

ISSUE BRIEF

No. 3535 | MARCH 8, 2012

African Union: Transparency and Accountability Needed

Brett D. Schaefer and Morgan Lorraine Roach

Since the establishment of the African Union (AU) in 2002, the United States has provided millions in taxpayer dollars to support the organization and its activities. Regrettably, the AU makes it impossible to determine the success of this effort. The AU does not publish an annual report on its activities, make its budget publicly available, or conduct audits or other independent evaluation of its work or activities.

The lack of transparency and accountability in the AU compares dismally with the practices of other international organizations that receive American funding, which are themselves often criticized for inadequate standards. U.S. ambivalence toward the AU's opacity is at odds with the well-established U.S. policy of maximizing transparency in

international organizations receiving U.S. funding. Congress should make U.S. contributions to the African Union contingent on the AU's immediate adoption of practices to improve transparency and accountability.

The U.S. and the AU. The AU is the most recent effort by African nations to unify and improve the region's governments and resources. The AU is the successor to the Organization of African Unity and was established to better promote regional integration, economic development, democracy and good governance, and peace and security and to coordinate regional interests through coordinated action in international organizations and meetings.

The U.S. shares many of these goals and has provided significant support to the AU aimed at bolstering its efforts. The U.S. partnership with the AU was monetarily formalized in August 2010 with a \$5.8 million assistance agreement.¹ In addition, the U.S. has provided \$258 million since 2007 to support the African Union Mission in Somalia, making the U.S. the largest individual financial contributor to AU peacekeeping operations in Somalia.² These funds, however, are

sent directly to African governments rather than to the U.S. Mission to the African Union (USAU) or the AU itself.

In addition to these direct funding streams, the U.S. taxpayer provides millions of dollars indirectly to the AU through multilateral organizations. For instance, the U.S. provides 22 percent of funding to the United Nations regular budget, which funds the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The ECA has two primary goals, the first of which is to "promote regional integration in support of the African Union vision and priorities." The proposed budget for the ECA was approximately \$119 million for 2012–2013.³ Of this, the U.S. would contribute \$26.2 million, or \$13.1 million per year.

The U.S. also established the U.S. Mission to the African Union (USAU) in 2006 to promote coordination and cooperation in pursuit of common goals. Previously, the U.S. bilateral embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, was responsible for U.S. relations with the AU. The USAU receives its budget and housing from the U.S. embassy in Addis Ababa.

Troubling Opacity. U.S. support to the AU and its activities is significant. If support for AU peacekeeping

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib3535>

Produced by the
Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom

The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 | heritage.org

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is included, U.S. support rises to well over \$100 million annually. However, the total support provided by American taxpayers to the AU is unknown, because the organization lacks the most rudimentary standards in transparency.

Many sections of the organization's Web site have no content, contain broken links, or direct the user to the wrong page. The Washington office of the AU was unable to provide basic information and referred questions to the AU headquarters. Telephone and e-mail inquiries to the AU headquarters for information and documentation went unanswered.

Inquiries to USAU confirmed that the AU does not file an annual report and that its budget is not public. There is no disclosure of its funding partners, who pay the majority of the organization's budget. Nor does the AU have an independent oversight entity. In fact, the organization provides virtually no details on its sources of funding, activities, or expenditures.

For instance, the most substantive documentation on the 2012 AU budget is a press release stating that "the approved 2012 budget of the

Commission amounted to a total of USD274 Million with USD152 million set aside for development programs and USD122 Million for operations."⁴ How those funds are allocated is not publicly disclosed.

Additional information is available in a report by the AU's Sub-Committee on Contributions, which details assessments charged to AU member states for the \$122 million in "operations" costs along with outstanding amounts owed.⁵ The remaining majority of the budget for specific programs is funded by bilateral and multilateral partners, including the bulk of the funding for AU missions in Sudan and Somalia, regional integration and economic reform efforts, and election monitoring. However, without transparency by the AU, it is impossible to determine the sources of AU funding, how much is being provided, and how effectively it is being used.

This lack of information, especially on an important issue like the budget, is extremely unusual. International organizations like the U.N. have been pressured by the U.S. and other major contributors, along with non-governmental organizations, into releasing increasing

amounts of information to the public, including budget documents, audits, and annual reports. To illustrate the AU's unique opacity, a cursory search of international organizations, international financial institutions, and intergovernmental bodies readily found fairly detailed information on their budgets, sources of funding, and activities.⁶

This situation is troubling for several reasons. Foremost is the poor example set by the AU, which is supposed to "promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance" among its member states. The lack of transparency and accountability also undermines the U.S. government's ability to monitor and properly manage the use of U.S. taxpayer dollars. Finally, the lack of an independent audit authority is a gross oversight that undermines self-assessment, evaluation, and discovery and prevention of mismanagement and corruption.

It is possible that this lack of transparency is a deliberate effort to conceal how much the organization relies on outside sources for funding. Indeed, at an AU summit last August on the famine in the Horn of Africa,

1. U.S. Department of State, "The United States and the African Union," Fact Sheet, Office of the Spokesman, April 19, 2011, at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/04/161212.htm> (March 1, 2012).
2. *Ibid.*
3. United Nations General Assembly, "Proposed Programme Budget for Biennium 2012-2013," A/66/6 (Sect. 18), May 12, 2011, p. 3, at <http://www.un.org/en/ga/fifth/66/ppb1213sg.shtml> (March 1, 2012).
4. Press release, "Deputy Chairperson Mwencha Holds Press Conference on AUC Strategic Plan, Institutional Transformation and Boosting Intra-African Trade," African Union, January 25, 2012, at http://au.int/en/sites/default/files/PR%20DCP%2025%2001%202012_18SUMMIT_PR_DCP_PressConf_E_Final.pdf (March 1, 2012).
5. African Union, Executive Council, "Report of the Sub-Committee on Contributions on the 2011 Budget of the African Union," Twentieth Ordinary Session, January 23-27, 2011, at http://xa.yimg.com/kq/groups/196748/61897438/name/EX+CL+687+%28XX%29+iv+_E.pdf (March 1, 2012).
6. A non-exhaustive search found annual review and budgeting information for the following multilateral organizations: African Development Bank, East African Community, Economic Community of West African States, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Union, Food and Agriculture Organization, International Labour Organization, International Monetary Fund, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Southern African Development Community, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environmental Programme, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Bank, World Food Programme, World Health Organization, World Intellectual Property Organization, and World Trade Organization.

member states raised less than 4 percent of the funding goal with only 21 pledges. Furthermore, when Jean Ping, the AU Commission's chairman, announced that \$350 million had been raised, he omitted the fact that \$300 million was provided by the African Development Bank, to which the U.S. is a major contributor.⁷

According to one source, although the AU "member states are responsible for the operational budget...[a number of them] have been sanctioned and will not take part in the AU's electoral processes for failure to pay their annual payment."⁸ The lack of payment by many African governments, which are best placed to be aware of the organization's strengths, to the AU budget says volumes about their perception of the value of the organization and its activities.

A Responsibility to Taxpayers. Congress and the Administration have a responsibility to be good stewards of American tax dollars, but they cannot be confident of fulfilling that responsibility with an aggressively opaque organization like the AU. Therefore, the U.S. should:

- **Make contributions to the African Union contingent on the AU's adoption of practices to improve transparency and accountability.** It has been long-standing U.S. policy to press international organizations to become more transparent and embrace stronger, more independent oversight. These efforts have met with varying degrees of success. However, the AU easily ranks among the least transparent of the international organizations receiving U.S. funds. The AU should not be exempt from this standard. The Obama Administration should demand that the AU bolster the information available on its Web site, publish an annual report of its activities, make its budget available for public scrutiny, and establish an independent audit body to evaluate the organization and its activities.
- **Track and publicly report annual information on all U.S. contributions to the AU**

and its activities. Because the AU receives substantial indirect funding to support its activities from multiple partners, U.S. contributions are more than is immediately apparent. In the interests of accountability, Congress should require complete information.

Without improved transparency and more reliable information and independent assessments of the AU's activities, it is impossible to thoroughly evaluate the effectiveness and value of the AU and its activities, which are supported by U.S. taxpayer dollars. Congress and the Administration should work jointly to address this lapse.

—**Brett D. Schaefer** is Jay Kingham Fellow in International Regulatory Affairs and **Morgan Lorraine Roach** is a Research Associate in the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.

7. Emily Dugan, "African Summit Raises Fraction of \$1.4bn Famine Fund," *The Independent*, August 28, 2011, at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/african-summit-raises-fraction-of-14bn-famine-fund-2345159.html> (February 16, 2012).

8. Prince Ofori-Atta, "African Union: A Big Budget and a Begging Bowl," *The Africa Report*, January 26, 2012, at <http://www.theafricareport.com/index.php/north-africa/african-union-a-big-budget-and-a-begging-bowl-50180072.html> (March 6, 2012).