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The Lobito Corridor and Local Voices

A Thesis on EU´s Development Cooperation and Investigation on Policy, Trade and Strategies in the Lobito Corridor with Zambia as a case study

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Abstract

This thesis research how the EU's shift from traditional development aid to investment-based development cooperation affects the understanding and practice of ownership within Global Gateway. Through a case study of the Lobito Corridor, with a special focus on Zambia, it analyses how local development priorities are translated, reshaped and limited within the EU's institutional and financial structures. The study is built on a critical policy analysis of central EU documents, the Lobito Corridor cooperation framework and Zambia's 8th National Development Plan, supplemented with semi-structured interviews with experts at different levels, including think tank representatives, EU institutional actors and a field worker from an NGO.

The analysis shows that Global Gateway formally emphasises partnership, sustainable development and partner-country ownership, but that its practical governance is shaped to a high degree by the EU's strategic interests, financial instruments and the need to mobilise private investment. In the Lobito Corridor, several African development needs coincide with EU interests, especially within transport, trade, energy and regional integration. At the same time, the focus on bankable projects, guarantees and blended finance creates a situation where partner countries' room for manoeuvre is limited to projects that are attractive to external financial actors.

The thesis therefore argues that ownership does not completely disappear within Global Gateway, but changes. It becomes less a question of independent national prioritisation and more a question of adjustment within an already defined investment framework. This has consequences for poverty reduction, local inclusiveness and the possibility of transforming formal partnership into actual influence over the direction of development projects.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background:

Global Gateway is the European Union's strategy for international investments and development aiming to create smart, clean and safe connections for infrastructure, energy, transport, digital technic, education, health and research globally. The strategy was launched by the EU commission in collaboration with EU representatives for foreign affairs in 2021 until the end of the budget year, 2027 (European Union, 2021).

The purpose of Global gateway is to increase investments in sustainable infrastructure, and to increase partnership with countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific region. The strategy has a clear aim towards sustainable, qualitative and long-term projects that will develop the partner nations' economies and develop their capacity to integrate into global markets (European Union, 2021).

The original goal was to mobilize up to 300 billion euro in investments globally during the 2021-2027 budget frame, combined between public funds, private investors, loans and guarantees. In October 2025 the EU commission released news that this target had already been met, and a new goal of 400 billion euros was set until the year 2027 (EU council, 2025).

The financing happens through a Team Europe approach, where the EU and the member states together with the European financial institutes and the private sector, coordinate resources to mobilize this capital. That includes guarantees through External Action Guarantee (EAG) and financial instruments through Global Europe and their components (European Union, 2021).

Global gateway builds upon six central principles to guide the investments: democratic values and high standards, good governance and transparency, equal partnership, environmental sustainability, security focus and catalytic improvements of the private sector. These principles show the EU's values to separate strategies from the other global investments initiatives, through the emphasis on sustainability, fairness and transparency (European Union, 2021). The strategy is also formed to support the United Nations 2030 Agenda for

Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on environmental change, which includes investments to support the global development and climate change goals through sustainable projects (European Union, 2021).

Within Global Gateway there exists a pool of flagship projects that highlights the strategy's most meaningful initiative through transportation, energy, digitalization, education, health and research. These projects are marked to show concrete results and meet local needs in the partner countries. In December 2025, the EU council approved a list with 256 flagship projects under Global Gateway, which shows the broad and sectorial engagement (EU council, 2025).

The Lobito Corridor is one of the Global Gateway's central flagship projects and aims to strengthen the transport infrastructure and economic integration in the central and southern regions of Africa. The project focuses on creating an efficient transport corridor from the Port of Lobito in Angola, through railways that connects Zambia and the Democratic republic of Congo (DRC) to the Atlantic (see figure 1). This corridor has potential to reduce the transport times of goods from several weeks to around seven days and lower the costs for export and import (European Commission, 2023).

The project builds on revival and modernizing the old Benguela railway, as well as completing infrastructure. It includes logistic hubs alongside the transport route as well as investments for transit and trade facilities, sustainable energy, agricultural and supply chains, and trade education & labour (European Commission, 2023).

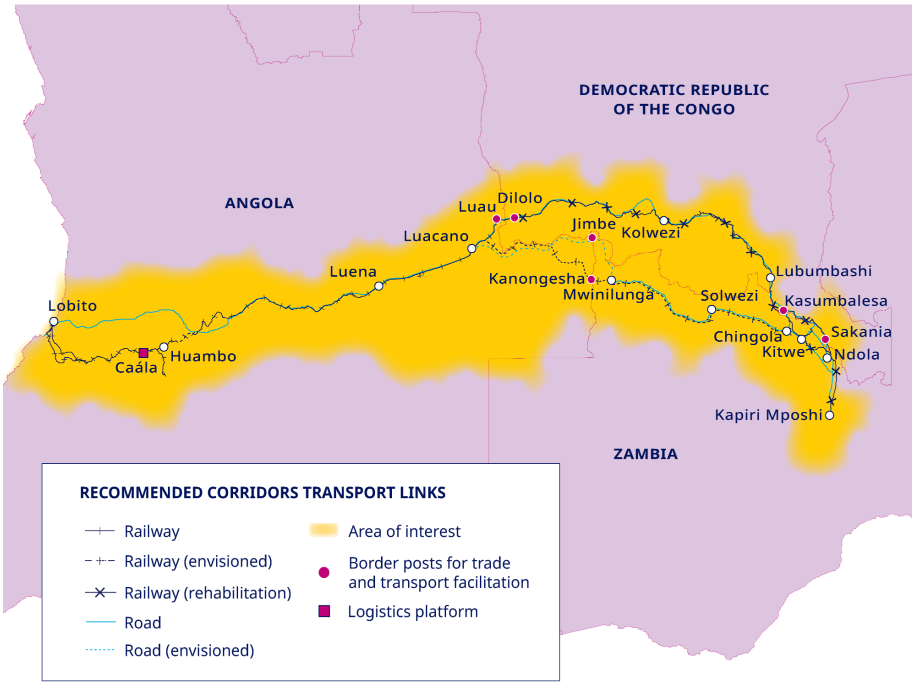
Throughout Global Gateway the EU mobilize their Team Europe partners with more than 2 billion euros in investments for the Lobito corridor, including support for transport infrastructure, logistics platform and support programme, around 50 billion to support agriculture and distribution chains, and 8 billion for the project "From Transport to Trade: Lobito Corridor Catalyst", which is appointed to develop a logistics hub via Caála in Angola (European Commission, 2023). Beyond direct EU-financing the project has attracted investments from member state countries, multilateral development banks (African Development Bank) and private actors that participate in railroad development and logistics services. This represents the ambition of the Global Gateways strategy by mobilizing both public and private capital in large, transformative projects (European Commission, 2023).

The Lobito corridor is expected to have multiple positive effects for the countries and regions by enhancing regional trade and export opportunities, especially for minerals such as copper and cobalt, which are essential for the green transition, and by creating work opportunities and economic possibilities through building, logistics, service and agricultural sectors. There will be better access to markets for small- and medium-size enterprises, which can strengthen local entrepreneurs and diversify economies beyond raw material export. Already within the project includes remedying clean energy (European Commission, 2023).

The Lobito corridor also has a geopolitical dimension. By enhancing west-oriented export routes for minerals, it reduces the project's need for other competing infrastructure initiatives in the region. This is relevant in the broader competition of the global raw material flow and strategic impact (European Commission, 2023). Even through the positive ambitions, there are challenges connected to the project. Multiple reports show operative and social risks, including possible relocations of those living along the corridor and the need to thoroughly inspect environmental and social risk analyses. It is important for the project to proceed with great caution in line with high standards for social responsibility and sustainability, in line with the EU's principle for investments.

Summarizing, global gateway is the EU's most ambitious global investments strategy ever for sustainable infrastructure and partnership. It aims to mobilize hundreds of billions of euros to strengthen transport, energy, digitalization, education, health and research, alongside the investment stressing the support for democratic values, sustainability and transparency. The Lobito Corridor is a concrete example of these ambitions. The project combines investments in transport infrastructure with support for regional trade, economic diversification and sustainable development. Through a Team Europe initiative, it mobilizes considerable resources to promote long term solutions economically through the corridor in Angola, Zambia and DRC. Global Gateway and Lobito corridor success depends on how well these projects are implemented together with the partner countries, inclusiveness of social, environmental and institutional challenges, as well as the ability to attract and use private investment in blended financing, in line with EU's guidelines.

The global gateway strategy is focused around concepts such as partnerships, sustainable development and ownership. However, how this is implemented in practical terms tells another story. Such concepts often function more as political ideals than as reflections of actual decision-making processes. This creates a central research puzzle: how are local development priorities translated, filtered, or reshaped as they move through complex institutional structures such as the EU's Global Gateway.



(Figure 1, The Lobito Corridor outline plan. Source: European Commission, Global Gateway strategy)

1.1.2 Zambian 8th national development plan

Zambia's 8th national development plan (8NDP) addresses the period between 2022 - 2026, and is the central document for the country's socioeconomic development. The plan is formulated as an answer to the rising challenges, including high debt, low economic growth and effects from the COVID-19 period. The strategy rests on four main pillars: economic change and creating job opportunities, human and social development, environmental sustainability, and also a climate governance system. The overreaching target is to bring Zambia back to "Vision 2030", where the country strives to become a healthy median income country.

The 8NDP is notable for its stress on national ownership. President Hakainde Hichilema has explicitly encouraged the Zambian population to "make the national plan their own" and actively participate in its progress. This policy has been presented through a series of constructive processes that involved both high-level governance and grassroots based initiatives, where groups from the civil society and the private sector, to youths and people with disabilities have participated. By decentralizing the decision making to a local level, Zambia aims to move the ownership and responsibility from the state to the citizens (Republic of Zambia, 2022).

In Parallel with Zambia's internal reform, was the EUs Global Gateway strategy launched in 2021 to mobilize the 300 billion euro in infrastructure capital, until 2027. This marks a fundamental shift in development aid from the traditional aid to the more investment-based approach on development and partnerships. The EU’s focus on digital transformation, energy transition and infrastructure that is critical for growth has similarities with Zambia's 8NDP. Zambia's priorities include, for example, development of transport corridors and renewable energy to diversify their economy, which matches EUs strategic interest to build sustainable transfers in Africa.

The differences however are in the underlying logic. Whilst the 8NDP puts human development and poverty reduction in the centre for transformation, Global gateway is criticised for prioritising the sectors where European countries have strong commercial interests, such as energy and transportation (Republic of Zambia, p.3, 2022) - where the Zambian plan stresses that development must come from the people's need to change the living standards. This way, Global gateway risks on one hand to become a trade policy masked as development aid, where EU own geopolitical need runs the choice of projects to invest in (María et al., p.10, 2025).

The tension between Zambia's wish for local ownership and EU investment driven strategy creates a complex policy context. In 8NDP, ownership means that prioritization gets put in nationally first, where resources are appointed to social sectors as health and education (Republic of Zambia, p.17, 2022). In the Global Gateway model, ownership risks being restructured by the financial structure. Since the main part of the resources is loans and guarantees that require a commercial surplus to attract private investors, receiving countries’ space for own governance can be limited to the projects that are beneficial transits for European actors (María et al., p.7, 2025). Earlier research shows that this could create a risk for the ownership in practice being reduced to Zambia accepting the pre-made packages that benefit EU strategic interests, rather than the project being based on the priorities that have actually been set in place for the national development plan.

This is the tension where the research regarding ownership stands. If international development cooperation goes from being a grant to an investment, a power shift also comes along between the parts. When a state as Zambia tries to claim their national ownership through documents such as the 8NDP, they are met by European policy demanding adjustments reflecting the market’s terms and conditions and geopolitical competition. This type of development strategy raises the question on whether the traditional development concept regarding “ownership” - where the recipient leads the process - still is applicable, or if it is about to change for the new form of development, where investment ownership is ruled by financial and commercial interest.

This background is necessary to understand how the shift changes in international development cooperation. By looking at how the national development plan is reflected compared to Global Gateways strategy, we can see differences and similarities, but changes in the main concept, who owns it.

1.2 Problem Statement:

The Lobito corridor is presented as one of EU's Global Gateway flagship projects and is an attempt at promoting sustainable development, regional integration and economic transformation in Angola, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the official policy documents, the project is framed through concepts such as partnership, mutual benefits and local development alongside its strong intent on investment-based development. The corridor project consists of external financing, geopolitical interests and has a strong focus on strategic placement, connected to raw material extraction. This created a fundamental tension in the project. The project is described as a development cooperation, but is in practice organised through interest based investments where connectivity, market access, supply chain and strategic logistics have a central role.

This tension is important because it creates a larger question on what ownership and transparency means in the new development era. In prior research we can usually see how ownership often means that partnership countries have a possibility to form and navigate their development priorities and lead the political process. In a more investment-based model, these lines become more unclear and dull - creating a vacuum on what ownership really means, and how transparent is the EU with its promises? What happens when a project is built on blended finance, guarantees, external coordination and private capital comes first? The idea here is that ownership risks becoming more formal than substantive. Partner countries may still be described as owners of their development, while important decisions over funding structures, implementation models, and project direction are shaped elsewhere - forming a sense of ownership, but the consensus on what ownership means might be different.

The Lobito Corridor is an ongoing project where we can see this happening in real time. The project is lifted as an opportunity to strengthen regional trade, create local anchoring and contribute to a long term and sustainable economic development. Yet it is also tied to broader struggles over infrastructure influence, mineral access, and the future direction of African trade routes. More critical voices are therefore questioning whether the corridor will support local development goals, or whether it will mainly serve external commercial and geopolitical interests. The central problem in this thesis is therefore not only if the Lobito corridor creates economic opportunities, but how the shift from traditional development aid to investment based development changes who sets the priorities, how ownership is practiced, whose interests are put first and how transparent are the goals - and using Zambia as the main case to compare.

1.3 Research Objective:

This study examines how the shift from traditional aid to investment-based development strategies reshapes the meaning and practice of ownership within the EU's Global Gateway, using the Lobito Corridor as an empirical case. The study treats ownership as a contested concept that is redefined through institutional arrangements, financial instruments, and implementation processes. Research-wise, it focuses on how ownership is framed in EU policy, how decision-making authority is distributed across actors, and how financial mechanisms influence partner-country control over development priorities in the Lobito Corridor. The analysis combines document analysis with qualitative interviews, including field-based perspectives from civil society actors involved in the Zambian part of the corridor, to trace how local input is translated into EU-level decision-making. Theoretically, the study is guided by Rational Choice Institutionalism and Principal–Agent theory to analyse how institutional incentives and delegation structures shape ownership in practice. By grounding the analysis in a concrete infrastructure project, the study assesses whether Global Gateway enables ownership or reproduces existing power asymmetries.

1.4 Research Questions:

Main RQ: How does the shift from traditional aid to investment-based development strategies reshape the meaning and practice of ownership in EU Global Gateway?

Sub RQ:

- How is "ownership" defined and framed within EU Global Gateway policy compared to earlier aid frameworks?
- How is decision-making authority distributed between EU institutions and partner-country actors in the Lobito Corridor?
- How do financial instruments such as blended finance and guarantees affect partner-country control over development priorities?
- How is local input, including civil society perspectives, translated through EU decision-making processes in the Lobito Corridor?
- To what extent does the Global Gateway enable substantive ownership in practice, or reproduce donor-driven priorities?

1.5 Delimitations:

This study examines the Lobito Corridor to understand how ownership takes shape within the EU's Global Gateway. The case fits this purpose because it is one of the EU's main infrastructure projects. It brings together large investments, geopolitical interests, and development goals. This makes it useful for studying how ownership works in investment-led development.

The Lobito Corridor also reflects the core features of Global Gateway. It involves complex institutions, many actors, and a mix of public and private financing. If EU principles on ownership hold in practice, they should appear in a project of this scale. At the same time, the project's size and strategic value increase the chance that external interests and financial structures influence decisions. The case also gives access to on-the-ground perspectives. Interviews with civil society actors in the Zambian section of the corridor show how local input enters project processes. This links EU-level policy with local implementation, which is key to assessing ownership in practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Evolution of EU Development Policy

Over the last decade, European development policy has shifted away from the old type of development model centred mainly on grants and aid and other services for foreign aid, to a more strategic approach that gives investment based priorities such as blended finance and risk reduction for private investors. This shift is often described through the idea of moving from billions to trillions, meaning that limited public development funds should be used to unlock much larger volumes of private capital in order to meet the investment needs linked to the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 (Bilal and Große-Puppendahl, 2016, p. 6). The literature presents this change as more than a technical adjustment in funding methods. It reflects a broader reorganization of development policy towards financial matters and geopolitical strategies. At the same time, it raises a central tension in the literature, whether development finance can still prioritise poverty reduction when it is increasingly organised around commercial interests and investors' opinions.

A central concept across this debate is additionality. Bilal and Große-Puppendahl (2016) define additionality as the principle that aid funds should only be used to support private investment when the public or development benefits are greater than the private returns, and when the investment would not have taken place without public support. They distinguish between financial additionality, which refers to the mobilisation of extra private capital, and systemic additionality, which refers to wider market effects, such as whether public support helps demonstrate that a project is viable and thereby encourages similar investments in the future. What we can draw from this, is how additionality is meant to justify why scarce public funds should be used to subsidise private actors. Bayliss et al. (2020) take a more critical view of additionality. Their main point is that public support is often described as if it clearly created something extra, even when this has not been properly shown with evidence. They focus in particular on the use of high leverage ratios as proof that public money has worked well. A leverage ratio shows how much private investment is attracted for each unit of public funding. At first glance, a high ratio may seem positive, since it suggests that a small amount of aid has brought in a large amount of private capital. However, Bayliss et al. argue that this does not automatically prove additionality. A high leverage ratio may also mean that public money is being used in projects that were already attractive to investors and would probably have received private funding even without public support. In that case, the public contribution has not created a new investment, but has simply supported one that was already likely to happen (Bayliss et al., 2020, p. 19).

The historical development of EU policy shows how this shift became institutionalised. Bayliss et al. (2020, p. 10) note that the European Consensus on Development from 2005 gave very little attention to innovative financing, while the Agenda for Change from 2011 marked a more decisive turn towards blended finance. Blended finance refers to the use of public development funds, such as grants, guarantees, or technical assistance, to reduce risk for private investors and make development projects more attractive to risk an investment. In this way, EU development finance increasingly moved away from direct public transfers and towards financial instruments designed to attract private investment. This process reached a new stage with the creation of the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus, EFSD+, where earlier development instruments, including the European Development Fund, were integrated into the broader NDICI, Global Europe framework (Lundsgaarde, 2023, p. 9). Lundsgaarde describes EFSD+ as an integrated financial package that combines grants, technical support, and guarantees. This is important to not miss, because it shows that the change was not only rhetorical, but institutional. The EU is no longer positioned mainly as a traditional donor distributing aid, but increasingly as a global investment actor that uses public funds to structure, guide, and de-risk private capital flows - going further away from the fundamentality of how development aid used to work.

2.2 Policy Translation and The Implementation Gap

Research on how political initiatives and policy ideas move between jurisdictions has become an important field in political science, public administration, and human geography. A central debate in this literature is whether policies should be seen as relatively fixed models that can be transferred from one context to another, or as ideas that are altered as they travel. This matters because it shapes how researchers understand policy change, implementation, and failure.

The earlier policy transfer literature, especially Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), provides the basic framework for analysing this process. They define policy transfer as a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, or institutions in one political context is used in the development of similar institutions in another (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000, p. 5). Their most influential contribution is the idea of a policy transfer continuum. This stretches from “lesson-drawing”, where actors voluntarily learn from policies elsewhere, to “direct imposition”, where policies are effectively forced from outside. Between these poles are different degrees of transfer shaped by pressure or necessity, such as international obligations or the perceived need not to fall behind economically (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000, pp. 13–14). This framework is useful because it shows that policy movement is rarely fully voluntary or fully coercive.

At the same time, later work questions the idea that policy moves intact from one place to another. Haupt (2023) broadens the field by distinguishing between policy diffusion, policy transfer, and policy mobility. Policy diffusion focuses on the spread of policy innovations, often through quantitative methods and mainly within political science (Haupt, 2023, p. 3). Policy transfer focuses more directly on the content, process, and outcomes of transfer, and is often more pragmatic in orientation (Haupt, 2023, pp. 4–7). Policy mobility, by contrast, is more critical and associated mainly with human geography. It focuses on how policies change as they move, and on how power relations, transnational actors, and global consultants shape that process (Haupt, 2023, p. 8). What is at stake here is a shift from seeing policy as something transferred to seeing policy as something translated. This is important for this study, since the issue is not only whether EU development ideas are transferred into the Lobito Corridor, but how they are reinterpreted, filtered, and transformed through different institutional levels and actors.

A related debate concerns who carries policy across contexts. Dolowitz and Marsh mainly highlight governmental officials, bureaucrats, and consultants (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000, p. 11). However, later empirical studies suggest a broader range of actors. McFarlane and Canton show, in the case of British-Turkish cooperation in criminal justice, that “Short Term Experts” and translators are key agents in the transfer process (McFarlane and Canton, 2014). Similarly, Si, Wereta and Pojani show that global engineering firms such as Arup and transnational networks such as C40 can act as important intermediaries in the transfer of planning models between China and Africa (Si, Wereta and Pojani, 2020). Policy movement is therefore not only a state-to-state process, but also one mediated by experts, consultants, and transnational networks.

Another central debate concerns why transfer succeeds in some settings but fails in others. Dolowitz and Marsh explain this through the concepts of uninformed, incomplete, and inappropriate transfer, where policies fail because they are moved without sufficient knowledge of the new context, without all necessary elements, or in ways that do not fit local conditions. McFarlane and Canton deepen this point by showing that transfer cannot be reduced to copying institutional structures. In their study of British common law-based practices in Turkey's civil law system, they show that implementation also depends on understanding cultural and legal meanings. Their discussion of *namus* is important here. Although often translated as honour, it refers more broadly to ideas of propriety, reputation, and gendered expectations, which shape how crime victims are understood and treated. The related idea of "turkification" further shows how Western models are adjusted to fit local conditions. Such adaptation may be necessary for acceptance, but it can also weaken the coherence of the original model if it is not grounded in evidence (McFarlane and Canton, 2014, pp. 25, 41). The broader implication is that policy failure often results not from transfer itself, but from the assumption that institutional models can move unchanged across contexts.

The literature also raises important questions about force and power. Dolowitz and Marsh show that policy transfer can be shaped by external pressure, including from organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank, and is becoming a principle-agent problem. This remains relevant for understanding more classic North–South forms of transfer. However, Si, Wereta and Pojani adds to this picture by showing that China's engagement in Ethiopia often worked through unconditional loans rather than formal conditionality. This gave recipient actors greater room for manoeuvre, but also created risks, especially that projects could move forward without strong external examination or long-term sustainability (Si, Wereta and Pojani, 2020, p. 418). This contrast shows that power in policy movement is not limited to direct imposition, but can also work through looser and less formally structured arrangements.

What we can draw from this literature, is how it shows that policy transfer is not a simple process of copying institutional models from one setting to another. Rather, it is a political and social process shaped by pressure, mediation, interpretation, and unequal power relations. Dolowitz and Marsh provide an important starting point for identifying what is transferred, by who, and to what degree. What we see in the later research, especially on policy mobility, suggests that it is not enough to focus only on formal transfer. Equal attention also needs to be paid to how policies are translated, adapted, and reshaped by the actors involved as they move across contexts. This is particularly relevant for this study. In the case of the Lobito Corridor, the key issue is not simply whether EU development models are applied in a new setting, but how ideas such as ownership, partnership, and development change as they pass through different institutions, actors, and levels of decision-making. This matters even more in investment-based development, where formal policy models move quite easily, while local priorities and social realities are often much harder to carry through in practice.

2.3 The Geopolitics of Aid & Infrastructure

Infrastructure has taken on a more central role in the new era of development policy, and this literature is important for the present study because it helps explain why infrastructure projects such as the Lobito Corridor cannot be understood only as technical tools for transport or growth. Instead, they must also be seen as political projects that shape who controls movement, who benefits from connectivity, and how development priorities are organised in practice. For a study concerned with concepts such as ownership, this literature adds an important side of the story. It shows that roads, railways, ports, and corridors do not only connect places. They also structure power relations between states, investors, and local actors. By that, this makes the geopolitics of infrastructure highly relevant for understanding how development is planned and governed under Global Gateway flagship projects

The central part of this literature concerns how infrastructure is framed. In policy, corridor projects are often presented as neutral and mutually beneficial tools for connectivity, trade, and development. Flint and Zhu (2019) show this clearly in their analysis of the Belt and Road Initiative, which is often described in terms of integration and mutual benefit. At the same time, they argue that such projects depend on territorial organisation, state coordination, and political control. In other words, infrastructure does not simply create economic links on its own. It requires states to organise territory, regulate access, and support the networks through which goods and capital move. Enns (2018) identifies a similar tension in African development corridors. These projects are often framed as “win-win” solutions that can attract investment while also promoting local development. However, her analysis shows that the reality is more uneven. Corridors may facilitate some forms of movement and investment, while also producing exclusion, displacement, and unequal access. Zajontz (2022) discusses this further by showing that even when infrastructure cooperation is framed as partnership and mutual gain, its content is shaped through asymmetric negotiations in which the parties do not enter with the same resources, leverage, or room for manoeuvre. What we can see from these studies, is that they challenge the common policy assumption that infrastructure automatically links investment to development. Instead, they suggest that this relationship has to be examined critically, because the language of development may hide the unequal power relations that infrastructure can produce.

This becomes even more important when looking at how mobility is used within corridor projects and infrastructure. Flint and Zhu (2019) show that connectivity depends on political and territorial arrangements that make certain forms of movement possible. Enns (2018) develops this point further by arguing that corridors do not create mobility in general, but selective mobility. Some goods, actors, and investments are enabled to move more freely, while other groups face delay, exclusion, or displacement. Mobility is therefore not a neutral or universal benefit. It is uneven, and that unevenness reflects broader power relations on who gets to be first, the most and supported. Zajontz (2022) adds a further dimension by showing that control over infrastructure is also control over future mobility patterns. In the case of TAZARA, the shift from aid and support to operation, privatisation, and investment became a struggle over who would define the railway's function and whose priorities it would serve. This is an important take away as it suggests that ownership is not only about formal participation in a project, but also about who defines the practical terms on which infrastructure will be used.

The role of the state is another shared concern in this literature. Flint and Zhu (2019) treat states as central actors because economic integration depends on political coordination and territorial management rather than market forces alone. Enns (2018) also points to the role of the state, though more indirectly. Her work shows that corridor projects involve not only physical infrastructure, but also regulation, border systems, and investment frameworks that shape how territory is governed. Zajontz (2022) focuses more directly on African states and their capacity to negotiate. He argues that Tanzania and Zambia were not passive in the TAZARA negotiations, but actively tried to shape outcomes through strategic decisions and earlier experience. At the same time, their room for manoeuvre was limited by debt, institutional conditions, and the wider political context. This suggests that states remain central in infrastructure politics, but that they do not act under equal conditions. State involvement matters, but it does not automatically mean that states control the terms of development.

The key take aways from literature is how it shows that infrastructure is not just a background condition for development, but a key arena in which ownership is negotiated. Corridor projects do not only move goods and capital. They also shape who has authority, whose priorities are embedded in project design, and how unequal power relations become material and institutional. For this reason, the infrastructure literature adds an important analytical layer to this thesis. It helps explain why the Lobito Corridor should not be understood only as a transport or investment project, but as a political space in which the meaning and practice of ownership are being redefined under an increasingly investment-based model of development.

2.4 Ownership:

The concept of ownership has become a central idea in development cooperation, especially since the Paris Declaration placed strong emphasis on partner countries taking responsibility for their own development agendas. Originally, ownership was understood as a political concept. It referred to both the content of the development policy, and what direction it is going (Booth, 2011 & Keijzer, 2020). This meant that development priorities were meant to be set by the recipient, rather than defined by donor countries. In this sense, ownership was closely linked to a broader idea of shifting power within the aid relationship.

At the same time, the literature shows a clear gap between the original ambition of ownership and how it works in practice. Earlier work presented ownership as a political means of shifting power within the aid relationship and giving recipient countries greater influence over development priorities (Booth, 2011; Hasselskog, 2022). Later research has been more critical, showing that ownership is often recognised in formal terms while underlying structures of donor influence and decision-making remain in place (Keijzer, 2020, Hasselskog, 2022, Reinsberg, 2025).

A key reason for this gap lies in the financial and institutional structures that shape the development cooperation. Donor countries use methods such as earmarked funding to restrict how freely recipient governments can set their own priorities, since financial resources are tied to specific sectors, projects, or even policy goals for the development project (Reinsberg, 2025). This creates a situation in which governments are formally expected to take ownership of policies, while operating inside a framework that already narrows their room for choice. Ownership therefore exists on paper, but becomes limited in practice, making it difficult for developing countries to exercise it in a genuinely self-directed way.

At the same time, many development programmes are based on the assumption that political leaders in recipient countries are focused on long-term development goals. The literature shows that this is not always the case. Political incentives in the country can be shaped by short-term priorities, electoral pressures, or other interests that do not align with donor expectations (Booth, 2011). This creates a mismatch between how ownership is designed in policy and how it works in real political settings. As a result, ownership is frequently applied in situations when its fundamental assumptions are not working.

In addition to these financial and political constraints, the literature points to a broader shift in how ownership is understood and measured. Instead of focusing on who truly controls choices, ownership is increasingly defined by procedural components such as participation, consultation, and the use of national systems. This reflects a move toward a more technical approach to development governance, where following the correct procedures is taken as a sign of influence. However, this risks reducing ownership to a formal obligation rather than a genuine shift of power.

This shift also affects how local actors are included in development processes. Governments, civil society organisations, and other local actors may be invited to take part in consultations or planning processes, but this does not necessarily mean that they have real influence over final decisions. The literature shows that participation can exist without meaningful control, which raises questions about how ownership is defined and measured in practice (Hasselskog, 2022).

This development is closely linked to a broader tendency within development policy to downplay the political nature of the aid relationship. Inequalities between donors and recipients are often recognised in official language, but they tend to remain in practice (Hasselskog, 2022). In this context, ownership is less about control over priorities and more about whether processes are followed correctly. The concept has therefore shifted away from its original focus on power and toward a more managerial understanding of development.

Overall, the literature suggests that ownership should be viewed as a challenged and restricted process rather than a set ideal. While it remains central in policy making and the discussions, its practical form is shaped by difficult financial structures, donor priorities, and institutional rules that can limit the space for independent decision-making (Booth, 2011, Hasselskog, 2022 & Reinsberg, 2025). This creates a gap between the idea of ownership and how it is experienced in practice.

This tension is especially relevant for analysing large-scale initiatives such as the EU's Global Gateway. Projects like the Lobito Corridor involve complex institutional arrangements, multiple actors, and several layers of decision-making. Local priorities and inputs need to pass through these layers before they can shape final outcomes. This study therefore focuses on how these priorities move through the system, and where they are changed, reshaped, or filtered along the way.

2.5 Corridor projects

Corridor projects are often described in the literature as networks of infrastructure that connect production areas, processing zones, and global markets. These networks typically include roads, railways, ports, and logistics hubs, and are designed to facilitate the movement of goods, capital, and services across regions (Enns, 2018). However, the literature also makes clear that corridors should not be understood as purely technical transport solutions. Instead, they are better seen as broader economic systems that shape how regions are connected and how development is organised.

A key point across the literature is that corridor projects do not only move goods, but also reorganise space and economic activity. Brunner (2013), for example, describes corridors as spatial development systems where infrastructure links together firms, labour markets, and urban centres. In this view, corridors are meant to support regional growth by creating new connections between economic actors. At the same time, this approach assumes that improved connectivity will lead to more balanced development outcomes, an assumption that is not always supported by empirical evidence.

Other parts of the literature take a more critical perspective. Enns (2018) shows that corridor projects can produce uneven effects by improving mobility for some actors while creating new barriers for others. Infrastructure investments may make it easier for goods and capital to move across regions, but they can also reshape local spaces in ways that disadvantage certain communities. For example, land use may be reorganised to support large-scale economic activity, while local livelihoods are disrupted. This highlights that corridor development is not neutral, but involves trade-offs between different groups and interests.

This tension is also visible in how corridor projects are planned and implemented. While they are often presented as development initiatives, the literature shows that they are closely linked to broader economic and strategic goals. Schindler and Sharma (2017) describe how large-scale infrastructure projects are used to support export-oriented growth and create favourable conditions for investment. Similarly, policy-oriented work often emphasises the potential of corridors to generate economic growth, attract private capital, and integrate regions into global markets (Brunner, 2013). This creates a dual character, where corridors are framed as development tools, but also function as instruments of economic strategy.

Another important theme in the literature is how corridor models spread across regions. Corridor development is often part of a wider policy trend, where similar approaches are transferred between countries and institutions. This process is linked to ideas of policy transfer and lesson-drawing, where existing projects are used as models for new ones (Schindler and Sharma, 2017). Organisations such as development banks and international agencies play an important role in promoting these models, often presenting them as effective solutions for regional development. However, the literature also shows that these models are not always adapted to local conditions, which can create challenges during implementation.

A central debate concerns the actual development outcomes of corridor projects. Some studies highlight their potential to improve connectivity, reduce transport costs, and stimulate economic activity. From this perspective, corridors can create multiplier effects that support regional growth and integration (Brunner, 2013). At the same time, other studies point to negative outcomes, including displacement, environmental pressure, and increased inequality. Enns (2018) shows that in some cases, corridor projects have led to new forms of exclusion by prioritising global supply chains over local needs. Similarly, Schindler and Sharma (2017) document how land acquisition and centralised planning processes can limit local participation and control.

Taken together, the literature shows that corridor projects should be understood as complex development processes rather than purely technical infrastructure investments. While they can support economic growth and regional integration, they can also reinforce existing inequalities and create new forms of exclusion. Their outcomes depend not only on the infrastructure itself, but also on how projects are planned, governed, and implemented.

This perspective is especially relevant for analysing the EU's Global Gateway and the Lobito Corridor. While the initiative is presented as a partnership-based development strategy, the literature suggests that corridor projects often involve competing priorities between development goals, economic interests, and global supply chains. This raises important questions about how local development needs are defined and how they are reflected in project design.

This study therefore approaches the Lobito Corridor not only as an infrastructure project, but as a process where different actors, interests, and forms of knowledge interact. In particular, it focuses on how local development priorities and civil society perspectives are translated within this system, and whether they are maintained, reshaped, or filtered as decisions move across institutional levels.

3. Theoretical Framework

Rational Choice Institutionalism (RCI) and Principal Agent Theory make up two similar theoretical perspectives that are often used to analyze decision processes within complex institutional systems, especially within the studies of international organisations and EU governance. Both perspectives create assumptions that political actors act strategically within the institutional framework, where rule, incentive and information structure affects how decisions are being made and implemented.

3.1 Rational choice institutionalism (RCI):

Rational Choice Institutionalism (RCI) was developed within political science during the 1980s and 90s as a way to analyze how institutions structure actors' behaviors. The perspective is built on assumptions that actors, such as states, organisations or governmental officials, act rationally to maximize their preferences or targets within those limitations that institutional rules create. Institutions are understood in this context as a form of stable governance that creates and forms incentives, and can therefore create how actors act in the political processes (Hall & Taylor, 1996).

Within EU research, RCI is often used to analyze how member states create these institutional structures to solve collective governance issues, at the same time as they try to control directions processes. Institutions function in this perspective both as a partnership mechanism and as control tools. Through formal rules, reporting obligations, and decision-making procedures, actors seek to reduce uncertainty while also limiting the scope for other actors to steer outcomes in ways that conflict with their own interests (Shepsle, 2006).

3.2 Principal–agent problem theory (PAT):

Principle-Agent-theory (PAT) can be seen as a more specific analytical focus within the broader rational choice perspective. The theory focuses on situations where an actor, principle, delegates responsibility or decision power to another actor, the agent. Delegation happens often because agents sit on resources, expertise or local presence, that the principle is missing. At the same time, the delegation creates a control problem because the agent may have their own preferences that do not fully represent the target of the principle (Hawkins et al. 2006)

A central concept within PAT is the information symmetry. The agent often has better information on processes of a policy, than the principle - which can mean that the principle has limited opportunities to fully supervise the agent's actions. This can lead to a so-called “agency loss”, where the actual implementation of a policy spins off from the intentions that the delegation had in mind. To limit this risk, the principle creates different forms of control mechanism, for example. the reporting conditions, advanced institutional processes or similar. (Pollack, 2003)

3.4 Analytical Model:

These theoretical perspectives are especially relevant for analysing EU governance, where decision making and implementation are often made at different levels of the delegation. The EU’s member states delegate for example considerable responsibility to EU institutions, such as the European commission, that in turn has responsibility to develop programmes and implement political decisions. The Commission can thereafter delegate parts of the process to other actors, as in other EU delegations, international organisations or civil society organisations. The result becomes a complex chain of delegations where multiple principle-agent relations exist at the same time (Pollack, 2003 & Hawkins et al. 2006).

In this study, RCI is used to give a holistic approach to analyse perspectives to understand how institutional structures within the EU shape decision processes around development policies and investments within the framework of Global Gateway. The perspective creates the opportunity to analyze how different actors within the EU-system act strategically within the institutional rules that govern policy processes, as well as how these rules affect what types of information and priorities that get impacted in their final policy decision.

PAT is being used more specifically to analyze how delegations and information asymmetries can affect how local development evidence is being handled in the policy chain. In the context of the Lobito-corridor multiple delegation relations can be identified. EU member states and political institutions function as principals that decide on overreaching political targets. The European commission and their general directorate, as in DG INTPA, function in their turn as agents with responsibility for operationalizing these targets through programmes and projects. Lower down in the implementation chain are additional actors, as in EU-delegations and CSOs (Civil society organisations), that contribute to data collection, consulting and process tracing of the development impacts.

Through this ladder of delegation structure can information symmetries arise between different levels within the system. Local actors and organisations can sit on detailed knowledge about the development need and local priorities, whilst decision making institutes on EU level can often ground their decisions on graded or filtered information. PAT makes third possible through analyzing how local evidence can change or reformulate whilst moving through this institutional structure, as well as how different actors can affect what types of information is finally being integrated into the policy decision.

By combining RCI and PAT, can this theory therefore analyse both how institutional structures can shape EU decision making processes and the delegation relations, where information loss or reshaping of local knowledge can arise.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design

This study is based on a qualitative research design that combines Critical Policy analysis (CPA) with semi-structured interviews. The purpose is to understand how development priorities are constructed, translated and eventually reshaped into the framework of the EU:s Global Gateway flagship project, Lobito Corridor. The study does not have its goal to statistically challenge the financial effects or measure quantitative development results. Instead, the focus lies upon how policy is formulated, and how concepts give meaning to how different actors understand the decision process.

Through combining document analysis with interviews, it creates a mixed-module approach of the official policy discourse, and the expertise and translations actors make within the system. This combination gives a deeper analytical framework and creates opportunities to be able to parallel official policy construction with practice.

4.2 Critical Policy Analysis

Critical Policy Analysis is a qualitative method used for analysing how policy is constructed and how power works within the policy process (Apple, p. 276, 2019). A difference between a more traditional policy analysis that often focuses on effects and/or implementation results - CPA discovers how the problem is identified, how solutions are being formulated and what kinds of perspective gets room within the policy documents (Apple, p. 278, 2019). Policy documents are not seen as neutral administrative texts, but as political products shaped by the institutional interests (Apple, p. 277, 2019).

In this study, CPA is used on central documents connected to Global Gateway and the Lobito Corridor. This includes strategy documents, official descriptions of the flagship project, relevant program documents and as well as EU meetings and communication (Apple, pp. 280–281, 2019). Zambia's national development plan is analysed to potentially correlate between development priorities formulated nationally, and how they are represented or not within the EU policy framework (Apple, p. 279, 2019).

The analysis focuses on how development is defined and what problems the corridor addresses. Especially, attention is pointed towards how concepts such as partnership, ownership, sustainability, strategic autonomy and critical raw materials are being used (Apple, p. 278, 2019). The study looks into how the Lobito corridor is primarily displayed: as a development project, a geopolitical instrument or if it is a combination between both (Apple, p. 280, 2019).

In practice, CPA displays how documents are read multiple times to identify repeating themes, concepts or patterns. Some central formulations are coded thematic and compared between documents. The analysis is not about counting occurrences but more translation of the purpose and identify tensions and if contradictions occur (Apple, p. 279, 2019). Even if not being said, exclusion of concepts will be analytical and relevant (Apple, p. 281, 2019).

4.3 Semi structured interviews

The second part of the methodology will consist of semi-structured interviews with selected actors connected to the Lobito Corridor and EU:s development processes. The interviews can include representatives from CSOs, government officials from EU or member states, as well as policy actors with insight to the decision process.

The purpose of the interviews is to get a deeper understanding on how the policy process is being transferred and used in practice. Whilst policy documents give an official and formal picture of the process, interviews give the opportunity to understand how different levels of the implementation work in reality, and how priorities are negotiated, but also how local needs are met and their influence. The interviews aim to highlight how geopolitical considerations are being understood internally and how actors see the balance between development goal and strategic interests.

Semi-structured interviews are chosen especially to give a balance between structure and flexibility. An interview guide will be used to ensure that central themes are being treated, for example. consulting processes, institutional limitations, understanding on ownership and the relation between development and geopolitics. At the same time will space be given to the interviewees to elaborate on their intentions and reasoning to lift their aspects that are not explicitly being brought up in the policy documents.

The interviews will be transcribed and analysed through a thematic lens. This means that the content will be read thoroughly to identify recurring themes, patterns and eventually differences between different actors. These themes will later be compared with the results from the CPA, to identify correspondences or discrepancies between official discourse and experienced practice and see how may or may not reflect the official EU documentations.

4.4 Integration of methods

The combination between Critical Policy Analysis and Interview is possible through the method triangulation (Given, p. 892-894, 2008). Document analysis shows how the Lobito corridor project is constructed through EUs official policy, whilst the interview gives insight into how this construction can be defined and translated into practice.

By analysing the interview material alongside the official policy framing and announcements, the study can examine whether there is alignment between formal representations and practical understandings. Where we might see similarities, this could indicate a shared understanding of the institutions. Where differences emerge, these may reveal how policy ideas are filtered or reshaped in ways that are not visible in the policy documents alone. The theoretical framework of policy transfer and ownership is then used to understand these findings and place them within a broader discussion of how development politics and geopolitics are changing and what it might bring.

4.5 Ethical considerations

The study follows the foundational research principle for qualitative research. All participants of the interviews will be informed of the studies purpose and will be informed about their consent before participating. The participants may stay anonymous, especially if sensitive information or questions are being discussed. The interview material is stored safely on encrypted devices and will only be used for educational purposes.

Since the study mainly consists of professional actors and not vulnerable independents, will the ethical risks be limited. At the same time, confidentiality and careful representation of participants' views remain essential to ensure academic integrity.

5. Empirical Findings / Results

This chapter looks into how the Lobito Corridor is constructed in EU policy and how this construction is understood in practice. The analysis is based on two types of material: policy documents and interviews. The core documents are the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation, the 2021 Global Gateway strategy, the 2023 Memorandum of Understanding on the Lobito Corridor, and the 2024 annual report on the implementation of the EU's external action instruments. Each of these documents has a different role in the analysis. The NDICI regulation is used because it sets out the more formal legal basis and development mandate of EU external action. The Global Gateway strategy is used because it presents the broader investment logic within which the corridor is placed. The Memorandum of Understanding is an important document because it gives the project a more concrete form by identifying its purpose, participating actors, and operational arrangements between the actors. The 2024 annual report is used to show how this policy direction is later presented at the level of implementation. The chapter also uses supporting documents where relevant, including the EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package and other texts that help situate the corridor within its wider regional and financial setting, to understand from a formal setting, to also a communicative perspective. Analysing these materials together makes it possible to see not only how the corridor is described, but also what kind of development model it is made to represent. This approach follows Critical Policy Analysis, where documents are read as political texts that define problems, priorities, and acceptable solutions. The three interviews are included to add another level to the analysis. The interviews help to show how these official formulations are interpreted, repeated, questioned, or translated by actors that are directly involved in or close to the corridor projects and Global Gateway as a whole. The interviews were three professionals working within the European Commission, on the ground in Zambia and also a senior analyst with history from think tanks and field work. Together, the documents and interviews make it possible to analyse both the official policy logic of the Lobito Corridor and the tensions that appear when that logic is used into practice.

5.1 The shift from aid to investment

In the material, two different ways of formulating development goals are introduced. In the NDICI regulation, EU development policy is presented as being primarily aimed at poverty reduction and, in the long term, poverty eradication. The regulation states that the Union's "primary objective" is "the reduction and, in the long term, the eradication of poverty" (European Parliament and Council, 2021). This places poverty reduction clearly at the centre of the development mandate. In the 2021 Global Gateway strategy, development is framed more strongly through investment in infrastructure, connectivity, and supply chains. The strategy presents itself as "a positive offer" and as "an EU plan for major investment in infrastructure development around the world" (European Commission and High Representative, 2021). This type of language is already signals a different starting point. Development is not only described as support for poverty reduction, but increasingly as a question of investment and large-scale infrastructure.

The difference becomes clearer in how development problems and solutions are described. The NDICI regulation contains a broad set of development goals, where poverty, social development, and sustainable development function as the main reference points (European Parliament and Council, 2021). In the Global Gateway documents, development is described more through investment in transport corridors, digital infrastructure, energy systems, and climate-related sectors linked to both environmental and commercial priorities (European Commission and High Representative, 2021; European Commission, 2024). The 2021 strategy also states that Global Gateway will mobilise "up to €300 billion between 2021 and 2027" (European Commission and High Representative, 2021). That formulation matters because it places financial mobilisation at the centre of the policy. The issue is not only what development should achieve, but how capital can be organised and scaled up to support it.

The development logic expressed throughout the Global Gateway material is therefore largely investment-oriented. In the 2021 Global Gateway strategy, the initiative is described as a response to the global investment gap and as a way to scale up infrastructure investment together with partner countries, financial institutions, and the private sector (European Commission and High Representative, 2021). The same document connects this orientation to competition, supply chain resilience, and the promotion of the EU's own interests. The 2024 annual report reinforces this direction at the level of implementation. At the same time, it states that "Eradicating poverty remains central" while also describing Global Gateway as "the main vehicle" for the EU's external action in this area (European Commission, 2024). Read together, these formulations suggest that the older aid logic has not disappeared, but that it now operates alongside a stronger investment logic which increasingly shapes how development is organised and presented.

This logic is even clearer in the Africa-Europe investment package. Here, economic integration, trade, investments, regional and continental supply chains as well as Africa's industrialisation is emphasised as central goals (European Commission, 2022). The document especially gives support to competitive and sustainable value chains as well as investments along the value chains and has the goal that partnership countries should develop regional value chains, diversify their economies and create more local value domestically. Education, health, and youth are also included in the package, but they are often linked to wider processes of economic transformation. Education and training are connected to labour market opportunities and skill development whilst health is linked both to public health needs and to production capacity, regulatory strengthening, and medicine manufacturing. These sectors therefore remain social priorities, but they are frequently framed within a broader investment and transformation agenda (European Commission, 2022).

When it comes to which actors are presented as central, an implementation perspective dominates, with the EU, the Member States, European financial institutions and the private sector at the forefront (European Commission and High Representative, 2021; European Commission, 2024). This emphasis is not only visible in the policy framing, but also reflected in how projects are generated and moved forward in practice. As a coordinator for development issues at Sweden’s Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels, the interviewee described there has been a gradual shift toward bringing in European business actors more directly into Global Gateway, with project ideas increasingly emerging from investment interests and then being aligned with EU priorities (Interview with Swedish EU development official, 2026). In the 2021 Global Gateway strategy, Team Europe is described as the framework through which capital and expertise will be pooled, and the same document highlights the private sector as essential as global investment needs cannot be met without large-scale private financing (European Commission and High Representative, 2021). The 2024 Annual Report, says explicitly that the private sector is an important actor within the global gateway and its full potential is not fully used (European Commission, 2024). Partner Countries, civil society and local actors also have a part within the material, but mostly within a structure where the investment frame already is defined through EU’s financial and institutional tools. However, whilst looking from the institutional insight, the delegation on structure is affected differently.

The policy instruments follow the same patterns. Global Gateway is described through financial instruments as aid, grants, guarantees, risk diversifications, blended finance and investments platforms, combined with regulatory support and support to commercial climate and companies (European Commission and High Representative, 2024 & European Commission, 2022). The Africa-Europe investment package expresses that financing includes both grants and loans, and that the package should attract private financing from both Africa and Europe, and that the EU should mobilize private investments by dividing the risk through the blended finance model and guarantees (European Commission, 2022). This suggests that public funding is increasingly used not only to finance development directly, but also to make larger investment flows possible.

Ownership and the role of partner countries are simultaneously formulated in terms of partnership, consultation and adaptation to needs. The 2021 Global Gateway strategy states that projects should be designed in close cooperation with partner countries and build on the needs and opportunities they identify for their local economies and societies, but also on the EU's own strategic interests (European Commission and High Representative, 2021). The same document stresses the need for local societies, SMEs and partners to have their voices heard through public consultations and CSOs engagement as well (European Commission and High Representative, 2021). There is also a language around equal partnership, but this is often formulated parallel with referencing to EUs strategic interests and to investors role for resilience, competitive power and supply chains (European Commission and High Representative, 2021 & European Commission and High Representative, 2024). A Senior Regional Grants Advisor for Africa at People in Need touches on this tension as well. He describes Corridor Voices not only as a platform for civil society participation, but also as a way for civil society to reduce social, environmental and reputational risks for investments, support ESG compliance, and provide data on local value chains (Interview with senior NGO advisor, 2026) This could be seen as that civil society participation is partly translated into the language of investment security and project implementation, rather than only democratic inclusion.

The new EU-Angola communiqué from 2026 reinforces this pattern. The Swedish EU development official interview confirms this shift, as he describes a gradual movement in Global Gateway toward economic security, strategic autonomy, critical raw materials and diversification of value chains. At the same time, he notes that this creates a continuing tension with more traditional development goals, which several Member States still try to keep visible in the negotiations. (Interview with Swedish EU development official, 2026). There, the emphasis is largely on economic security and diversification or the supply chains, market access for goods and services as well as agricultural products, and investments in strategic sectors as a part of the common partnership (Council of the EU, 2026). At the same time, the Lobito Corridor is described as a driving force for sustainable development, national and regional integration and including growth, but also a structured axis for industrialization, logistical platforms, agriculture chains, renewable energy and development of local productive capacities (Council of Europe, 2026). The communiqué also introduces all relevant actors to be involved, including governments, private sectors and CSO's, and that the EU has set aside resources to strengthen the civil society's capacity along the Lobito corridor project. Even here combines the language about inclusiveness and local development with a focus on investments, logistical effects and industrialisation and strategic sectors (Council of the EU, 2026). The interview with the Senior Policy Analyst at ecdpm, adds a useful nuance to this reading. She described the Lobito Corridor as more than an externally driven EU/US project, since Angola, Zambia and the DRC also try to use the corridor for market access, regional trade, industrialisation and value addition. At the same time, she also stressed that this agency is shaped by external finance, private investors and the need for commercially viable projects (Interview with Senior Policy Analyst at ecdpm, 2026). This means that the shift from aid to investment does not remove African priorities, but it makes them easier to advance when they fit the investment logic of Global Gateway.

Across the material as a whole, a clear difference therefore emerges between the guiding logic of the policies and announcements. In the NDICI regulation, poverty reduction remains the overarching formulation. The Global Gateway documents are much more strongly shaped by the language of investment, transport, connectivity, markets, and value chains, and even when social and local development goals are present, they are usually placed within an investment-based context

5.2 Distribution of decision making authority

When looking at the documentation with specific attention to decision-making authority, the material suggests that authority is formally shared across several actors, but not on equal terms. A useful way to understand this structure is to distinguish between four levels: the formal principles of partnership, the setting of the broader agenda, the coordination of the project, and the territorial and regulatory tasks needed for implementation. The NDICI regulation provides the broad legal principles of EU external action. It emphasises “ownership of development priorities by partner countries,” “inclusive development partnerships,” and the use of partner countries’ own institutions and systems where appropriate (European Parliament and Council, 2021). In the more operational Global Gateway documents, however, governance becomes more closely tied to EU-led coordination structures, financial instruments, and external partnerships. Already at this level, a gap appears between the language of partnership and the distribution of practical control, with the EU more clearly positioned in the lead when it comes to implementation and coordination. The Swedish EU development official’s interview adds on this as well, this reading from an institutional perspective. He explains that the Council and Member States mainly give policy input on how Global Gateway should develop, while the strategy itself was launched and designed by the Commission. This suggests that authority is shared within the EU system, but that the Commission still holds a central role in defining the initiative’s overall direction - creating a tension between member states and the EU.

In terms of agenda-setting, the Lobito Corridor is presented as a project where African and external priorities meet, but the documents give considerable weight to the external frameworks through which the corridor is organised. In the 2023 Lobito Corridor MoU, the initiative is explicitly connected to PGII and Global Gateway. PGII, or the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, is the G7 framework through which the EU and the United States present support for large-scale infrastructure projects such as Lobito. In the MoU, the corridor project is presented as a way to grow and enhance regional trade by connecting the developing countries to global markets through the Benguela railway and the port of Lobito (U.S. Embassy in Zambia, 2023). At the same time, the 2021 Global Gateway strategy states that the initiative will be driven both by the needs of partner countries and by “the strategic interests of the European Union” (European Commission and High Representative, 2021). The agenda is therefore presented as a shared project, therefore shared responsibility, but it is strongly structured through external policy frameworks and external investment logics. This distinction was also raised in the interview with the Senior Policy Analyst at ecdpm, they argued that ownership cannot only be measured by whether partner countries are included in agreements or consultation processes. The more important question is who shapes the corridor's purpose: whether it mainly becomes a corridor for mineral exports, or whether it also supports processing, agriculture, local firms, regional value chains and employment (Interview with Senior Policy Analyst at ecdpm, 2026). This supports the point that formal participation and practical control need to be treated as separate issues.

The Global Gateway material also presents the EU as the main coordinating actor in the wider governance structure. In the 2021 Global Gateway strategy, projects are said to be developed and delivered through Team Europe Initiatives, bringing together "the EU institutions, Member States, and European financial institutions" together with businesses, governments, civil society, and the private sector in partner countries (European Commission and High Representative, 2021). The same document also explains that EU delegations will play a key role on the ground by identifying projects, matching them with financing, and following up on implementation (European Commission and High Representative, 2021). In this sense, decision-making is not presented only as a matter of political dialogue, but also as a question of who controls coordination platforms, project preparation, and access to finance. This is further illustrated in the Swedish EU development official's description of how project ideas move through national business structures and into the Commission's Investment Hub, where they are assessed and shaped (Interview with Swedish EU development official, 2026).

As an operational document, the 2023 Lobito Corridor MoU makes this division of labour more concrete and easier to understand. It states that the United States will provide guidance to the project developer, facilitate coordination between the host governments, help identify different commercial actors, and look at financial support through American tools (U.S. Embassy in Zambia, 2023). The European Commission is given a similar, and in some respects broader, role. It is expected to support engagement and coordination, launch preparatory studies, and guide the project developer and implementing actors. In other words, the MoU places the European Commission and the United States in very central positions when it comes to shaping the project's framework, in terms of technical and financial but also as the whole institution. This is important because it shows that the main external actors are not only funders, but also organisers of the project's wider architecture (See figure 2 for a graphical overview on systematic structure).

The developing countries are however primarily responsible for territorial and regulatory matters. Angola and Zambia should evenly share due diligence-material, give access to feasibility studies, negotiate concession agreements, handle right of way, resettlement and permissions, as well as cooperate around a possible collaborative concession unit for the Zambia-Lobito rail Line. DRC is described as responsible for supporting the development of that part that lies within its borders and together with Angola and Zambia, support common operation of border posts, harmonise documentation and transport links within respective territory (U.S embassy in Zambia, 2023). The partnership countries are here presented as crucial operational actors, but their responsibility lies mostly within the national administrative and lawful level, rather than on the project's overall financial and institutional design. Similarly, in the interview with the Senior Regional Grants Advisor for Africa at People in Need, he described national governments as being involved while local authorities and civil society actors were less consistently included in the process (Interview with senior NGO advisor, 2026)

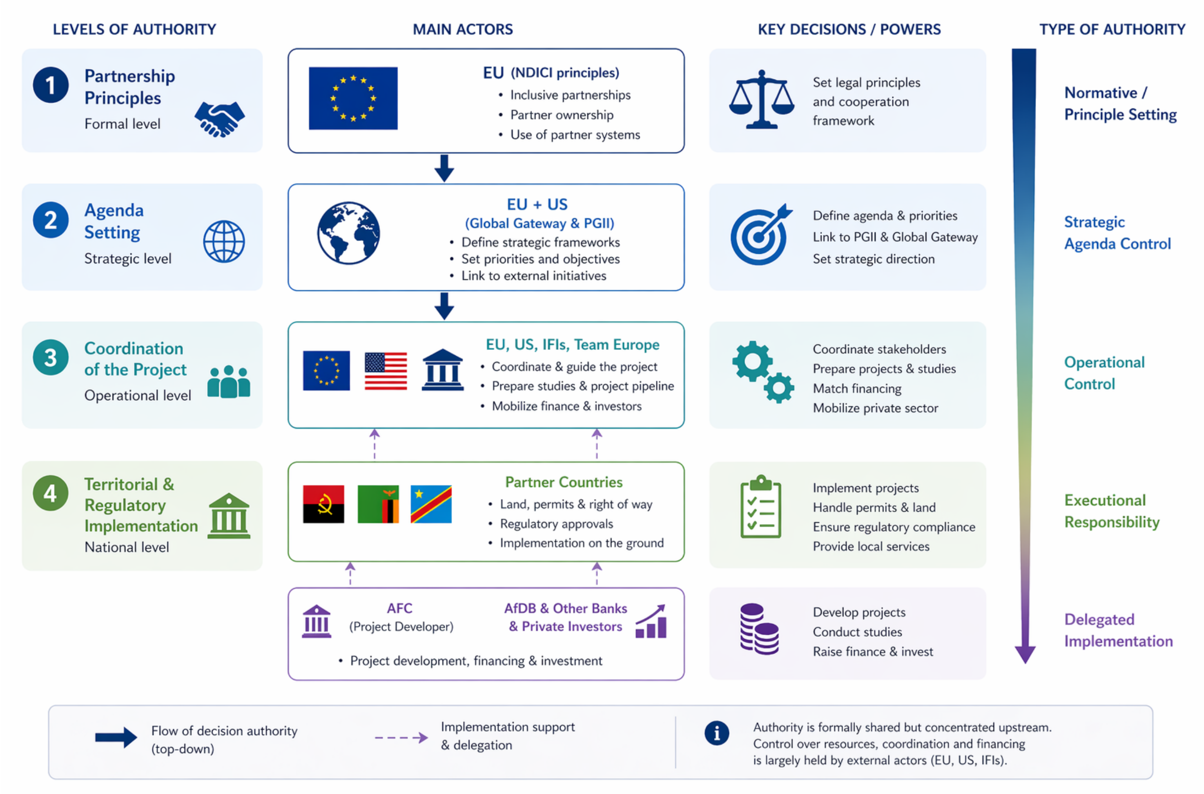
This is further reinforced by the distribution of responsibilities between AFC, AfDB, and the other actors involved. In the MoU, AFC is said to work as overall Project Developer for Zambia Lobito Rail Line and responsible to identify consultants and relevant interest, implement technical, commercial, financial and jurisdictional studies, seek sponsor and the likes, through financial modeling and later participate in negotiation with the host countries (U.S embassy in Zambia, 2023). A significant part of decision-making and project development is thus delegated to external development and finance actors.

A World Bank report points in the same direction. There, the project's goal is described to increase private investors and grow resilience for SME in non-oil based value chains, especially in the Lobito corridor, as well as public measures should be used to mobilize private capital to productive infrastructure, logistics and refinement (World Bank, 2023). Governance is described through a module where public institutions should create and enable terms, whilst investments and economic activity to a higher degree, is expected to operate through private and mixed arrangements. Decision making in this process is not only described at governmental, but is distributed amongst different governmental institutions, development banks and private investors - as well as project developers.

Also, UN Zambia and ECDPM highlight that this governance model is not without friction. Here, friction refers to the political, administrative, and regulatory obstacles that make coordination across the corridor difficult. These sources also play a somewhat different role in the analysis than the MoU. They are not operational documents that assign formal responsibilities, but rather analytical and policy-oriented texts that help explain where coordination becomes difficult in practice. UN Zambia describes the LCTTFA[1] as a central mechanism to harmonise laws, regulations, data, infrastructure strategies, and trade between the three corridor countries, which gives the impression that regional collaboration is an important factor for decision-making (UN Zambia, 2024). The same document also highlights that multiple governments with different political agendas, tariffs, and administrative capacities make this coordination difficult. ECDPM goes a bit further on this and describes how African trade negotiations are often put aside in the geopolitical story about the corridor, at the same time as the three governments actually hold different interests and priorities (ECDPM, 2025). It also highlights that formal coordination mechanisms seem to focus primarily on trade facilitation and regulatory harmonisation, while much of the coordination around investment still takes place through external actors and informal channels (ECDPM, 2025).

Even the communiqués about Angola show this mix of national responsibility and external coordination, but these sources should also be read somewhat differently from the MoU. Unlike the MoU, which functions more as an operational working arrangement, the communiqués are political communication documents that present the partnership publicly and signal priorities rather than allocate responsibilities in detail. In the communiqué from 2023, the priorities linked to the Lobito Corridor are presented as being aligned with Angola's National Development Plan 2023 to 2027, while also being connected to the Team Europe initiative and to wider discussions on reforms and actions by the Angolan state (EEAS, 2023). According to the 2026 communiqué, the EU partnership is now presented as providing financial, technological, and logistical measures to facilitate and speed up construction of the Lobito Corridor, and connect it to regional integration processes, platforms, agricultural value chains, and energy networks (Council of the EU, 2026). Although, the partner countries are presented as actors responsible for domestic reforms and local ownership, whereas the EU is positioned more clearly as a critical actor for resource mobilisation, external coordination, and the wider implementation structure - increasing this division between the local actors and the EU.

[1] The Lobito Corridor Transit Transport Facilitation Agency (LCTTFA) is a trilateral institution. It is based in Angola, and serves to coordinate, harmonize policies, and facilitate trade, logistics, and infrastructure development along the Lobito Corridor.



(Figure 2. A simplified overview of how decision-making is organised in the Lobito Corridor project. It shows the split between externally driven strategic and financial decisions and nationally anchored implementation and regulatory responsibilities, alongside the role of regional coordination Source: Author's own illustration, based on the NDICI regulation (European Parliament and Council, 2021), the Global Gateway strategy (European Commission and High Representative, 2021), the Lobito Corridor MoU (European Commission, 2023 & U.S. Embassy, 2023), and ECDPM (Bilal and Große-Puppendahl, 2016).

We see through the policies, documentation and processes that it points to a decision making structure in which partner countries are assigned ownership over national development goals, territory, permits and many other reform processes, whilst the EU and the US, together with other external actors largely presented at those who coordinate financing, initiate studies, mobilize investors and shape the whole institutional architecture of the project.

5.3 Financial instruments and partner-country control

In the documentation regarding financial terms and promises on global gateway and the Lobito corridor, we see it mainly through instruments to mobilize the capital, share risks and make projects more attractive to invest in, rather than traditional aid in a sense. In the Global Gateway strategy, the target is said to mobilize up to 300 billion euros between 2021 and

2027 by combining public and private capital and resources through guarantees, grants, loans, blended finance and other financial tools, to ease up investments in partner countries (European Commission, 2025). The strategy from 2024 is the same model described as a combination of grants, subsidized loans and guarantees to limit investment risk, with explicit focus on attracting private capital to strategic sectors and projects (European Commission and High Representative, 2024). The financial logic is presented already from the start and throughout the projects as a model where public resources are being used to govern investments, rather than as a direct finance development priorities.

The same pattern returns in the more overarching EU-documentations. In 2021, describes the message about the Global Gateway strategy as a way to mobilize the investments through Team Europe, where EU, member states, financial institutions and the private sectors should co-exist together in the partner countries (European Commission and High Representative, 2021). The 2024 follow-up states more specifically that the Global Gateway is based on a combination of grants, subsidized loans and guarantees of reduced investment risk, with the aim of attracting private capital to strategic sectors and large-scale projects (European Commission and High Representative, 2024). In the documentation it is being said that public resources should primarily be used as leverage capital: to minimize risks, support project preparations and make investments possible in those sectors where private investors otherwise would not invest by themselves. This is also reflected in interview with the Senior Regional Grants Advisor for Africa at People in Need, where Global Gateway is described less as a separate funding instrument and more as a framework that builds on NDICI funding while trying to mobilise additional resources through the private sector, multilateral financial institutions and development finance actors.

The NDICI regulation gives this module a common ground. The regulation keeps poverty reduction and long term poverty eradication as an overarching goal for EU's development cooperation, but it also opens up for usage of budget guarantees, blended finance and other financial tools within the European external instruments (European Parliament and Council, 2021). This means that investment oriented financing forms are not presented as a separate add-on to the development policy, but as a part of the institutional framing. The lawful frame integrates two logics within the same instrument, a political development goals, and a financial model where risk assessment and capital mobilization gets a central function.

Even Africa-Europe investment packages follow this same pattern. In that regulation, financing is presented as a combination of EU-grants, European and international loans, guarantees, risk-diversion and private investors within transport, energy, digitalization, health and value chains (European Commission, 2022). The documentation highlights not just what sectors should be prioritized, but also what projects should be built through forms of financing to create a leverage effect and attract more actors than just the states. In the material this is presented as a way to increase investment volumes, but also as a regulation where the project's framework must be adjusted to the financial viability, risk assessment and the possibility of creating mixed financing arrangements.

In the lobito corridor project documentations, this financial logic is more operative. In the MoU, the European Commission is said to support financial possibilities through guarantees, grant support and debt tools, while the US should consider financial support through its own tools and AfDB through loans, guarantees, grants and other types of support structure (U.S embassy in Zambia, 2023). AFC is given a central role in developing the financial module for Zambia-lobito Rail Line, identifying sponsors and investors to participate in concession negotiations with the developing countries, or “host countries” as described in the documentation (U.S embassy in Zambia, 2023). The financing architecture is presented as purely external. Partner countries participate in the process, but the central financial instruments, channels of financing and risk assessment mechanism is being described almost only in external institutions.

The World Bank documentation strengthens this picture. The project's goals is to increase private investors and climate resilient growth for SME in non oil-based value chains, especially in the lobito corridor, and projects should mobilize private capital for productive infrastructure, logistics and other related services (World Bank, 2023). The documentation contains several tools that build on risk diversification and public catalysis. This includes support for PPP development, due diligence for selected PPP transactions, a project preparation fund, public investments in last mile infrastructure to support PPP arrangements, and a credit guarantee scheme to alleviate risk and promote bank lending to MSMEs (World Bank, 2023). Even here a governance logic is presented where public resources are being used to prepare projects, limit risk and create some investment more attractive. The interview with the Senior Policy Analyst at ecdpm makes this financing logic more concrete. She described the corridor as shaped not only by states, but also by railway operators, mining firms, finance institutions and investors. The Lobito Atlantic Railway consortium is especially relevant here, since its commercial logic is closely tied to mineral transport, particularly copper and cobalt. Private actors may be necessary for the project to move forward, but their role also means that broader development goals, such as agriculture, SMEs, local jobs and civil society participation, may have less influence if they are not seen as bankable (Interview with Senior Policy Analyst at ecdpm, 2026).

UN Zambia presents the corridor from a regional development and coordination perspective rather than as an operational financing document. In that policy brief, the corridor is described as requiring extensive resources from both public and private sources, while the Lobito Corridor Transit Transport Facilitation Agency Agreement is presented as a mechanism for harmonising policies, laws, regulations, joint infrastructure strategies, traffic data, and trade facilitation instruments across the three corridor countries (UN Zambia, 2024). The same brief also notes that the corridor will require significant financial resources and skilled labour, and that long-term implementation may depend on structures such as a Special Purpose Vehicle to isolate risk and secure continuous financing over the life of the project (UN Zambia, 2024). Financing is therefore not presented mainly as a matter of state planning budgets or aid transfer, but as a question of institutional design, investor security, and risk management.

The European Parliament’s resolution from 2026 confirms this development, but also adds the tension that follows from it. The resolution describes Global Gateway as a strategy built on the EU’s external finance architecture and linked to the ambition of mobilising development finance from “billions to trillions” through stronger private sector involvement (European Parliament, 2026). At the same time, it underlines that geopolitical goals must not override development effectiveness principles or distort partner countries’ priorities, and that initiatives should be formed in line with country ownership and in consultation with local actors (European Parliament, 2026). The resolution also calls for greater transparency around EFSD+ and clearer evidence on the leverage effect of guarantees and other financial instruments. This makes the document relevant not only as a presentation of EU ambitions, but also as evidence that the governance effects of these instruments remain contested within the EU itself.

Against this background, the financial instruments seem to shape how much influence partner countries actually have. The policy documents and briefs still use a somewhat clear language about national priorities, equal partnership, and local development. The Angola communiqués from 2023 and 2026, for example, link the cooperation to Angola's national development plans and to goals such as economic diversion, social inclusion, and more focus on human development (EEAS, 2023 & Council of the EU, 2026). Zambia's Eighth National Development Plan provides a different type of source. Unlike the EU and corridor documents, it is a national planning document that sets out Zambia's own development priorities and implementation approach. The Plan presents development through "Socio-Economic Transformation for Improved Livelihoods" and describes national planning as coordinated, integrated, participatory, responsive, and results-oriented (Republic of Zambia, 2022). It also links economic transformation to trade facilitation, transport and logistics, private sector competitiveness, credit guarantee schemes, PPPs, and access to finance for production and exports (Republic of Zambia, 2022). This does not mean that Zambia stands outside the broader investment logic. Rather, it shows that the country's own planning framework also includes trade, private sector development, and financial instruments, but from a domestic planning perspective in which participation, coordination, and national priorities are more clearly foregrounded.

This is not to say that partner countries play no role in financial governance. In the World Bank material, for example, the Ministry of Economy and Planning in Angola holds ultimate responsibility for implementation, and several national actors are given specific coordination and implementation roles (World Bank, 2023). Yet this takes place within a financial order in which credit guarantee schemes, PPP mechanisms, due diligence processes, external standards, and project preparation structures help define what is financeable and on what terms. Some room for manoeuvre therefore still exists, but it exists within a framework that places strong weight on external risk evaluation, project readiness, and investability in deciding which development goals can actually be realised.

ECDPM's discussion paper points in the same direction, but from a more analytical perspective. Unlike the planning and policy documents, it does not allocate responsibilities or present official priorities. Instead, it looks at whether the corridor is actually viable and at the wider political economy around it. The paper argues that, despite all the language describing the corridor, there is still limited clarity about what investments will actually happen, and that African governments are not approaching the project with the same interests or priorities (ECDPM, 2025). It also suggests that formal coordination mechanisms such as the LCTTFA seem to focus mainly on trade facilitation and regulatory harmonisation, rather than on coordinating the wider investment structure. This, in turn, raises questions about how these different interests are supposed to be brought together in practice (ECDPM, 2025). In addition, ECDPM shows that many ambitions to move beyond mineral transport have not yet translated into sufficient investment in other sectors. This suggests that the financial instruments do not simply make development possible in general. They also tend to favour sectors where demand, strategic value, and external interest are already more clearly established. Partner-country control over development priorities therefore does not disappear, but it becomes more closely conditioned by a financial logic in which external structures of risk-sharing, project preparation, and private participation shape the practical field of choice.

Taken together, the material points to a financing model in which the shaping, selection, and realisation of projects are increasingly conditioned by guarantees, loans, blending, PPP structures, credit guarantees, and private investment. In the broader EU policy texts, this is presented as a way to mobilise more resources and support long-term cooperation. In the more operational Lobito Corridor documents, the same logic appears in more concrete form, where the main financial instruments are controlled through external actors and institutions, while partner countries are more closely associated with implementation, regulation, and the domestic anchoring of development goals. The result is not a complete absence of ownership, but a more uneven arrangement in which partner countries retain ownership of broad development aims without exercising the same degree of control over the financial terms through which those aims are pursued. Similarities can be seen with what the Swedish EU development official shared as well in the interview: ownership is treated as important within the institutional process, but it is filtered through project criteria, investment readiness and the need to attract European business participation (Interview with Swedish EU development official, 2026).

5.4 Framing ownership in EU policy

Ownership does exist as a principle within EU:s Policy documents, but it is given a different value depending on the documentation type. In the NDICI regulation is ownership connected to the partner countries own priorities, how they use their institutions and systems, as well as poverty education and sustainable development as an overarching goal (European Parliament and Council, 2021). In this framework is ownership primarily seen as a development political ideal. Partner countries should not just participate in the implementation, but also as the legitimate starting point for the priorities.

In the Global Gateway material the language is kept around partnership, but it connects to a different kind of governance. The 2021 Global Gateway strategy is said to be built on partnership countries' needs and possibilities, but at the same time also on EUs strategic interests (European Commission and High Representative, 2021). In the follow up strategy published in 2024, this is highlighted by how partnerships are described within a Team Europe model, where investments, resilience and strategic cooperation stand in the centre (European Commission and High Representative, 2024). Compared to the NDICI regulation, ownership here becomes less connected to self-sufficient national priorities and more connected to participation in an already structured partnership.

The difference is clearer when looking at the material together. The NDICI regulation speaks about partnership in a language close to classic development aid politics, whilst the Global Gateway material places the same principle in a framework where investments, connectivity and strategic sectors are already defining the core of the cooperation (European Parliament and Council, 2021 & European Commission and High Representative, 2021 & European Commission and High Representative, 2024). Ownership does not disappear, but it moves from being about control over development goals, to participation in an investment-driven agenda that is already partly structured by EU interests, instruments and procedures. This is also how the Swedish EU development official described the institutional process : he saw ownership as an important criterion, but one that is assessed through project eligibility, partner-country interest and the wider 360-degree approach, rather than as open-ended control over the agenda itself (Interview with Swedish EU development official, 2026).

The Africa-Europe investment package lies closer to the Global Gateway material than the NDICI regulation in this sense. The document does add some local aspects however in creating value, African industrialisation and economic diversification (European Commission, 2022). Also, these goals get framed in through competitiveness, sustainable value chains, investments and integration in the regional and global market. Ownership here is therefore not presented as freedom over own governance for development, but as a possibility to position themselves within the investment logic that has already been set. The same regulation also says that partnership should create more local value and this will be done through structures that are defined by external financing, market access and strategic value chains.

This tension becomes more concrete in the Lobito Corridor documentation. In the MoU, Angola, the DRC, and Zambia are presented as central to permits, border access, concessions, border cooperation, and other administrative processes, while the European Commission, the United States, AfDB, and AFC are given roles in guidance, studies, financial modelling, investor engagement, and overall project development (U.S. Embassy in Zambia, 2023). The NDICI regulation suggests that partnership should also involve a stronger role for partner-country institutions and priorities. The MoU, however, points to a more limited order in which partner-country ownership is mainly tied to national anchoring and practical implementation, while the wider technical and financial architecture is shaped externally.

The communiqués coming out of Angola confirm this narrative but in a slightly different way. The 2023 communiqué makes the link to national anchoring more explicit since it indicates that the priority areas for cooperation aligns with Angola's National Development Plan 2023-2027 and include among other things the need for sustainable economic diversification, good governance and social inclusion, and human development (EEAS, 2023). In the 2026 communiqué, there is still an attempt to establish a link between the two documents, but this time with some modifications. The 2026 communiqué provides more details concerning the development of the Lobito Corridor from the point of view of its industrialization and the development of its logistics infrastructure and value chains in agriculture and renewable energies with a view to the role of the EU in financing and supporting this process (Council of the EU, 2026).

U.N Zambia's policy brief and ECDPMs discussion paper highlights this difference from two angles. UN Zambia describes this corridor as a tool for regional transformation, value chain development and broader development effects, but highlights also the need to harmonise laws, cross-border institutions and coordinated governance between the states (UN Zambia, 2024). ECDPM is more reserved and points out African trade accessibility is often put aside in the geopolitical story on the corridor, even though the governments in Angola, DRC and Zambia have their own interests in the project (ECDPM, 2025). Together we see how ownership in these documents are often formulated as common regional and national participation, but the external framing has more demands on how ownership should be practised.

The 2026 European Parliament resolution shows that this tension is also present within the EU’s own institutional debate. The resolution highlights that global Gateway must respect the counties ownership and the geopolitical goals shall not be overruling the countries own priorities (European Parliament, 2026). At the same time, the Parliament states that civil society organisations and independent experts in partner countries still lack an active role in decision-making and accountability processes (European Parliament, 2026). This is the same kind of concern that was touched with what the Senior Regional Grants Advisor for Africa at People in Need discussed, where civil society involvement in the Lobito Corridor is described as limited and uneven, with consultations often appearing more “ad hoc” than systematic. His account therefore supports the view that ownership is not only a question of state-level alignment, but also of whether local actors are meaningfully included in the structures where priorities are shaped (Interview with senior NGO advisor, 2026). Senior Policy Analyst at ecdpm’s interview points in the same direction but adds a clearer distinction between consultation and decision-making power. She noted that local actors may be included around safeguards, environmental risks, resettlement and community impacts, but that this does not necessarily mean that they shape larger decisions about financing, sector priorities or how the corridor’s benefits are distributed (Interview with Senior Policy Analyst at ecdpm, 2026). This strengthens the argument that participation can exist without becoming substantive ownership.

Concludingly can we see by looking especially at ownership questions in the documents that it has not disappeared completely, but is being changed throughout the policies, regulations and resolutions. In the broader development political framework does ownership primarily mean the partner countries prioritise, institutions and long term development goals. In the Global Gateway material and Lobito corridor documentation the language is more often about consultation, coordination, national anchoring and participation in the investment driven partnerships. the documents and regulation, press releases on much more can be seen as a bit contradictory in this sense, where it describes ownership as a variable instead of a constant.

6. Discussion

6.1 Needs vs. Strategic Interest:

The most central point that comes from this analysis is that the tension between interest and need can not be understood as a one-way understanding, as there are incredibly complex circumstances between the EUs interests and the partner countries' needs. The picture is somewhat mixed. In the Lobito corridor, there are multiple areas where both interests and needs overlap. Zambia, DRC and Angola have a clear need of better transport infrastructure, stronger regional growth, sustainable energy solutions and also require greater opportunities for local value production. So, it is not just that the corridor is a response to external interests. Most of the project's goals are closely related to regional development priorities. This was also reflected in the interview with a Senior Policy Analyst at ecdpm. They stressed that Angola, Zambia and the DRC should not be understood as passive recipients of an EU/US project, but as actors trying to use the corridor for their own priorities, including things such as market access, regional trade, industrialisation and value addition (Interview with a Senior Policy Analyst at ecdpm, 2026).

At the same time, this agency is not unlimited, since the corridor still depends on external finance, private investors and commercially viable projects. It also connects to EUs own strategic interests. Transport, raw material flows, supply chains, docks and other trade exports, market access and much more are central for both the partner countries to become more globalised in the world. Here is where the tension arises around which needs and interests are prioritised, how are they formulated, and how do they change the future for the African countries.

They are noticed, but they are not strong enough to drive the project’s structure in the same way. This is indicated by the MoU, where the operative structure is mainly built around rail development, regional trade, feasibility studies, concessions, financing tools and investor engagement. Civil society and local communities are included, but mainly as actors to be consulted in relation to standards, studies and social risk, rather than as actors shaping the main direction of the project. The social and human development priorities found in Zambia’s 8NDP do not always fit easily with the logic of loans, guarantees and private investment. Rather than directly contradicting these financial instruments, they often have to be reframed in ways that make them compatible with the institutional and financial structure of the Lobito Corridor project.

This does not mean that the Global Gateway does not abandon development as its goal. Rather, it changes what is being prioritised and which development needs are represented most strongly. A need gets more leverage depending on the investment opportunities it can develop. This is where the interface between needs and interest becomes unclear. A need for transportation can be substantive for the Zambian population, but it can also be beneficial for the EU to have better transportation infrastructure to easier access critical mineral resources and strengthen the trade routes. Both things can be true at the same time, fulfilling this idea of "win-win" utopia - but this is just exactly what is interesting.

This also says something important about ownership. Within an older development logic, ownership is often conceived as meaning that the partner countries themselves should define what is being prioritised, and rule the political process. In the material, this language remains, especially in the NDICI regulation where partnership countries' ownership is being emphasised. But when analysing the Global Gateway and Lobito corridor policies and documentation more thoroughly, especially the documentation on the operative parts, this idea of ownership becomes more restricted. Partnership countries are still introduced as important actors, but primarily through national anchoring, reforms, permits, and questions on land and border processes - as well as some practical implementation.

The overreaching architecture however looks a bit different. Financing, investment mobilisation, project development, technical studies and coordination are mostly connected to the EU, Team Europe, development banks, external project developers and private actors. Partner countries do own some parts of the process, but not the most fundamental parts where the project's aims are decided or regulated. Ownership does not disappear, but it changes character. It becomes a smaller question on ruling the development target and more a question regarding participation in the project, whilst the framework is already decided.

The financing module also represents this understanding. Blended finance, guarantees, loans and risk diversification are often presented as technical tools to mobilise capital. But they are not neutral. They affect which needs can be financed. A hospital, a local development program or a civil society project can be just as important from a development perspective, but do not necessarily produce the capital results that are needed to attract private investors.

A railway connected to minerals, docks, logistics and export does however. This does not mean that the corridor is lacking development worth, but it means that some needs have an easier time to navigate and be prioritised through the system than others.

The interview the Swedish EU development official outlined how global Gateway is all the more connected to economic security, strategic autonomy, critical wares and European business participation. This does not show that the development goals have disappeared but strengthens the picture that it now shares the space with a clearer strategic and economic logic. The Interview with senior NGO advisor gave an additional important nuance of the process, explaining civil society's participation through the example of Corridor Voice, which can bring local voices into the process. At the same time, civil society is also described as a means to reduce social, environmental and reputational risks to investments. This is a significant shift.

Here the theoretical framework is useful. Rational Choice Institutionalism helps to understand why actors act within the incentives that institutions create. The EU's system rewards projects that can combine development language with strategic interests, capital mobilisation and clear results. Principal Agent Theory helps at the same time to understand how local information is moved through multiple layers. Local actors can have detailed knowledge about needs and risks, but this knowledge must pass through governments, EU-delegations, development banks, project developers and investment structures. On the way it could be decomposed, reformulated or adjusted to the language that suits best to the decision maker - which in this instance is the EU. The problem is therefore not just that local voices are ignored. The issue is also that they must be translated to a system that changes the terms and conditions on how they will be heard.

This ties together with the literature on corridor projects. Infrastructure is often described as a win-win solution, but the previous research shows that corridors create selective mobility. Some resources, actors and investments find it easier to move along the corridor, whilst other groups get less space or even are affected negatively. The Lobito courier fits just as well in this pattern. Copper, cobalt, export chains and logistical actors are presented as very mobile in the project's vision. Local needs also do have a part, but become stronger when connected to this economic logistic.

The broader conclusion, therefore, is that the Global Gateway cannot be simply described as either meeting the development needs of the beneficiary countries or the self-interest of its EU donors. It is both. But this balance is not neutral. The results show that it needs to get the largest political and practical power when it also can serve strategic or commercial interest. That is just where ownership becomes the most problematic. If partner countries can only get a breakthrough when it suits within the external investment framework - ownership becomes more limited than what the policies requests.

These discussions should still be interpreted carefully. This study analyses policy documents and interviews, not long-term development outcomes. It cannot yet show whether the Lobito Corridor will improve livelihoods, reduce poverty or create more equal regional development in practice. But it does show something important about the policy process. The main tension is not that interests replace needs completely. It is that needs become strongest when they are useful to interests. That is where the politics of ownership in Global Gateway becomes visible.

6.2 The Reality of Alignment:

The reality of alignment is that there is not complete consensus between the different actors. What we can draw from the research is mainly about justification and adjustments. On the policy note, there is a stress on the concept around partnership, ownership and sustainability - as well as local needs. At the same time, the research also shows us that alignment should not be taken for granted. What we understand is alignment as built instead of national and local priorities, that are drawn into the institutional context, where they have to be adjusted to fit the broader investment logics, strategic interest and already established decision processes. Alignment does therefore not come from a neutral agreement between the two sides, but rather a result showing how some priorities give space, whilst others get reformulated and filtered through the bureaucratic chain.

We see this especially in relations to the Zambian national development plan and Global Gateway. This is a clear overlap on what sectors are brought up, especially infrastructure, energy and transport. This overlap should not be confused with alignment. Behind the thin consensus - there are different development logics. Where Zambia's national development plan puts humanitarian development, poverty reduction and wide civil society development in the centre, the investment module is driven with requirements on mobilizing capital, financial return and strategic relevance. The reality of alignment is therefore that coordination often occurs at the level of sectors, but not necessarily at the levels of purpose, power or control. What appear to be common priorities can in practice accommodate quite different understandings of what development is and who it should serve. This also can be connected to the Senior Policy Analyst at ecdpm's point that the EU can sometimes struggle to help partner countries "meet in the middle". EU standards on transparency, sustainability and governance may be important, but they can become difficult to translate into practice if partner countries are expected to already have the institutional understanding and administrative capacities required to meet them. Realignment is not only about agreeing on sectors, but also about how external actors support the capacities needed for partner countries to shape implementation on more equal terms - creating an equal ownership (Interview with the Senior Policy Analyst at ecdpm, 2026).

This tension is rooted even further when foreign aid moves from traditional aid, to loans, guarantees and blended finance. In a structure like that, space for own governance in the form of priorities gets limited - since the projects in large need to align with the financial and commercial requirements. That means that alignment in practice is not primarily about external actors adjusting to the local needs, but how local priorities need to adapt to an investment driven module. In this lies also an important power aspect. Adaption does not show on both sides - but rather within a framework where some types of development goals get granted more easily than others. Social needs, local diversification or priorities without clear commercial logics, therefore risks not being prioritised over the others.

By looking through the lens of a critical policy analysis, the concept of alignment is not only the question, but how alignment is produced as a policy idea, and what function this language has. Alignment then appears as a discursive construction that creates an image of coherence, legitimacy and common purpose, while the decision-making structure itself is characterized by institutional hierarchies and selective forms of knowledge. The crucial thing is not only what priorities are listed, but how the problem is defined, what solutions are brought up as reasonable, and what actors are given interpretive power. When investments in transport corridors, logistics and raw material flows are formulated as development - a certain understanding of what is counted as relevant development is created. In that understanding, some local needs are prioritized, whilst other needs become second handed.

Through this framework, it also becomes important to pay attention to the tension between language and practice. Participation and local influence can be seen as processes and principles, without actually having a real impact on the project's alignment. It can get reinterpreted, simplified or be down prioritised depending on how well it fits in the political and strategic target. Therefore, alignment should not be understood as a permission, but as a process where local knowledge must be translated into understanding a type of language that is doable within the bureaucratic policy world. This means that influence is not decided by the locals participation, but if their perspective survives this policy translation without losing its content.

The reality of alignment therefore is not fully coordinated between external investments and local development priorities - but rather about selective adjustments, where some priorities can be involved to support the dominated logic, whilst other priorities get almost demonetized. The Critical Policy Analysis perspective highlights this process through shifting the focus of what the policy actually says, to see more into what has been left out. Alignment is therefore understood less as a concept of actual alignment, but an expression on common ownership and more as an expression on local development agendas, being reformulated to fit just a specific investment driven and geopolitical development module.

6.3 Implications of Financialization:

The financialization of development has important consequences for how poverty reduction is understood within the Lobito Corridor. When development is organized around bankable projects, so projects that may attract investors and generate financial yield, the focus on social needs are transformed into investment opportunities This does however not necessarily mean that poverty reduction disappears as a whole. Better infrastructure, regional trade and new logistical chains can create labour opportunities and access to the open market. But poverty reduction becomes more of an indirect goal.

Policy transfer becomes relevant in this sense. The global gateway does not only finance development projects, but also presents a certain way to think about development. Instead of prioritising social needs, an investment logic is integrated into the partner countries' development plan. It is therefore not only about the EU supporting already existing national priorities, but also about making certain types of projects more accessible than others. Dolowitz and Marsh describe policy transfer as a process where ideas, institutions and policy instruments from one context are used in another (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000). In the Lobito Corridor, this is done through EUs model on blended finance, guarantees and private investments, and how these affect what development problems that are presented as actual solutions.

The problem is that social needs cannot always be translated into investment opportunities. Needs such as local welfare, public services, social security, civil societies participation or protecting vulnerable groups might not give immediate financial yield and are not as attractive. Therefore these kinds of questions risk being placed second, even if they are mentioned as a fundamental pillar of the Global Gateway 360 approach. Projects such as railways, docks, mineral export and other types of industrialisation however fit better into the investment logistical mindset, since they are easier to measure, finance and connect to external actors.

This creates a tension between development as social change and development as investment mobilization. Global Gateway often presents these targets as united, and in some cases they could be. But the analysis shows that this cannot be taken for granted. If financial yield is the most important filter for what projects get prioritised, this risks poverty reduction becoming dependent on whether it can be connected to commercial interest, and how.

The consequences are therefore not that investments are not critical for development. But rather how it could risk the most vulnerable and poor groups, when their interests are under prioritised if their needs are not connected to these strategic investment opportunities. In the Lobito corridor, this means that development could be strengthened when social needs, mineral flows, trade interest and the investors' logics are intertwined. Where these interests are not intertwined, they risk the locals' needs being only admitted in policy, but have a weaker effect on the actual surface.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Findings:

This thesis has explored the transition from how traditional development aid has changed into a more investment-based development strategy, and how this reshapes the meaning and practice of ownership in the EU's Global Gateway, using the Lobito Corridor as an empirical case. The overall conclusion is that local country ownership does not disappear in the Global Gateway, but that it has a new meaning to what we have understood it as previously. In earlier development aid, ownership has a clearer connection to the partnership countries' ability to regulate development priorities and govern the development process. In the Global Gateway documentations, ownership is still present, but in terms of language and principle, it is more interconnected to participation, consultation, national anchoring and implementation within an already established investment-based framework.

The first research question was about how ownership is defined and framed within Global Gateway compared to an earlier development framework. The results show how, to a high degree, NDICI-Global Europe governing treats ownership as a development political principle, connected to partnerships' own priorities, poverty reduction and usage of national institutions (European Parliament and council, 2021). In the Global Gateway strategy, there is a similar language on partnership and local actors' needs and principles, but it is combined with the EU's strategic interests, supply chains, market access, resilience and mobilising private capital (European Commission and High Representative, 2021). This does not mean that a development goal is missing, but rather that is placed within another logic. Development is expected to a high degree to happen through investments, infrastructure, trade and connectivity.

The other research question was about decision-making authority, and we see that this is divided between EU institutions and partnership countries in the Lobito corridor. The analysis shows that authority is formally decided between multiple actors, but not on equal terms. Angola, Zambia and the DRC are presented as central actors when it comes to territorial and administrative issues, such as permits, border control, concessions and national coordination. At the same time, the EU commission, the US, AfDC and AFC are given important roles in coordination, studies, project development, financial modelling and contact with investors (U.S embassy in Zambia, 2023). Partnership countries are necessary and seen in the corridor project’s process, but are extremely limited to external actors' decisions making.

The third research question focuses on financial instruments, such as blended finance and guarantees, and how they affect partnerships countries’ control over development priorities. Here, the results show how financing models affected what types of projects that are prioritised, attractive and possible. The projects that can become “bankable”, for example, railways, logistical nodes, energy infrastructure, transport corridors and value chains, fits well in the Global Gateway model. However, social goals become broader, as poverty reduction, local democratic anchoring and social investments, become less governing for shaping the project. Partner countries' room for negotiation is limited not only through formal decisions, but also through financial criteria, risk assessments, investment based trust and the need to mobilize private capital.

The fourth research question is about how local perspective, inclusion of civil society voices, are translated through EUs decisions making process. The interviews help out here a lot, and show both a local input can be accessible in the process, but often just through formal language. In the case with Corridor voices, civil society's role is not only connected to democratic inclusion, but also to ESG, risk assessment, local knowledge and better implementation of the project. This makes the civil society relevant, but partly through translating their role to an investment base language. Local inputs therefore risk becoming absent in this decision making process, and can only be utilised properly when reaching a certain limit of bureaucracy. This creates a situation where local participation is not necessarily excluded, but filtered through institutional and financial logics that determine what kinds of knowledge become legitimate in the decision-making process. As a result, voices that cannot easily be translated into investment-oriented language risk becoming less visible in the final shaping of the project.

The last and final research question asks how Global Gateway whether enables substantive ownership or reproduces donor driven priorities. The answer here is mixed. The Lobito Corridor does answers actual regional needs. Zambia has clear interests in some of the project's goals, which link to their national development plans, and this is also true for Angola and DRC. We see this through transport infrastructure, regional trade, economic diversification and access to global markets. The project should therefore not be understood as a simple capitulation to external dominance. The analysis shows these needs become the most visible when they fall in line with EU´s and western actors' strategic interests, especially around critical goods and resources, export roads, supply chains and geopolitical positioning.

Overall, this thesis shows the transition from development aid to investment changes how ownership goes from a question of who sets development priorities to a question of who can shape projects inside a financial and geopolitical framework. Ownership becomes less about control over the development agenda as a whole, and more about participation within a pre-structured investment model. This is the main tension in the Lobito Corridor: it may support real development goals, but it also shows how local and national priorities are filtered through the requirements of finance, infrastructure strategy and external geopolitical interests.

7.2 Policy Implications:

An addition to this thesis is how can this change for the future. This question does not have a simple answer, and might be effective for now, but may change in the near future depending on the world's circumstances.

A few points I would like to add up on are especially the EU's advanced bureaucracy. The bureaucracy within the EU is a struggle not only for the EU themselves, but also for member states within the EU to understand how the flow works, how decision-making processes are effective and how to utilise the strength of 27 member states to aim for the same goals. This itself is a significant task, but not an impossible one. In the eyes of trade and investment led development, the EU should consider the limitations they place on participation from partner countries. If the EU continues to have these advanced criteria on the partner countries, the EU will continue to be an unattractive source of support for these countries, and the gap will be filled by someone else. China has a different model than the EU and is leading this development race. If investment criteria could be simplified, without compromising on values, the EU does have the strength to compete on a much larger scale - and might just be able to utilize this “win-win” quotation they strive towards.The other point is that ownership needs to be shifted more clearly towards the partner countries, not only through formal partnership language, but through practical influence over priorities, implementation and evaluation This means that cooperation should begin from the priorities already identified by Zambia, Angola and DRC, rather than from what can most easily be fitted into the EU's investment model. If the EU are enabling themselves to contribute to social inclusion and focus on soft values as well in a real sense, and not purely in policy language and promises, they could compete on a large scale as well. By involving partner countries' on a real scale, aims to work with the national development plans, and increase the reputation of the EU by the partner countries - the EU could become one of their greatest allies - and contribute both in terms of value chains and civil societies along the corridor project. For the Lobito Corridor, the criteria and measuring should not just be in terms of mobilising capital, kilometres of railroads, trade volumes or export capacities. They should also measure how the projects affect the local labour market and opportunity, small scale companies, agricultural improvement, access to services and eventual regional equalness.

By providing strong coordination and clear governance for the EU, Global Gateway can become a more consistent and coordinated union and have a stronger implementation structure. This can benefit partner countries through limiting overlapping initiatives, unclear division of responsibility and competing priorities between both European and financial actors. Through a principal- agent perspective, this would give a clearer common direction and also limit the risk for individual actors that are driven by their own interests throughout the project. Stronger EU unity could therefore create a more predictable negotiating environment for partner countries, making it easier for them to negotiate, follow up on commitments, and hold external actors accountable. At the same time this demands a stronger EU coordination that not only leads to more centralised European control, but also strengthening the partner countries' actual influence over the project's direction.

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