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Towards a People-Driven African Union

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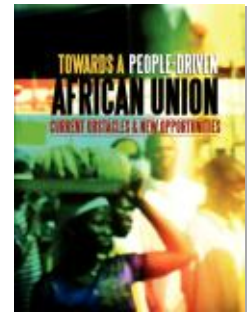
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PREFACE: BACKGROUND TO THIS STUDY

This research report was jointly commissioned and coordinated by Oxfam GB, the African Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD), and the Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project (AfriMAP), an initiative of the Open Society Institute network of foundations in Africa.^a

In January 2006, the three organisations agreed to examine and compare the extent of national policy and public engagement around the bi-annual summits^b of the African Union (AU) at the AU headquarters in Ethiopia and in a sample of African countries. The African Union has already developed a reputation for charting an ambitious pan-African state-building project, yet very little is understood by policy-makers or citizens of how African countries prepare for the summits and their related ministerial meetings, and how they implement decisions and resolutions made in these fora. As a consequence, African citizens are not able to contribute effectively to the building of the pan-African institutions, which remains a project largely restricted to a small elite.

Since the AU Commission is now near the end of the first phase of its strategic plan (2004–2007), it seemed a good moment to ask questions designed to draw lessons for the next stage of continental institution-building. What are some of the best practices that have contributed to effective intra-state coordination, consultation with non-state national actors and public accountability? Are there major divergences between African countries in the way they organise around African summits and international summits? What policy and practice changes could be proposed to improve the quality of continental policy-making and implementation? What could civil society organisations and citizens do to contribute effectively to this process? How can the AU be made more open and transparent to African citizens?

During 2006, two researchers interviewed respondents from among civil society and government officials from 11 countries,^c and attended both the January and July summits in Khartoum and Banjul, to find answers to these questions and draft a report of their findings. A consultative meeting to discuss the draft report prepared from this research was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 10–11 November 2006 and attended by representatives of member states, the AU Commission and civil society organisations. Inputs from this meeting were incorporated into the draft final text, which was then circulated to a wide range of African civil society organisations and coalitions for their comment and endorsement.

The scope of the study has been limited to preparations for AU summits, broadly speaking, in order to keep a tight focus on one set of issues. We have thus not included discussion of civil society engagement with several other important African Union structures, including the Peace and Security Council, the secretariat for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the African Peer Review Mechanism, the Pan-African Parliament, or the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Much would no doubt be learned by extending research to these organs, as well as to other countries, especially the island states and others rarely studied for such purposes, and other regional economic communities.

The three commissioning organisations are committed to the vision of the African Union as an institution open and accountable to all Africa's citizens. We offer this research as a contribution to achieving that aim.

Postscript, November 2007: The report was launched at the January 2007 summit of the African Union. This is an updated edition, with an additional chapter 10 providing information on events during 2007. The text is otherwise unchanged.

VISION AND MISSION OF THE AFRICAN UNION, MAY 2004

The vision of the African Union is that of an Africa integrated, prosperous and peaceful, an Africa driven by its own citizens, a dynamic force in the global arena.