 2016). Until this point the narrowing of bilateral focus has been accompanied by the UK's continued commitments to multilateral frameworks, thus maintaining Britain's influence and role. The reorientation of aid from multilateral to bilateral channels threatens to diminish the UKs position in global development as well as requiring a significant increase in administrative capacity and a long process of bureaucratic reform.

The changes to the UK's political leadership in the wake of the referendum do little to allay concerns over the future of development funding, nor the commitment to social development initiatives that are not directly linked to free trade. The appointment of Priti Patel as the new Secretary of State for International Development reflects the sentiments of the current British government and the Brexit wing in particular. Prior to her appointment Patel, a key advocate of Brexit, characterized international aid as a 'low priority' for government. She argued that aid spending should be orientated to securing the British national interest and that DFID should be replaced by a Department for International Trade and Development 'to enable the UK to focus on enhancing trade with the developing world and seek out new investment opportunities in the global race” (Patel quoted in Tapsfield 2016). The appointment of Patel therefore raises questions about the future both of UK aid commitments and DFID itself. Chakrabortty (2016) argues that while it would be difficult for Patel to reject the UK aid commitments of 0.7% GDP, she will be more likely to erode it. Rather than the ‘pro-poor’ focus that has defined the UK’s position, Chakrabotrry (2016) predicted there will be more focus on orientating aid towards middle income states such as South Africa that would boost UK trade interests abroad. For the poorest Commonwealth states, and those with small and remote markets, this re-orientation would pose a significant threat.

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Conclusion

The referendum and prospects of a UK exit from the EU have created much uncertainty about the future of development cooperation at the national, regional and global levels. There has been much under-estimation of the extent of change required in order to disaggregate UK relationships from the wider network of EU’s external agreements. Without doubt the negotiations to both to leave the EU and to restructure UK relations with the rest of the world will be lengthy and costly, although the extent of that remains unknown.

Brexit will necessarily require the UK to reformulate its relations with the Commonwealth. As this paper has shown, accession to the EU fundamentally changed UK's trade and aid relations with ACP states (both in Commonwealth and beyond). It also provided an opportunity for ACP Commonwealth States to access European markets and development funding, and strengthen relations with non-Commonwealth ACP states. Those relations will remain in the event of UK withdrawal, although it is uncertain what shape EU development cooperation will take in the absence of UK.

Membership of the EU has enhanced UK leadership in global development. Through the collectivization of aid commitments and administration, the UK has been able to secure influence throughout the Global South and has shaped the policy framework through which this has been delivered. A decision to leave the EU could undermine that leadership, threaten sources and levels of development funding and create uncertainty about the future of EU and UK trade relations. While this will present challenges, for critics of the UK's policy orientation and the sustained emphasis on liberalization within EU's external relations this might present an opportunity to improve the basis of those relations and develop alternative development frameworks which truly reflect the needs of the poor.

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Appendix

Commonwealth members (* indicates ACP membership)

Africa	**Caribbean and the Americas**	**Europe**	**Asia**	**Pacific**
1. Botswana *	1. Antigua and Barbuda *	1. Cyprus	1. Bangladesh	1. Australia
2. Cameroon *	2. Bahamas *	2. Malta	2. Brunei Darassalam	2. Fiji *
3. Ghana *	3. Barbados *	3. UK	3. India	3. Kiribati *
4. Kenya *	4. Belize *		4. Malaysia	4. Nauru *
5. Lesotho *	5. Canada		5. Maldives	5. New Zealand
6. Malawi *	6. Dominica *		6. Pakistan	6. Papua New Guinea *
7. Mauritius *	7. Grenada *		7. Singapore	7. Samoa *
8. Mozambique *	8. Guyana *		8. Sri Lanka	8. Solomon Islands *
9. Namibia *	9. Jamaica *			9. Tonga *
10. Nigeria *	10. Saint Lucia *			10. Tuvalu *
11. Rwanda*	11. St Kitts and Nevis *			11. Vanuatu *
12. Seychelles *	12. St Vincent			
13. Sierra Leone *				
14. South Africa *				

15. Swaziland * 16. Uganda * 17. United Republic of Tanzania * 18. Zambia *	and The Grenadines * **13.** Trinidad and Tobago *			

ACP member states

1. Angola
2. Antigua and Barbuda
3. Belize
4. Bahamas
5. Barbados
6. Benin
7. Botswana
8. Burkina Faso
9. Burundi
10. Cameroon
11. Cape Verde
12. Comoros
13. Central African Republic
14. Chad
15. Congo (Brazzaville)
16. Congo (Kinshasa)
17. Cook Islands
18. Cte d'Ivoire
19. Cuba
20. Djibouti
21. Dominica
22. Dominican Republic
23. Eritrea
24. Ethiopia
25. Fiji
26. Gabon
27. Gambia
28. Ghana
29. Grenada
30. Republic of Guinea
31. Guinea-Bissau
32. Equatorial Guinea
33. Guyana
34. Haiti
35. Jamaica
36. Kenya
37. Kiribati
38. Lesotho
39. Liberia
40. Madagascar
41. Malawi
42. Mali
43. Marshall Islands
44. Mauritania
45. Mauritius
46. Micronesia
47. Mozambique
48. Namibia
49. Nauru

50. Niger
51. Nigeria
52. Niue
53. Palau
54. Papua New Guinea
55. Rwanda
56. St. Kitts and Nevis
57. St. Lucia
58. St. Vincent and the Grenadines
59. Solomon Islands
60. Samoa
61. Sao Tome and Principe
62. Senegal
63. Seychelles
64. Sierra Leone
65. Somalia
66. South Africa
67. Sudan
68. Suriname
69. Swaziland
70. Tanzania
71. Timor Leste
72. Togo
73. Tonga
74. Trinidad and Tobago
75. Tuvalu
76. Uganda
77. Vanuatu
78. Zambia
79. Zimbabwe