

# AFRICAN UNION AND EUROPEAN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS: CROSS-CULTURAL TRAPS IN MULTICULTURAL TEAMS

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**Abstract:** *Volumes of text have been written about the necessity of cross-cultural communication in global organizations, particularly in business (Moran et al. 2007). Communication was reported to be an important core mechanism of support strategy processes for sustainable development (OECD 2001). The cooperation of stakeholders depends on it (GTZ Rioplus, 2006). Very little research has been done on effective sustainable development multicultural teams. Sustainable development project creation and implementation is highly impacted by cultural differences and communication differences. Members of international commissions need to be able to communicate with each other in creation and implementation of important sustainable development projects.*

*The purpose of this study is to examine the state of cross-cultural communication involving two significant players in the arena of sustainable development: the African Union and the European Union. Cultural differences between the AU and EU are discussed and areas of communication breakdown are identified.*

*Some styles represented in the EU seemed to be more apt to promote misunderstandings and breakdowns in the communication process. Recommendations include comprehensive cross-cultural communication. Cross-cultural training to develop strategic communication beneficial to facilitating relationship formation, teamwork and coherence in project implementation is highly recommended. More research is necessary in methods for creating cultural synergy, solving problems in mindful ways and adjusting styles to fit the other team members.*

**Key words:** *cross-cultural communication, African Union, European Union, sustainable development, multicultural teams*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

“Sustainable development is the pathway to the future we want for all. It offers a framework to generate economic growth, achieve social justice, exercise environmental stewardship and strengthen governance” (Ban Ki Moon, UN 2015).

These important words define the current drive towards sustainable development. The purpose of this work is to consider the challenges involved in the processes of project development that are inherent in the international context. Cross-cultural communication is at the backbone of all multicultural groups in the international arena. Incredibly diverse individuals, groups and countries find themselves in sustainable development committees, facing the challenges of communicating to get a job done. Cross-cultural communication studies can be found in many profession applications, such as business and education, but the area of sustainable development project team communication is considerably lacking in this area. Exploring the literature reveals

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that there is a massive quantity of research on the subject of cross-cultural communication, intercultural communication, cross-cultural studies, transcultural communication, both theoretical and specifically applied to different countries as well as professions. Regular cooperative development projects and teams have been studied, but there is very little written about sustainable project development team communication.

In recent times it has become obvious that the need for sustainable development is imperative for the survival of humanity. As seen in the above quote of Ban Ki Moon, sustainable development will define the future we all want. The success of sustainable development projects depends on many factors, but one of the most important is the ability to work effectively on multi-cultural teams.

Obviously, in order to work well on a team all team members need to be able to communicate with each other. The OECD and UNDP have studied the need for strategic communication in sustainable development. The OECD has defined the strategies for sustainable development as “a coordinated set of participatory and continuously improving processes of analysis, debate, capacity strengthening, planning and investment, which integrates the economic, social and environmental objectives of society, seeing trade-offs where this is not possible” (OECD, 2002). This quote demonstrates that communication is at the base of sustainable development. Terms such as “participatory”, “processes of analysis”, “debate”, “planning” are all based on the ability of team members to communicate with each other and function effectively. Working effectively on a multicultural team can be challenging as well as frightening, but in general the payoff is high. According to various management reviews, multicultural teams are more effective, productive and creative (Hunt, Leyden and Prince, 2015). They also have more “cognitive flexibility” (Markman, 2015) which makes them better problem solvers.

Multicultural teams are obviously affected by cultural values and cultural communication styles. Many studies have been published on multicultural team building, effective team building, team communication, etc. The general consensus is that culture plays a significant part in the ability of a multicultural team to function.

Cultural challenges are manageable if managers and team members choose the right strategy and avoid imposing single-culture-based approaches on multicultural situations according to Brett, Behfar, Kern, (2006). These researchers identified four cultural differences that can create team conflicts. They cited direct vs. indirect communication; trouble with accents and fluency; differing attitudes toward hierarchy; decision-making norms in conflict.

Another study conducted by the East-West Center in Honolulu (1980) examined factors that influence International Cooperative Research and Development projects (ICRD). What they came up with can be applied to any sort of international cooperative group, especially in the sustainable development area. Important areas included project planning and organization; decision-making procedures; official language to be used; affiliation of members with outside groups; various types of communication, from face-to face to impersonal, to mention a few.

### **1.1 Factors that affect multicultural teams**

Another researcher suggested that cross-cultural factors impact project stakeholder management and there is a lack of corresponding research on those factors (Luckmann, 2015). He cited the lack of cross-cultural knowledge sharing, cross-cultural intelligence, trust among stakeholders as being significant impact factors for a project. Additionally, the fact that Western

project management approach is mostly incompatible with approaches in other parts of the world has an effect on the success of international projects.

According to the German Rioplus Organization for Environmental Policy and Promotion of Strategies for Sustainable Development, strategic communication is a “prerequisite and an instrument of effective policy making and public participation: from formulating a vision, negotiating and decision-making, developing and implementing plans to monitoring impacts”. They point out that communication provides exchange of information, builds consensus, encourages the creation of programs, implementation and action. They believe that it is necessary to encourage “delicate cooperation between government, civil society groups and the private sector.” They add that this is the reason that the OECD and UNDP consider awareness raising and communication as essential part of the support strategy processes for sustainable development. They conclude that cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders are essential for the success of any sustainable development project.

In summary, sustainable development depends on multicultural groups, whether they be small projects in the private sector, or enormous endeavours such as the construction of the Nairobi-Mombasi Railway (China and Kenya) or African Union-European Union long-term projects. And functional multicultural teams depend on effective cross-cultural communication to be successful.

This reason this study has focused on the cross-cultural communication processes between the African Union and the European Union for this reason. The following section discusses the African Union and the difficulty of identifying a uniform culture.

## **1.2 The African Union**

There are 54 countries on the African continent (UN, 2018) with a population of approximately 1.278 billion (UN estimate 2018). There is an estimated number of 3000 ethnic groups and more than 2000 languages. It is impossible and also incorrect to make cultural generalizations about the African continent. The African continent has been divided up by the African Union into several regional-political areas: north, south, east, west, central and the Diaspora (African Union, 1999). This study adopts the African Union division of Africa (African Union, 2018).

## **1.3 African Culture**

The word “African culture” is a misnomer because geographical Africa and Diasporian Africa contain numerous cultures and subcultures. The first point to be aware of is that Africa has been undergoing dramatic changes in the past few years due to development, immigration and various ongoing conflicts. Trying to analyse all of the cultures present is a daunting project at best, if not impossible.

## **1.4 Cultural and Linguistic History of Africa**

No discussion of African communication processes can be conducted without touching on the cultural and linguistic aspects of African history, especially the impact of colonialism. Linguistic and cultural groupings have been affected not just by the indigenous populations that were present before the age of colonialism but also by what followed. Apart from indigenous languages, the impact of the Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone influences on communication styles in Africa are significant. Also the slave trade, both within Africa and

trans-Atlantic exerted a strong impact, coupled with continuing ethnic conflicts. Various scholars (Ali Mazrui, 1986; Mutua-Kombo, 2008; Karl Peltzer, 2006) point out that it is important to consider colonialism and other historical events in order to comprehend the African communication styles. Mazrui suggests that there are three main cultural influences in Africa: traditional indigenous culture, Islamic culture, and Western influence. Mutua-Kombo states that there is a conflict between the core values and beliefs of contemporary and traditional Africa and the historical influences forced by contacts with Europeans. Peltzer (1995) proposes three separate “groups” of Africa. The first group is traditional who have had little contact or influence with modernization. The second group seems to continue within modern and traditional cultures (i.e. working in the city during the week and returning to the extended tribal village on the weekends). The third group is modern and lives in a modern context and participate completely in the contemporary world (Peltzer, 1995, pp. 25). One can only assume that these three groups have changed in number since this research was carried out, with a growing number of transitional and modern group members and a diminishing number of traditional group members. Nwosu points out that Africans are able to manage the transitions and end up being able to communicate and interact within the three groups (Nwosu, 2008, pp. 176). The effort to grasp what African Culture actually is goes back to cultural identity. Many sociologists and philosophers have attempted to identify cultural patterns running through all modern African countries.

### **1.5 African cultural themes**

There has been much discussion about African identity and what constitutes “traditional African culture”. The next section summarizes various possibilities for understanding the cultural values that underlie African communication.

According to Lassiter (1999) there are shared cultural values in sub-Saharan Africa which still exist long after the advent of European contact. He says that traditional African culture consists of “generally widespread sub-Saharan core values, beliefs, cultural themes and behaviours as they existed prior to European contact”. He believes that they can still be found more in rural areas and less in urban areas. These shared cultural values are influential because “many, if not most, fundamental thought processes and behaviours of contemporary sub-Saharan Africans are based and continue to be derived from” these cultural values.

There has been ongoing discussion on what African culture actually is, whether it can be defined and classified as “African culture” or whether it needs to be divided or sectioned by ethnicity, colonial linguistic roots, nationality, religion, degree of development, and so forth. The general consensus of the literature is that it is not advisable to generalize about African culture, but there are threads of commonality that can be studied and applied to achieve a better understanding of African communication. This consensus puts forth the idea of a common African culture known as “pan-African”. Core African cultural values and patterns of cultural behaviour fall into this category. Lassiter (2000) stated that the motivation for identifying a common pan-African culture is based on the need to achieve “viable and sustainable African national and community development”.

Another observation is that Africa is rapidly developing and modernizing, and therefore there may be more Western acculturation taking place. Also the fact that the African Union includes the millions of Africans that are part of the African Diaspora as AU members indicates the possibility of ongoing cultural exchange, interchange and change. Makgoba presented his ideas on the common cultural values of the African peoples (1997). He offered the thought that the

people of the African Diaspora maintain what is generally considered to be the Pan-African cultural identity, which by default defines core African values. He says that the shared values “include hospitality, friendliness, the consensus and common framework-seeking principle (Ubuntu), and the emphasis on community rather than on the individual.” The community takes priority over the individual; long-term friendship and hospitality are important; the goal of finding consensus and a common frame work (Ubuntu) are three areas that he believes define African culture (Makgoba, 1997, pp 197-198). He says that African Diaspora peoples of African descent “are linked by shared values that are fundamental features of African identity and culture.” He states that these values are present in “variations of African culture and identity...the existence of African identity is not in doubt” (1997 p 1997-198).

According to Obeng-Quaido from Ghana there are four important cultural thematic areas (1986). These cultural orientations involve work, the place and importance of the individual in society, the concept of time, and the human being’s relationship with the spiritual world. He offers the following analysis.

Work orientation: Work is considered in terms of the benefits to the community. Africans are expected to provide for their extended family members who are less fortunate than they are.

Individual’s place in society: The collectivist orientation is exemplified by the African proverb “I am because we are” demonstrates a strong focus on the group.

Concept of time: Time is not measured by schedules but by connections. Africans do not believe in being dependent on schedules. Time should be dedicated to relationships.

Relationship to the spiritual world: Obeng-Quaido refers to a comment made by Mbiti, a philosopher, who said that Africans are extremely religious but it is difficult to distinguish between the spiritual and secular world.

## **1.6 Communalism**

Nwosu (2009) presented a thorough analysis of the African culture in terms of intercultural competence. He formulated a very useful table which furnished the cultural elements for comparison in this study. The dimensions that he suggested include self-orientation, relational orientation, time orientation, activity orientation and discourse orientation. First of all, self-orientation explains the formation of identity and what impacts identity. Communalism seems to be the strongest influence in the African self- identity. Nwosu says that there is a symbiotic relationship between the individual and group. Hierarchy, formality and distinct gender roles define how people interact with each other. He quotes Mbiti (1969) who wrote “whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual” (p. 109) and “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am” (Mbiti, 1969, p 109). This value can be seen in various African languages, including in the Xhosa language (a person is a person through persons) and Igbo (“a person who is not with his or her extended family must bury himself”). Therefore, the African personal identity is defined by taking part in a community and making personal decisions with the needs of the larger community in mind. The idea of communalism is very evident in traditional Africa and takes on the status of a religion in the same way that individualism in the West is elevated to a high, almost religious status (Taylor and Nwosu, 2001). The extent to which African culture is a communal culture is its focus on the “authenticity of community-presentation image” (Moemeka, 1996, p 198) which means that communication practices are influenced by how

different behaviours have an impact on the community image and not the way a behaviour could impact an individual. This fact, although seemingly insignificant, has a strong influence in procedures, communication and project implementation. To sum up, communalism is the "soul and fibre of work, activity and social life in Africa" (Awa, 1988, p 136).

### **1.7 Social relations**

Another area flowing from this orientation is that of social relations. According to Nwosu, relationships are built on a hierarchical lineal superstructure where people are not equal because of different reasons, including age, status and wealth. Friendship is considered to be a sort of obligation which includes various responsibilities and rights. The existence of the hierarchical superstructure can be seen by examining the language used to address various persons, the titles, and organized interactions. Blake (1993, pp. 8) stated that various linguistic structures can be observed which indicate the existence of rules guiding discourse. Deliberative, forensic and epideictic genres can be noted that are based on the respect for older people, the affirmation of hierarchical structural supremacy, certain rituals performed out of respect for the ancestors, the use of rituals in an array of life situations; relationships between siblings. Salutations, use of titles, names, etc. are strongly dominated by hierarchical values.

### **1.8 Time**

Cultural perspectives on time have been an extensive topic of cross-cultural communication studies. How cultures manage and respond to time exerts a heavy impact on behaviours and human relations. The study of time and how it is viewed was started by Edward Hall (1959). He defined the use of time as polychronic (doing many things at once) or monochronic (doing one thing in at a time). Cultures will tend to focus more on the past, present or future and have a certain preferential focus. The dominant view of time will be felt in all areas of communication within a culture. The structure, content and urgency of communication are formed by the dominant cultural view of time in a particular culture (Burgoon, Stern and Dillman, 1995). African cultures tend to focus on the past. They see time as cyclical, with a strong focus on tradition and history. They are also polychronic in their orientation towards the use of time. This results in a tendency towards more flexibility. Nwosu says that the African idea of time is based on "how we communicate and how we connect with each other" (p.171). Being in a hurry can be seen as disrespectful, and this accounts for the (seemingly) time consuming rituals of greetings. Scheduling and obligations can be seen as a direct conflict to the formation of social ties. This is another challenge on multicultural teams.

### **1.9 Activity**

Human activity, specifically work, is viewed differently by different cultures (Kuckholn and Strodbeck, 1961). A 'being' culture is one that considers that all human action is determined by destiny or fate. People define themselves by their relationships and connections, not by their jobs. A 'doing' culture is the opposite. People define and value themselves by their achievements, their function, their job. The typical expression "live to work or work to live" summarizes it. People in a 'being' culture work to live (Africa, South America, many parts of Asia, Middle East) whereas people in a 'doing' culture live to work (U.S.A, Germany, other countries in Northern Europe and other countries with Anglo-Saxon cultural roots). "Doing" cultures measure activity in terms of goals, purposes and success with tangible results. According to Nwosu, the African concept of work is not as clear-cut as that of the 'doing' culture: the difference between work and play, the role of employees, and interpersonal bonding

in the workplace are different. For the African worker, the job site can be considered a sort of home, where one develops strong relationships. The cultural value of communality is highly expressed on the job, because the worker is expected to take part in the lives of his co-workers. A worker who does not actively participate in the lives of co-workers according to cultural expectations can be considered a threat to the social balance of the communal order. On the other hand, “doing” cultures do not expect the same intensity of involvement and supervisors and workers are expected to focus on the job to be done, not the relationship to be made. This is another area where problems can arise in multicultural teams.

### **1.10 Verbal and non-verbal communication**

Nwosu (2005b) states that the African communication style is primarily indirect and nonlinear. It tends to use a narrative style where the story begins somewhere, breaks off and goes to another related subject and later returns to the main narrative. A related area is that of the call-response, where the speaker calls on the audience to respond and express their support. This aspect supports the communal approach to life. Call-response communication promotes “harmony, unity, unison, agreement and an assurance that we all together in our thinking” (Nwosu 2008, p 174).

### **1.11 Discourse orientation**

Discourse orientation or who has the responsibility for the communication, listener or speaker, can be very important in the communication process. These two types of discourse orientation are referred to as listener-responsible style and speaker-responsible style (Hinds 1987). In the African communication style, the listener is responsible for the communication. It is the responsibility of the listener to understand what the speaker is saying. The resulting reliance of nonverbal symbols is due to the fact that often messages are indirect. How the listener reacts is very specifically linked to the need to avoid losing face and minimizing conflicts.

A speaker-responsible culture (U.S. and other related cultures) will tend to come off as offensive in a listener-responsible culture. “Telling it like it is” which appears frequently in American speech would not be appreciated in the African culture. Certainly, it is important for members of cultures involved in the communication process to be aware of the others’ discourse orientation. However, it is important to point out that in some areas of Africa, direct speaker-responsible communication is more favoured and it is necessary to be aware of which discourse style is most utilized.

A speaker-responsible culture and a listener-responsible culture are on opposite ends of the spectrum. The member of a speaker-responsible culture will not be able to read innuendos, interpret body language and signals, and may interpret indirectness not as a way to be polite but as a way to be evasive, if not blatantly dishonest. The speaker-responsible cultural member needs to be told everything directly and is not able to intuit meanings, or at least the meaning intended by the other speaker. Listener-responsible cultural members can feel frustrated because they feel that they are not being listened to, and therefore not respected.

Another discourse area is whether a culture favours indirect or direct communication. Some of the most significant cross-cultural communication challenges in multicultural teams can be seen in this area of indirect-direct communication. The use of an indirect or direct communication style can result in great misunderstandings and general lack of esteem on the part of both parties. In a given communication context, there is a large space for miscommunication. The team

member from the culture that uses the indirect communication style potentially will see the direct communicator as rude, offensive, and disrespectful. The tendency could be to stop listening. On the other hand, the team member from the direct communication style culture can feel that their counterparts are not listening, not interested, and even lying because they are “not being honest”.

## 2. Methods

The method included a thorough search of pan-African cultural values, cross-cultural differences between the African Union and various EU member countries. The idea for the research was taken from the 5th African Union-European Union Summit which was located in Abidjan, Ivory Coast on November 29-30, 2017. There were 55 leaders from the African Union and 28 European Union Member States represented. One of the most important outcomes was the issuance of a joint statement on the situation of migrants in Libyan refugee centres, and alleged slave trade of migrants. A committee was formed to search for solutions. The following analysis was based on the members’ ending speeches on the Libya Migrant Crisis on December 14, 2017. Unfortunately, it was impossible to access videos of the actual committee meeting, but the final statements were available on the internet. The members of the committee represented several different countries, all of which could be considered culturally quite different from any African nations.

It is obviously dangerous to generalize because people do not always demonstrate the so-called national cultural values of their home country. People tend to become more “international” and often temper what may have been a strong value and dilute it, so to speak. Generalising is always a risk; because it can lead to stereotyping. However, the point is that every international committee or multicultural team faces cross-cultural challenges. This particular committee was used to illustrate that point. The information about the home cultures of the members of the AU-EU Commission was taken from various sources, including Hofstede (2018), various area sources (Moran 2007; Lewis, 2010; CIA Factbook; 2018; Quintessential, 2018).

## 3. Results and Discussion

An analytical table (below) was set up to evaluate selected cultural orientations and discourse styles taken from the research on pan-African culture. The countries involved are those represented by the team members: Italy (Mogherini), Sudan (El-Fadil), Swing (USA), Turk (Austria), and Poland (Tusk). The transcripts from the concluding speeches from the committee furnished the text to be analysed, and can be found in the text boxes below. The first speaker considered is Ms. Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security

[https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=african+Union+EU+statement+december+2017+mogherini](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=african+Union+EU+statement+december+2017+mogherini)).

*“We decided to establish this Task Force during the EU-AU Summit in Abidjan last 28 November. It is, I believe, a turning point in our work to safe and to protect lives of migrants, in particular inside Libya but also along the routes, and dismantling the traffickers' networks. (...) Thanks to the IOM, and supported by the European Union, already 16.000 people have been able to voluntarily return from Libya to their home countries. We have worked and we commit now to work even more on the reintegration projects to help them return not only safely but also in a dignified manner, with a future in their communities of origin. It is a work that has started one year ago. It has produced this result, 16.000 people already in one year. And now*

*we committed to work towards providing assistance to additional 15.000 migrants under the emergency voluntary humanitarian return by February next year. (...) I would also like to announce today that EU makes available additional €100 million to support the work of IOM and UNHCR on the ground to allow them to continue the operations...”.*

Ms. Mogherini focuses on the concepts of protection, saving lives and helping migrants. She demonstrates a humanitarian focus intermingled with achievement. She calls attention to the fact that it is the work of the committee to save lives, help migrants return home safely, etc. She was very clear in her description but focused on generalities. She also calls attention to the achievements of the group demonstrating the Italian cultural value of “bella figura” (Toffle, 2007).

One can only imagine that after many years in the international arena Ms. Mogherini has taken on a more neutral communication style. But she definitely focuses on actions completed and actions to be done.

The next speaker is Mrs. Amira El-Fadil, the African Union Commissioner for Social Affairs Amira speech <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuKgZxet3AY>: “(...) *I can say that the cooperation and the partnership between us here started way before this ..especially with the European Union.... We have a joint plan of action on migration...we were working together on creating lasting solutions for migration in Africa....we are accelerating our processes as partners working together for a long time.... We are working together, the African Union, the European Union, the United Nations.....We have started by having our first meeting in Addis Ababa on 4 December 2017. We agreed on the structure through which we are going to work, which is a three level structure. This is the political level of this partnership. The second level is a working level which is going to be led from Addis Ababa, the HQs of the African Union, and the third one which is an operational level which is going to be led by our liaison office for Libya which is based now in Tunisia. (...) When it comes to the issues of the traffickers, tracing these networks and the criminals, and bringing them to justice, we are also using our continental cooperation between the two continents. And we are using our own AU institutions that are already engaged on this issue. They will work very closely with our counterpart to make sure that these criminals will be brought to justice and be cracked down. (...)*”.

Mrs. El-Fadil is from Sudan but her orientation seems to be quite pan-African. She stresses relationship, working together, partnership, long term association. She also wants to show top-notch organization as she explains the structure of the partnership. She mentions ‘continental cooperation’ to convey working together. Then she also stresses that the AU had already been working on ‘these problems’. The focus on hierarchy comes through in her explanation of the three-level structure. There is no mention of a schedule for implementation, or dates of actions already accomplished. She mentions the date of December 4, 2017 as the beginning of the relationship of the team in this particular aspect a project which has been going on for an undetermined time, giving the impression of fluid time. She is not very clear in her explanations, which may be due to problems with the English language, or due to the pan-African cultural tendency for the listener to be responsible for the communication, therefore there is no need to explain clearly. Her emphasis on relationships and being together strongly indicate the pan-African ‘being’ culture. Her tone is quite interesting, however. It almost seems apologetic bordering on defensive as if she wants to show that the AU had been doing its job adequately before. The fact that she mentioned the structural plan seemed to be a response to the need to appear well-organized and state-of-the-art.

She seemed to be defending the AU when she said “we are using our own AU institutions that are already engaged in this issue”. Which can be inferred to the ongoing fear on the part of the EU that the AU is not carrying out its objectives fast enough. The next speaker is Mr. William Lacy Swing Director General of the International Organization for Migration ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAcUjSz\\_BsE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAcUjSz_BsE)): “*We believe, and I have shared with her an operational plan for the 15.000 (people) that we want to bring home - not just bring home, not just evacuate, but to help them to reintegrate back into the society with dignity -, we will reach the figure of 15.000, I would hope according to that plan, in the next couple of weeks. There are a few bottlenecks that we are still clearing up but they are fairly minor questions of discussion, dialogue and try to get more aircrafts in, and so forth. We are very pleased with that. We have also, thanks to the very generous support of the EU and its Member States, been able to set up an important operation in Agadez, in Northern Niger. (...) The second aspect, of course, is the one of reintegration that requires some more work. We are working on it. We have to augment what we are doing now, and do it as speedily as possible so that people coming back are welcome properly and given a real chance to get life started again. And then thirdly, I guess I would say, perhaps the most important element in the future is to try to get the international presence restored in Libya. (...)*”.

Mr. Swing is from the U.S.A. His speech is very direct, informal and focuses on results, indicating an action culture with a strong future orientation. He uses vernacular language (bottleneck) which may tend to exclude non-native speakers. He focuses on the effective use of time by listing activities finished with a timeline. He also shows the tendency to evaluate oneself positively, a typical American characteristic that can prove irritating to cultures that prefer to demonstrate modesty. He also demonstrates the “get-the-job-done so typical of Americans. He does use the first- person plural perhaps to convey a sense of teamwork. He also clearly communicates goals and following steps indicating a future focus. The strong focus on work and doing can be seen in the fact that he uses the word ‘work’ twice in sequence. It is very much like a military report that outlines different actions accomplished.

The next speaker is Mr. Volker Turk UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbOMJcipnBA&t=44s>): “*Libya is in an extremely difficult situation as we speak. And the solidarity with Libya is first and foremost what has to be in our minds. Libyan people suffer – over a million Libyans were in need of humanitarian assistance. There are some 200.000 people internally displaced in Libya. And amongst all of this, you also have this very, very complex mixed migratory flow through Libya, from different parts of Africa and from the Middle East, trying to reach safety. (...) But we also need the solidarity from Europe when it comes to helping Niger for example. We are going to host people. In these circumstances, we need to find a third country resettlement solution for them. So we are grateful for what Europe has offered so far. We need to sustain it and we need to make sure that we apply it as flexibly as possible because it is an exceptional situation which requires exceptional measures. (...)*”.

Mr. Turk conveys sympathy for all the players in the situation. He is trying to avoid accusing Libya of human rights violations by focusing on solidarity with Libya. He seems to be extremely cross-culturally savvy which can be seen as he skilfully avoids saying anything that could incite conflicts. He addresses all players in a rather informal and sensitive manner. As he speaks, he seems to be trying to build consensus and elicit participation from all parties involved. He also indirectly states that it is a very significant problem (‘exceptional situation, exceptional measures’). He seems intent on defusing any sort of conflict that could arise.

The final speaker, who was not in this committee meeting, is the President of the European Union, Donald Tusk, but it is necessary to examine what he said. *“As you know, the European Union is Africa’s biggest partner and closest neighbour. Its biggest investor, its biggest trading partner, its biggest provider of development aid and humanitarian assistance as well as its biggest contributor in peace and security. And this summit demonstrated our determination to reinforce our partnership even more”* (Consilium Europa, 2017)

Mr. Tusk’s comment seemed to express the EU’s attitude toward the AU. Although the quote was very general, it could be interpreted in two ways. A listener with a direct communication style from a speaker-responsible culture would interpret it as a neutral summary of a relationship. A listener with an indirect communication style from a listener-responsible culture could interpret it as a veiled threat, or a reminder of superiority, or at the least an indication of being patronized.

Obviously what listeners hear and how they interpret what they hear can constitute two different worlds.

This table summarizes the differences in cultural orientations and values in the team members of the Libya Migrant Crisis Committee on December 14, 2017.

Orientations	Poland	Italy	USA	Austria	Pan African
Communalism, collectivism and individualism	Moderately individualism (60 Hofstede)	individualistic (76 Hofstede)	Very individualistic (91 Hofstede)	Moderately individualistic (55 Hofstede)	Highly communal (beyond collectivist)
Social relations	Relationships and consensus important	Relations important	Relations important but not determinant of business	Do not need personal relationship to do business; consensus important	Hierarchical superstructure Strong connections
Time	Fluid time but punctuality valued	Combination of time both fluid and a resource	Time is money	Punctuality and time is a resource	Time is fluid
Activity	Strong work ethic/doing	Moderately being	Doing culture	Doing culture	Being culture
Communication	Indirect, formal	Indirect Formal	Direct Informal	Direct	Indirect, Formal
Discourse (listener or speaker responsible)	Good listeners, slow to respond	Speaker responsible	Speaker responsible	A mix	Listener responsible

Figure 1. Summary table of Libya Crisis Committee Meeting cultural orientations and communication styles.

#### 4. Conclusions

Significant differences exist in cultural values and therefore communication. As the OECD so aptly put it, two-way communication is the “lifeblood” of any strategy (OECD 2001). Without it, sustainable development projects will fail. This research demonstrated the great differences that exist between the EU and AU cultural communication styles and how important it is to be aware of communication differences in multicultural or international teams. Communication breakdowns can occur from seemingly innocent differences, ranging from choice of words, tone of voice, cultural assertions and assumptions. Most people are not aware of how cultural values influence behaviour and also communication style. Cross-cultural training should be part of the preliminary formation of multicultural teams that will work together on sustainable development projects.

It should be ongoing and allow times of reflection between team members to be sure that they understand each other. It should not be taken for granted that the message of the speaker is interpreted by the listener in the way intended. Team members also need to understand the power of nonverbal communication and learn to interpret it from the cultural point of view of the other members. More research should be done on cultural communication styles applied to sustainable development multicultural teams. The EU should examine its own communication style as an institution, and ask itself how ethnocentric it may be in its approach to the African Union. New approaches that are more Afro-centric should be developed, with the intention of creating cultural synergy, solving problems in mindful ways and adjusting styles to fit the other team members. Ika expressed it well: cross-cultural project management issues are common and the effort to implement typical Western project management processes unavoidably create enormous political, organizational and cultural obstacles. And the” most formidable of these obstacles are cultural ones.” Approaches must be modified according to the countries involved (Ika, (2010), Stuckenbruck & Zomorrodian, 1987, p. 174) African project management needs to be created according to African cultures, social norms, communication styles and values.

Further reflection on the beginning quote of Ban Ki Moon, “Sustainable development is the pathway to the future we want for all. It offers a framework to generate economic growth, achieve social justice, exercise environmental stewardship and strengthen governance” is in order. This paper has attempted to illustrate the magnitude of the challenge of communication on sustainable development teams. The main hope for the future of the world lies in our ability to communicate effectively in a harmonious and equitable manner with all people. Cross-cultural communication in sustainable development multicultural teams is essential.

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