Special report 17/2012 (2011 discharge): European Development Fund (EDF) contribution to a sustainable road network in sub-Saharan Africa

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PURPOSE: to present the European Court of Auditor's Special Report 17/2012 on the road network in sub-Saharan Africa.

BACKGROUND: the EU is one of the leading donors in the road sector in Sub-Saharan Africa. Road transport is a focal sector for EDF (European Development Fund) cooperation strategy with most Sub-Saharan African countries. Financially, it is by far the most important cooperation sector, with about **EUR 7.4 billion in EDF commitments made in this region over the period from 1995 to 2011**. Improper road maintenance and vehicle overloading is putting the sustainability of Sub-Saharan road network into danger. Roads are essential for regional integration, economic growth, social development, effective public administration and security. In Sub-Saharan Africa, roads are the dominant mode of passenger and freight transport, accounting for more than 80 % of total movements of goods and services and transport needs are growing rapidly.

CONTENT: this special report assessed whether the EDF has contributed to the sustainability of the road network in Sub-Saharan Africa effectively: whether the road infrastructure supported by the EDF is sustainable and whether the Commission effectively promotes the sustainability of road infrastructure.

The audit focused on the technical, financial and institutional sustainability of road transport infrastructure and looked at 48 programmes financed since 1995 under the 8th, 9th and 10th EDFs in six partner countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Tanzania and Zambia where EU auditors inspected about 2400 km of EDF funded roads.

The Court stated that **the aid-recipient countries visited by the Court do not do enough to ensure the sustainability of road infrastructure**. In all partner countries visited by the Court, roads are affected to varying degrees by premature deterioration. Most of these countries have adopted institutional reforms, notably entailing the creation of road funds and road agencies, and made significant progress on road maintenance. However, many challenges remain to be addressed in all of them to ensure appropriate maintenance.

Court's conclusions: the Court concluded that the Commission is **partially effective** in its support for a sustainable road network in Sub-Saharan Africa. Although spending on road maintenance has increased over time in all the partner countries visited by the Court, it remains insufficient to cover the needs. One main reason is the priority given in national budgets to the rehabilitation and upgrading of the road network rather than to maintenance.

Moreover, the Commission is partially effective in promoting the adoption and implementation of the sector policy reforms that are required to address the existing obstacles to a sustainable road network in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Commission's use of the conditions attached to its financial support has a moderate incentive effect. This also has an impact on policy dialogue, which the Commission does not use in to its full potential, although this dialogue has been instrumental in promoting progress in some areas, notably where the institutional framework and road maintenance funding are concerned.

Technical cooperation funded by the Commission has been **less successful** than could be expected.

Court's recommendations: the Court recommends that in a number of respects the Commission should better focus EDF resources and make better use of conditions attached to its programmes, of policy dialogue with the partner countries' governments and technical cooperation, so as to maximise the effectiveness of the development support provided by the EDF towards a sustainable road network in Sub-Saharan Africa.