

## **Securing Rights for Development: The Commonwealth Secretariat and the Emergence of a Common African Front for the Lomé Convention (1972-1975)**

Melanie Torrent<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Université Paris Diderot, English Studies, Paris, France

[melanie.torrent@univ-paris-diderot.fr](mailto:melanie.torrent@univ-paris-diderot.fr)

As the British government signed the Treaty of Accession to the European Economic Community, the inclusion of Commonwealth developing states in the EEC's trade conventions remained an unsolved issue. The African and Malagasy Associated States, over which France maintained a dominant political and economic influence, were divided over two major issues. First, should Nigeria, whose size and economy were seen as a threat by its Francophone neighbours, be admitted into the association? Secondly, should reciprocal preferences, that France had managed to include in previous Yaoundé Convention negotiations, be accepted or fought against as a brake for African development? In April 1972, the Commonwealth Secretariat initiated a series of meetings with the African and Malagasy Associated States, attempted to provide a space for dialogue between Anglophone and Francophone Africa and fought to generate a common African position that would benefit the developing South. Although the Lomé Convention, which was signed in 1975, presented clear limits, it also achieved considerable progress in securing better conditions for developing states, supported by stronger multilateralism in the South. This period is crucial for a number of evolutions which this paper will investigate. First, the emergence of a strong Commonwealth voice, distinct from British policies, and of the Commonwealth Secretariat as an active player in trade diplomacy and development, at the time when the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (1971) and the Commonwealth Youth Programme (1973) first came into operation. Secondly, the ability of the Commonwealth to work in cooperation with other multilateral organisations and create strategic partnerships on key issues: relations with the Organisation of African and Malagasy States, with the African and Malagasy Associated States, with the *Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique* (ACCT) and with the Organisation of African Unity helped overcome the deadlock in negotiations. Finally, the role of the Commonwealth in opening avenues of cooperation across Africa and particularly across the divide inherited from the colonial era. While underlining the limits of the negotiations and their outcome, this paper intends to demonstrate the role of the Commonwealth in buttressing multilateral engagements with and for Africa.