U4 PRACTICE INSIGHT

The campaign to promote the African Union Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance: Insights into advocacy on the African continent

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This U4 Practice Insight seeks to communicate the experiences and lessons learned by a governance specialist during three years of advocacy work to promote the ratification of the African Union Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. It is intended to serve as a practical example of civil society and democracy advocacy at work in less than ideal situations. The campaign which had to rely mainly on personal engagement with key stakeholders offers special insights for donors and aid practitioners promoting democracy and good governance. It draws on concrete experiences of working with both francophone and anglophone bureaucracies and demonstrates by example the importance of building relationships. If applied and implemented rigorously, the Charter can radically change the socio-political and economic circumstances by providing a solid platform upon which to engage in promoting democracy and good governance. In view of corruption being more a symptom rather than a cause of dysfunctional socio-economic and political contexts, the Charter holds promises for overcoming the status quo and dealing with the roots of corruption.

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Introduction

In early 2010, The Institute for Democracy in Africa (Idasa) launched a continent-wide campaign to seek the ratification of the *African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance* (hereby referred to as the *Charter*). This project lasted approximately three years and was implemented in collaboration with partners from government and civil society across the continent. This paper highlights some of the author's experiences as the campaign coordinator and lessons learned from that work. With the advent of the Charter, practitioners promoting democracy and good governance have been provided with an ideal opportunity, as it is a document promulgated by governments, thus providing a solid platform and basis upon which to engage in advocacy nationally and internationally.

The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance

The *Charter* presents a set of universal standards, and attempts to address the core issues that undermine progress towards the realisation of these. It introduces a governance discourse that includes fundamental values through the inclusion of holistic cultural contexts. It devotes considerable space to the critical area of political, social and economic governance. Many of the continent's challenges, especially the forces, practices and conditions that hamper sustainable development, are also addressed in the Charter's normative framework. In essence, if applied and implemented rigorously, the Charter can radically change the socio-political and economic context. More importantly, it can enable governments, civil society and citizens to critically engage the root causes of the problems that continue to plague the continent: endemic corruption, disparate economic development, and the gap between governments and governed.

The *Charter* is a normative framework on both practical and conceptual levels. It straddles human and socio-economic rights, values, principles, and the institutional and procedural components of the democratic political process. Hence, it is an invaluable tool that can be applied to a variety of domains, individually or systemically. For instance, although the Charter specifically addresses elections in a detailed way, it also acknowledges the necessity of dealing with the context

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in which elections take place. By focusing on the *culture of democracy*, which encompasses rule of law, democratic institutions and processes, and governance more broadly, the Charter provides an opportunity to view and address the political landscape as a whole. Thus, it seeks corrective measures or improvements to the *system*. Plainly stated, this is a process that fundamentally challenges and threatens the status quo. This may partly explain why only two countries had ratified the Charter in 2009, when the Idasa project was launched.

A slow-starting charter with needs for promotion

However, initially, the adoption of the Charter by the African Union (AU) in January 2007, seems to have gone largely unnoticed by Member States, African civil society and the broader international community. Today, 17 countries have ratified the Charter. But at the end of 2009, when the Idasa project was launched, only Mauritania and Ethiopia had done so, although many others had signed it (indicating an intent to ratify). For the document to enter into force, 15 Member States' ratifications were required, which was finally attained in January 2012. Initial discussions on the need to promote the Charter took place at Idasa in the middle of 2008, at which point the search for donor support began. Apart from a "joint action plan" between the AU and International IDEA (2008), little else was being done to promote the Charter.

Ratification of the Charter, like other AU instruments, is a three-step process. First, the state (usually the Head of State) needs to sign the Charter, a step that can be interpreted as *intent to ratify*. The second step is the *ratification*, on a state level. This is done according to institutional and procedural rules in each country. In some cases, this step can be completed by the Head of State alone, or with the approval of the "cabinet" (or equivalent). Other places it will require an Act of Parliament. Finally, the country must deposit the "instrument of ratification" with the AU Commission. The following 17 countries had completed this process at the time of writing, see Figure 1).

Despite the clear need to address democracy and governance issues on the continent, funding for this type of work was – and continues to be – difficult to secure. Although donor and international support for the process of conducting elections has increased over the past decade or so, the opposite can be said for the

ACRONYMS

AU	*the African Union*
DFAIT	the Canadian *Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade*
ECOWAS	*the Economic Community of West African States*
Idasa	*the (former) Institute for Democracy in Africa*
International IDEA	*the International Institute for Democracy and electoral Assistance*
ECOWAS	*the Economic Community of West African States*
SADC	*Southern African Development Community*
UNDF	*United Nations Democracy Fund*

ABOUT IDASA

Originally, Idasa stood for the Institute for Democratic Alternatives in South Africa, which suited the time in which it was created. Later, it would be known simply as the Institute for Democracy in South Africa. It was born out an initiative by Van Zyl Slabbert and Alex Borrain, which brought together white South Africans and the exiled ANC in at a famous meeting in Dakar, 1986. Slabbert and Borrain recognised the need for sustained dialogue as a fundamental component of democracy, and to institutionalise this they created Idasa in South Africa and the Gore Institute in Dakar, Senegal. The event in Dakar marked the beginning of a dialogue process that ended with a democratic transition. Although Idasa played a critical role in the transition to and entrenchment of democracy in South Africa, by the late 1990s much of the work took place across the continent, in various fields relating to democracy and social justice. Sadly, Idasa was forced to close its doors at the end of March, 2013.

more nebulous field of governance. More accurately, there seems to be less financial support for African – or local – NGOs working in the area of governance and democracy. Eventually, Idasa (in partnership with the Africa Democracy Forum) managed to secure an operational budget of less than $700,000 for the three year campaign to promote and seek the ratification of the Charter.

Although this may appear a significant amount, the fact that the number of target countries stood at a minimum of 13, meant that the funds were stretched. It was also a concern that the Charter was not being speedily ratified, and spoke to an underlying problem that the campaign would need to overcome. The Charter is a remarkable document, and one can only

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FIGURE 1: COUNTRIES THAT HAVE COMPLETED THE RATIFICATION PROCESS (CHRONOLOGICALLY)

	COUNTRY	SIGNATURE	RATIFICATION	DEPOSIT
1.	Mauritania	29/01/2008	07/07/2008	28/07/2008
2.	Ethiopia	28/12/2007	05/12/2008	06/01/2009
3.	Sierra Leone	17/06/2008	17/02/2009	08/12/2009
4.	Burkina Faso	02/08/2007	26/05/2010	06/07/2010
5.	Rwanda	29/06/2007	09/07/2010	14/07/2010
6.	Lesotho	17/03/2010	30/06/2010	09/07/2010
7.	Ghana	15/01/2008	06/09/2010	19/10/2010
8.	South Africa	01/02/2010	24/12/2010	24/01/2011
9.	Zambia	31/01/2010	31/05/2011	08/07/2011
10.	Niger	17/06/2008	04/10/2011	08/11/2011
11.	Chad	22/01/2009	11/07/2011	13/10/2011
12.	Guinea	09/05/2007	17/06/2011	11/07/2011
13.	Cameroon	16/01/2012	24/08/2011	16/01/2012
14.	Togo	30/10/2007	24/01/2012	20/03/2012
15.	Guinea-Bissau	17/06/2008	23/12/2011	04/01/2012
16.	Nigeria	02/07/2007	01/12/2011	09/01/2012
17.	Benin	16/07/2007	28/06/2012	11/07/2012

*At the time of writing, news that Mali and Sudan have ratified has emerged but has not as yet been confirmed.

surmise that its significance was not fully appreciated. Alternatively, speedy ratifications were not carried out precisely *because* the implications were understood and appreciated. But then, international legal instruments promoting standards that are intended to improve socio-economic conditions and human rights, and reform political and legal systems are often adopted as a matter of course (only the more fundamentally dysfunctional countries do not appreciate the value these have for their international image). No donors have made the ratification of the Charter a condition for disbursing aid, and the AU does not have the leverage or political will to robustly promote this value-laden document. Then again, enforcement mechanisms for these types of documents, whether of AU or UN origin, are notoriously weak and ineffective. Adopting the Charter may have been seen as a cosmetic opportunity that even its ardent opponents could not pass up. In addition, it was an opportunity to provide symbolic support for the AU – an institution that remains chronically embryonic. However, while the AU Commission was reluctant to overtly promote the Charter –especially when this entailed engaging with specific countries – the Pan-African Parliament has been extremely active in promoting the Charter.

Only in 2008 – a year and a half after its adoption by the AU General Assembly – was the first ratification completed by Mauritania (which, in hindsight, could have been an futile attempt to avert the *coup d'état* that took place only a month later). Ethiopia, in mid-2009, became the second country to complete the ratification process. It was not, by any means, an auspicious start. Despite much positive noise regarding economic growth on the continent, and endless articles heralding the emergence of the African continent, there is little evidence that development is advancing at a pace above a trickle. Governance indicators, for instance from the World Bank or Mo Ibrahim, show that dramatic improvements were achieved in the 1990s. This was largely linked to the proliferation of multi-party politics, regular elections, and reforms within many of the legislatures. The trajectory displayed by these indicators levels out over the last decade or so, and improvements in this sector have only made moderate real gains, if any.

Even African economic growth is now being viewed as lacking "inclusivity", which means that bad governance practices are entrenching the status quo enjoyed by the political and economic elite. Thus, the arrival of the Charter was, and is, a critical opportunity to revitalise the debate on democracy. Without denying that there has been *some* progress, the Charter can challenge a

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continent that has become politically stagnant, where coup d'états continue to occur, election results remain troublesome and highly disputed, and development is hampered by narrow political and economic interests.

The campaign

The campaign to promote the Charter was an advocacy exercise in its purest sense. The ultimate aim was to promote noble concepts, and influence governments to adhere to these through legislation and policy. Twelve countries were targeted and approximately 40 NGOs and individuals formed the core component of the campaign. Much of the advocacy work targeted key national government departments and specific functionaries within these. One of the initial challenges was to figure out how the process of ratification worked. Who needed to do what, and how could the campaign speed this up? The campaign did not have any direct beneficiaries, as success would only, perhaps, be seen in the long-term. The project did not seek – or have the resources – to generate mass, popular support as a means to influence governments. The real impact or potential change would only be evident in the implementation phase, which the AU is now seeking to do via its African Governance Architecture. One of the strategic objectives of the project was to "popularise" the Charter, and build "constituencies of support". This was understood to mean a target audience with the capacity to influence the political process in international and high-level domestic political arenas. The methodology adopted was largely the product of financial constraints. Advocacy campaigns that rely on broad-based popular support amongst citizens are costly and time-consuming exercises. Hence, the approach adopted was one of strategic targeting for maximum impact at minimum cost.

One of the key questions was: *"why have so few ratified the Charter?"* Given the inherent, obvious, and progressive benefits of implementing and adhering to the Charter, why did it take five years for the threshold of 15 ratifications to be reached? This total (even the current number of 17) is still less than a third of the total AU Member States. The bureaucratic element played an important role throughout. On a domestic level, the wheels of government spin at the pleasure of bureaucratic processes that are often little known or understood. Within the material construct of government, there are procedures that need to be followed, which often have gatekeepers. Anywhere along this line, if there is no champion pushing the piece of paper, things can be forgotten or relegated to the long list of unattended agenda items. Lack of information is another important factor, which will be further elaborated below.

Implementing the campaign: challenges and opportunities

A critical part of the campaign to promote the Charter was to try to understand why countries had been so slow to ratify the document. The objective would be to seek to overcome the identified obstacles. In total, 12 target countries were selected on the basis of geographic distribution, political will, the presence of an active civil society, and chances of success, amongst other criteria. Due to the limited budgets, ownership was also a principal challenge. The selection of target countries and local partners also depended on clear desires to take on the objectives of the project without significant budgetary support. Limited financial means also necessitated a strategic agenda with clear and well-defined priorities. It was therefore decided that the focus of the campaign should be to get 15 ratifications, and that the equally important component of *implemen-tation*, would have to be set aside.

In an ideal world, all project proposals for advocacy work of this nature would be preceded by in-country assessments. This would enable the formulation of a comprehensive, realistic and relevant proposal. However, due to the relationship between funding and project work, the cart often precedes the horse. The need to plot a course before the terrain has been mapped can be especially crippling. Advocacy work – which is most effective when it can be flexible and opportunistic – is constrained by concomitant prerequisites of log-frames, objectively verifiable indicators, and time-specific deliverables. In retrospect, a different approach would significantly have altered the target country selection. Botswana – a country rated high on most governance indexes – appeared as a natural candidate for ratification. After the initial country visit and assessment, however, it became clear that this was far from the case. Government staff responsible for AU affairs could not make a case to the relevant Minister why Botswana *should* ratify. Essentially, the argument went that Botswana already has a healthy democracy, so why does it need to ratify a Charter on democracy? Later, it was to become clear that Botswana has historically had little interest in the work of the African Union.

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After conducting country assessments, which included the identification of potential partners, the project was officially launched in January 2010. Three partners from each country were invited to Pretoria, South Africa, for a two-day meeting. One of the primary objectives of this meeting was to ensure that the selected partners took ownership of the campaign. To nurture this ownership, the meeting was convened without presenting the participants with any clear agenda, apart from the broader goal of discussing ways to promote and ratify the Charter. This was not well-received by all participants and a framework agenda was therefore produced prior to the meeting. However, the initial part of the meeting was spent on a discussion of the agenda, with a view to ensuring that all participants agreed on the topics and timeframes. The intended message of this approach was to demonstrate that this project and its objectives were not those of Idasa exclusively, despite it being the "lead" agency in the process. To a large extent, the result of this approach was successful, as the initiatives taken by the individuals and partner organisations later demonstrated.

In terms of project design, indicators of success for this type of work are vague at best, unless one is willing to set goals that are in reality unachievable. For instance, it was not a stated objective to have all 12 targeted countries ratify the Charter, for several reasons. The first, and most obvious, is that, given the resources, time, and circumstances, would have been unrealistic. Reluctance to ratify was evident, and not clearly understood, and thus setting this as an indicator would have been over-ambitious. Secondly, and more importantly, the link between advocacy and outcome is not straight forward causal relationship. At the end of the project, a total of 15 countries had ratified the Charter, of which only five were target countries for the project. Several assumptions or arguments can be made regarding these developments. It can be claimed with some certainty, that the work of the project *played a role* in achieving the 15 ratification threshold. However, as there were two other institutions working towards the same goal; International IDEA and the Pan-African Parliament – both with greater access to the higher strata of government – the exact nature of the influence generated by the project is, and will remain, unclear. What can also be stated with some certainty is that the work was beneficial for the *movement* to promote the Charter. Furthermore, despite an absence of collaboration between the campaigning actors, their work was nevertheless mutually reinforcing.

Perhaps the starkest evidence of the shift in awareness was that, while doing the initial country mapping and assessment, the vast majoring of people contacted (in over 180 meetings in 12 countries) had never even heard of the Charter. Today, that is not at all the case. But even this is difficult to substantiate without conducting broad, sample based surveys. Awareness of the Charter was not the only notable piece of information gathered during the assessment phase. The process for ratifying international agreements was itself poorly understood, even among government staff. In Kenya, for instance, no central database of international agreements that Kenya is party to, exists in *any* department (a proposed Bill to rectify this was proposed in 2011, but seems now to have been forgotten with the 2013 elections taking all the attention). Similarly, most of constitutions do not explicitly state how international agreements are negotiated and concluded. Although many constitutions allocate this responsibility to the executive, they usually do not state whether there is a role to play for the parliament, which there usually is.

Key challenges and lessons learned in the implementation of the campaign

Relating the challenges to the lessons of this project illustrates the need for flexibility within a project of this nature. Both the UNDF and the Canadian government proved to be excellent donor partners in that they understood and accepted the need for adaptability and flexibility.

Regarding *lessons* learned there are two perspectives one can take on the process of promoting the Charter. First, there are issues specific to the nature of advocacy work, and secondly, the obstacles that arose in the process of doing the advocacy. Advocacy is a broad term that can encompass a variety of methodologies; from large media campaigns to personalised engagement with key stakeholders. Of the two, mainly due to financial limitations, the campaign relied on the latter of these.

A question of bureaucracy
One of the principal challenges that emerged during the campaign was to figure out exactly what procedure needed to be followed in order for the country in question to ratify an international legal text. In Botswana, the executive can complete the ratification process without referring to the legislature. But, does

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this also automatically "domesticate" the treaty? In the case of Botswana, yes, but in the case of Kenya, which is similar, no. There, the executive can ratify but only an act of parliament can domesticate a treaty. In most cases the department of justice is required to produce a document stating that the international treaty/charter does not contravene the constitution. This is but one step in what is a whole series of processes that can involve several government departments and the legislature (which adds another whole procedural element). Only in Lesotho (not one of the targeted countries) was the ratification process, from signature to deposit, completed within one calendar year.

Understanding and engaging with state bureaucracy became one of the imperatives of the project; locating who needs to do what and when. Priority was not, as it was initially anticipated, to generate *political will* in support of ratification. Three examples show the important role played by pure bureaucracy. In Sierra Leone project staff became aware of a procedural error. After Sierra Leone had ratified the Charter in Parliament, the instrument of ratification was faxed to the AU Commission. The correct procedure was to hand it in officially (at which time a photo is also taken). Upon being made aware of this error, the correct procedure was followed. This is perhaps the only example where the project had a direct impact on finalising the ratification process. In contrast to Kenya, Rwanda was in 2009 completing an audit of the international documents it had, and had not, signed and ratified. In so doing, they became aware of the Charter and took the necessary steps. In Ghana – a country that prides itself on its democracy – the defeat of the ruling party in an election had introduced new ministers and staff. The previous government had provided the *signature* of the Charter, but the new government was not aware of this. Upon becoming aware of this document, and that Ghana had committed to ratify by signing it, the process was "rapidly" completed.

Lessons relating to bureaucratic procedures

Although there are differences between all countries, it is – perhaps unfortunately – not unfair to make a distinction between those countries with an anglophone and a francophone past in terms of their decision-making processes. Furthermore, the centralised tendencies of a typically francophone bureaucracy can reinforce cultural traditions that often have "respect for elders" as a key value. This usually includes intolerance towards criticism. In combination, these two elements can create a bureaucratic culture with overt authoritarian tendencies. To differ or pose questions is an invitation to open conflict, and elections are conceived of only in zero-sum terms. Ministers and members of parliament are generally more accessible than in anglophone countries; partly because they are the only ones who *can* make decisions. Power dynamics encountered in more anglophone countries – where the distribution of authority has horizontal *and* vertical elements – offers more points of entry in terms of advocacy, and more potential obstacles. If one were to generalise; in Anglophone countries advocacy must take a multiplicity of stakeholders into consideration, whereas in Francophone countries you only need to convince one person.

An advantage to the francophone system is that the formal process (when there is one) is clearly defined. And that although the process may be cumbersome and lengthy, people generally know who needs to do what and when. In Senegal, this bureaucracy proved to be impenetrable, but in Mali it was a "simple" process of following bread crumbs until the right people were located. Indeed, in Mali it was discovered that a change in the *chef de cabinet* (chief of cabinet) caused the ratification process to stall. A formal note had been sent to the chief from the Department of Justice indicating that the Charter could be ratified. Shortly thereafter, a new chief was appointed and the process stalled for two years. The Department of Justice would not take it upon itself to follow-up on their note, as this could appear as questioning those higher in the bureaucratic hierarchy; an important dynamic defining the formalities and constraints not uncommon in countries with a Francophone colonial past.

In Burundi, due to a pervasive atmosphere of suppressed conflict, competition, and control, any advocacy effort of this sort, if it is to meet with any success or even include the participation of government staff, must have the consent of the relevant minister. Without this approval, even in informal terms, staff down the hierarchical ladder will prevaricate and redirect. Initiative must come from the top. The strategic approach, therefore, must take into account the different cultural contexts that define the operational culture of the bureaucracy and broader political atmosphere.

The personal versus institutional approach

The challenge posed by the tight budget played

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a significant role in determining the nature and number of in-country activities. Oddly enough, the project had a significant under-spend in the area of in-country activities. Despite the success of the large, international conferences and workshops that were held for project partners and stakeholders, maintaining momentum within individual countries after these events was problematic. As the amount of funding could not allow partners to initiate their own (short- or long-term) projects, with specifically dedicated staff, the in-country activities relied on the willingness of individuals (usually the head of the organisation) to take up the promotion of the Charter out of personal convictions of its importance. Thus, the lack of an organisational approach – let alone a collaborative organisational approach involving all country partners – minimised the potential effect of campaign or advocacy work toward government institutions. Whether or not this type of approach would have been more effective if properly funded, is an interesting and debatable point. The question is particularly relevant in political contexts where institutions are dominated by key individuals (elected and non-elected government officials). Influencing these individuals using institutional advocacy must rely on indirect pressure, via media, broader political discourse, and critical mass of public opinion, to name but a few options, with hope that the targeted institutions are receptive.

Lessons related to the personal versus institutional approach

The institutional advocacy approach, although considered as part of the project methodology initially, was rapidly abandoned once the limitations of the funding became clear. That said, the choice of country partners included organisations that engage with the institutions on other issues, and are thus familiar with the key people, processes, and entry points. Ghana provided a good lesson on adaptive advocacy, applying what some partners referred to as "silent advocacy". As elsewhere, in Africa advocacy often hinges on personal relationships. The lead partner organisation in Ghana was on familiar terms with the minister of justice, who also serves as the attorney general – a key player in the ratification process. Personal, informal meetings where guards are down and frank exchange is possible, is vastly superior to formal briefings or workshops. One of the main lessons from the project was indeed this: the political process is about people. Not the people, but individuals who make up the

elected and appointed body that is commonly viewed as a monolithic unit. The task became to find the "right" people; those who had knowledge of the process of ratification and who could follow its progress. These personalised encounters are defined by an exchange of information, and thus require a subtlety that does not always come naturally. Simply put, personalised advocacy strategies need to take into account the personal qualities of those who will be doing the work. Personalised advocacy skills are not evident, and are not for everyone. Similarly, "mapping" exercises that seek to understand and analyse the political dynamics of a particular context, if they are to have useful insights, rely heavily on the knowledge, experience and instincts of those undertaking the work. A questionnaire or standardised approach to mapping will generate surface value information, and little of the intricate nuances that reside between the lines; what is *not* said, for instance, may often be more important than what *is*.

Advocacy in fluid contexts: the need for flexibility and adaptive methodology

One of the primary risks involved in a project of this scope are the number of factors that can change the political landscape. Despite careful consideration in the selection of countries to be targeted, as the project unfolded, events and new information made it necessary to move the goal posts: the objectives and targets. For instance, to contextualise the Charter (make it locally relevant) some countries were selected because they were scheduled to have elections, such as in Cape Verde, or internal review and reform processes, such as in Kenya. We referred to this process as "piggybacking" the Charter, and the aim was to use current, topical issues as a means to discuss and promote the Charter. In some cases, this proved relevant and effective. In others, such as Kenya and Cape Verde, the link could not be made and the domestic issues overshadowed the Charter. Other factors were time and shifting objectives. During the first meeting of all the country partners, the consensus was that an emphasis should be placed on getting countries to complete the ratification process, and defer the implementation component until the 15 ratification milestone had been reached. As the project progressed, Rwanda, South Africa and Ghana completed the ratification of the Charter, and (with the approval of the UNDF), these were dropped as target countries for the second year of the project, allowing for the reallocation and more effective use of limited

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financial resources. This allowed the project to expand its scope of activities in the remaining countries and add countries that were not originally included.

Lessons related to advocacy work in fluid contexts

Small scale advocacy, to be effective, must be opportunistic. That said, a project can also be designed to create or generate opportunities which can then be seized. More often than not, however, circumstances change over time or new information makes old assessments irrelevant or less important. The Charter campaign had the flexibility to adapt to these factors as they arose during the span of the project. In this regard, and in others, the donors should be commended in showing an openness and willingness to alter the project framework, something that is notably rare within the strict parameters and guidelines of most donors. Such flexibility also allowed for the campaign to reach out to other partners and processes that emerged. This proved to be of immense value, as informal collaborative partnerships could thus be nurtured. That way it was possible to avoid overlap and redundancy and the resources were optimised for maximum impact.

Knowledge and necessity

Scepticism around international treaties is widespread and can easily undermine work to promote documents that seek to address local issues through international means. Regardless of the fact that the Charter is an "African" document – a product of the AU – it is still viewed by many as a document containing "western" values. Hence, one of the main challenges was to construct convincing arguments *for* the ratification of the Charter that would explain how this could improve the lives of ordinary citizens. As the Charter is unlikely to provide any short-term benefits, this challenge is often harder than it would seem. But the most obvious hurdle was the broad lack of knowledge and interest in what goes on in the AU. It was discovered that Botswana has little interest in the work and activities of the AU – a fact confirmed by AU officials at a later stage in the project. Staff within the Department of Foreign Affairs even expressed their frustration with this. They asked for good arguments to convince the minister why Botswana should ratify. More often than not, it is the subregional bodies (like the SADC and ECOWAS) that are more relevant and known. The lack of knowledge regarding the Charter can be equally applied to civil society and government, although the interest in or ne-

cessity of ratifying does usually exist.

Lessons regarding knowledge and necessity

An increasing presence of the AU on the international stage played an important role in the promotion of the Charter. This was due in large part to the activities of the Pan-African Parliament, as well as the AU asserting itself on the international stage. Even so, diverting people's attention to issues of an international provenance or relevance remains a challenge. Hence, a key question regarding the Charter was how it linked to national contexts: why is it important, and what change can ratification bring? Such questions were asked on a number of occasions, at all levels, from ordinary people to high-level government employees. Perhaps more important is the persistence of the view that democratic values are externally imposed. By way of response, the "piggybacking" approach proved to be an effective methodology, in particular with regards to elections (where the Charter provides clear guidelines). An effective tool to overcoming these obstacles was also to involve, wherever and whenever possible, staff from the AU. Although this presents certain challenges, the presence of AU staff at national events effectively counters the questions as to the relevance or need of the Charter (even if only because it personalises the institution, or makes it more tangible).

Conclusion

One can argue that certain problems – such as corruption – are symptoms of, rather than a cause of socio-economic and political dysfunction. Hence, to combat this phenomenon successfully, the building blocks of social organisation must be assessed, understood, and reconfigured. Without addressing the context in which corruption flourishes, attempts to rid it from the continent are likely to have only a temporary and partial impact. Civil society and the donor community, most often by choice and circumstance, are by and large engaged in a game of peripheral politics; each competing with the other to gain primacy on the political agenda. Climate change, corruption, education, health, etc., are noble social causes for which donors and civil society champion change. They are also tangible, and generally quantifiable. Democracy and governance is slightly more difficult to measure, as highlighted by the debates around the general validity and relevance of governance indicators. Promoting democracy presents specific challenges that are of little interest

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to the risk averse or those conditioned or obligated to define project work in measurable results.

It is generally acknowledged that democracy – or *good governance* – is the lynchpin to providing sustainable solutions for socio-political, economic, and similar challenges. In this respect, the Charter offers a platform to remedy a range of problems that currently vie for attention in the constricted, fluid, opportunistic and highly centralised decision-making processes that define political arenas in Africa. It can open new, and re-define existing spaces in which *political will* can be more closely aligned with the developmental needs of Africa's people; even if only by institutionalising

best practice in electoral processes. But while regular elections have become a positive feature of the continent's landscape, many of the issues that surround these events remain problematic. These are issues that give rise to fundamental questions linked to values, culture and history; questions which governments, civil society, and the donor community often leave in the subdued and potentially toxic context of relativistic discourse. In other words, while it is safe to be pedantic about the procedural components of democratic practice, this focus on *process*, rather than *outcome*, leave the core problems unchallenged, unexpressed, and unresolved.

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