

Africa's Democracies: Promises, Progress and Prospects

**Electoral Institute for
Sustainable Democracy in Africa
1996-2016**



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PROLOGUE

Since its inception in 1996 the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) has undertaken many democracy-related and supportive experiments in partnership with African governments and international organisations that invited its assistance. During this politically tumultuous period Africa has often featured in global media as a region where armed conflicts, humanitarian disasters and perpetual poverty predominate. EISA's experiences paint a brighter, more hopeful picture.

Although EISA is based in South Africa it is led and staffed by a diverse group of African democrats from all over the continent and is a thoroughly pan-African non-governmental organisation whose efforts to build hope for the sake of sustainable democracy are not naïve.

During the past half century the majority of Africa's people have experimented with democracy within the borders of ill-fitting post-colonial states, where wars and poverty have been debilitating and widespread. Their causes and persistence are complex and beyond the scope of this booklet. Deadly conflicts will presumably continue to threaten the continent's democracies, but these conflicts have almost all been within and not between or among African states and there is evidence that they might be ebbing.

The booklet briefly tells three inter-related stories. The first describes the emergence of a growing consensus that states governed democratically are likely to be more peaceful, politically capable and reliable partners in reaching the long-term pan-African goals of regional cooperation and collective action. As a result, African governments are less indifferent to each other's domestic governance and human rights because abuses of power locally can generate unwelcome refugees and other risks to regional peace and cooperation.

The second story highlights EISA's cooperation with the African Union, regional economic organisations (RECs) and other local and international democratic stakeholders. EISA has helped advance this growing interest in democratic governance by assisting African inter-governmental organisations to monitor and assess each other's democratic elections.

Although this booklet, in celebrating EISA's 20th anniversary, honours all of its projects and programmes, it pays particular attention to the institute's unique role in encouraging and facilitating the intensifying interplay between domestic and regional politics that may prove vital to sustaining Africa's democracies with economic and security benefits accruing nationally, regionally and even globally. It considers the interplay of domestic and regional conditions that have affected democratic experiments in the

past two decades and speculates about the prospects for sustainable democracy on the continent in the decade ahead.

The concluding section deals with several major challenges facing Africa's governments and people that are likely to affect their resolve to work towards sustainable democracy. It holds firmly to the assumption that the more transparent and accountable Africa's democratic experiments are, not only to their citizens but in pan-African and sub-regional partnerships, the better will be their prospects for peace and prosperity.

Thoughtful critics and cynical autocrats sometimes argue that low-income African countries cannot afford democracy. Africa's afflictions of poverty and economic inequality are impossible to ignore when more than 50% of its population still relies on subsistence agriculture to survive and weak institutions make it difficult to check even the most corrupt and abusive behaviour of small elites. Yet EISA's experience and close scrutiny of democratic progress offers a more complex picture, one that affirms the diversity and vigour of credible and durable democratic experiments, even within some of Africa's poorest nations.

The booklet benefits from being written in South Africa, a democratic experiment whose launch, barely a quarter-century ago, inspired people across Africa and around the world. South Africans were exemplary in their openness to learn democratic lessons from other nations, conducting their own remarkably inclusive and open-minded debates and deciding for themselves how they would undertake and attempt to sustain their particular democratic experiment. It has not been a linear process – democratic experiments never are.

South Africa's role in Africa features prominently in the sections that follow, which contain both a broader storyline and a narrower, but no less important one. The broader picture is of the country's initial role as a regional leader in the reform of continental institutions, rendering them more supportive of democratic experiments and advancing a more positive and assertive pro-democracy vision with its advocacy of an African Renaissance, although South Africa's role as a regional champion of democracy has ebbed in recent years and no comparable successor has emerged.

The narrower narrative focuses on the international politics of Africa's democratic elections and, more specifically, on EISA's work, which began in South Africa and extended first into neighbouring countries and then throughout the continent, despite troubling signs of democratic decline.

While this was being written South Africa held municipal elections, which EISA monitored. Local elections are normally considered to be less consequential than those for national office and of little international interest. How intriguing, therefore, are the broader implications of the many incumbents defeated in those local elections. The unusual degree of regional and global interest in the elections may be justified as early warning signs of more politically potent popular disenchantment with the nature and direction of the country's democratic experiment under two decades of the same national government.

Democracy, after all, is an experiment, the goal of which is to keep the experiment running with the purpose of empowering people to live democratically. Unlike in science, there are no laws to discover; only laws people design and implement for themselves to resolve conflicts peacefully and fairly in determining who gets what, when and how. Sustainable democracy promises related results of social and economic development for the betterment of all.

EISA has committed itself to assisting such processes and it is hoped that this booklet will shed light on the conditions that were conducive to its mission and those that were constraining. In so doing perhaps it will inspire and inform others to seek a more democratic Africa and a more democratic world.



Continental and Global Trends Conditioning Democracy in Africa

We, the Member States of the African Union (AU); Inspired by the objectives and principles enshrined in the Constitutive Act of the African Union, particularly Articles 3 and 4, which emphasise the significance of good governance, popular participation, the rule of law and based on the holding of regular, free, fair and transparent elections conducted by competent, independent and impartial national electoral bodies; [are] ... Determined to promote and strengthen good governance through the institutionalization of transparency, accountability and participatory democracy; [and] Convinced of the need to enhance the election observation missions in the role they play, particularly as they are an important contributory factor to ensuring the regularity, transparency and credibility of elections;

*African Charter for Democracy, Elections and Governance, Preamble,
Adopted 30 January 2007 and entered into force 15 February 2012*

INTRODUCTION

For two decades the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) has been a vibrant, vital and visionary pan-African non-governmental organisation based in Johannesburg. It has supported democratic ideals and ideas exemplified in the African Union document quoted above, which was adopted unanimously.

All EISA's programmes are committed to a vision of 'An African continent where democratic governance, human rights and citizen participation are upheld in a peaceful environment'. Operationally EISA 'strives for excellence in the promotion of credible elections, citizen participation and strong institutions for sustainable democracy in Africa'.



EISA evolved out of an indigenous, community-based civic initiative, the Independent Mediation Service of South Africa (IMSSA), which took root in the violent 1970s to help secure a just and democratic peace in the country despite seemingly intransigent racial oppression. When, in 1994, South Africans of all races participated for the first time as full citizens in a national election, IMSSA engaged in a nationwide voter education programme and was contracted by the country's newly constituted 1993 temporary electoral commission to recruit, train and deploy counting monitors.

What was evident, however, was the many administrative and operational shortcomings in the conduct of the 1994 election, including inadequate voter education, the inconsistent application of common polling principles and practices and the attendant risks of confusion and even conflict, whether out of misunderstanding or partisan malpractice. This experience, however, informed the formation of a much more effective Independent Electoral Commission.

After a careful review and assessment of South Africa's election experience, and of elections held in neighbouring countries, in 1996 Dren Nupen, Ilona Tip, Bontle Mpakanyane and Mabo Mosupye, all women who had worked in the IMSSA balloting department, left IMSSA to form what was initially called the Electoral Institute of South Africa, with Nupen at the helm.

EISA began modestly, working with South Africa's immediate neighbours and building on staff and leadership experience in domestic conflict mediation and resolution and election monitoring (Seirlis 2008). In the next six years EISA developed its capacity to provide more extensive electoral assistance than election monitoring, in partnership with Southern African Development Community (SADC) governments, electoral management bodies, civil society organisations and donors.

Support for the 14 countries in SADC developed on two levels.¹ First, EISA facilitated the establishment of an all-SADC Electoral Commissions Forum (ECF) and staffed it from 1998 to 2004. Among the ECF's activities were an election conflict management programme, the training of trainers for election operations at all levels, including national election management body commissioners and staff, for all SADC members. Running parallel with the ECF process, between 1997 and 2004 EISA also set up and managed the Election Support Network (ESN) for civil society groups wishing to acquire the skills to operate domestic observer missions and other electoral support activities in any SADC country.

The second level of SADC engagement was EISA's deployment of its own election observer missions (EOMs), although these could only be sent to countries where it

was invited and was assured of sufficient freedom to conduct an impartial and credible deployment of observers and experts drawn from across the SADC region.

EISA was launched in Johannesburg at a democratically auspicious moment, on 28 June 1996. A month earlier South Africa's Parliament had adopted the country's first democratic Constitution, which has become a model for the world and the backbone of the nation.

Deputy President Thabo Mbeki commemorated that act with his 'I am an African' address, which Ugandan scholar Mahmood Mamdani rightly describes as 'one of the most remarkable political documents of the 20th century' and as 'Lincolnesque' (Ndlovu & Strydom (eds) 2016).

His reference to America's great Civil War president is apt, for Mbeki, no less than Lincoln at Gettysburg, called for governance of, by and for the people as a universal preventative against crimes against humanity as evil as South African apartheid and, worse, slavery in the United States. In bearing witness to what happens 'when one person has superiority of force over another, where the stronger appropriate to themselves the prerogative even to annul the injunction that God created all men and women in his image', Mbeki universalised human rights, all the while identifying himself as an African, from a continent from which all homo sapiens can claim descent and with whom, as an African, he feels an affinity.

A year later, another son of Africa, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan also made a case for the universality of human rights and democratic values, this time in a remarkable address to the 2 June 1997 session of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Annual Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Never before had the OAU heard such an unqualified appeal from an African peer for all to 'embrace the primacy of democratic rule, the inviolability of human rights, and the imperatives of sustainable development'. He called for an end to a recent period 'marked by civil wars, the tyranny of military rule, and economic stagnation' and for seizing the democratic opportunity exemplified by the end of apartheid and the adoption of democracy in South Africa and declared: '... the will of the people must be the basis of governmental authority in Africa ... [and] ... respect for fundamental human rights.'

Annan rejected the view of some African leaders who dismiss democracy and human rights 'as a luxury of the rich countries for which Africa is not ready ... [while] others treat it as an imposition, if not a plot, by the industrialized West', adding:



I find these thoughts truly demeaning, demeaning for human dignity that resides in every African heart. Do not African mothers weep when their sons or daughters are killed or maimed by agents of repressive rule? Are not African fathers saddened when their children are unjustly jailed or tortured? Is not Africa as a whole impoverished when one of its brilliant voices is silenced? ... So I say to you my brothers and sisters, that human rights are African rights, and I call upon you to ensure that all Africans are able fully to enjoy them.

Annan 1997

His passion was also pragmatic, presenting human rights abuse as an early warning of deadly conflict that all should want to prevent. Apartheid was primarily a domestic abuse of human rights, no less than slavery was for hundreds of years in the United States. Yet in the 1860s America dealt with its domestic crime by the only means available, a war that became the deadliest in history at that point. In the case of apartheid, for the first time a domestic human rights issue was deemed by the UN Security Council to be a sufficient threat to international peace and security that it merited the imposition of sanctions, however mild, against a UN member, South Africa.

The outlook of idealism without illusions implied by the UN Secretary-General's 1997 remarks in Harare reflected EISA's values. By 2000 EISA had developed extensive electoral experience. Although this was only within those SADC countries conducting open and observable elections, it was sufficient to begin distilling some common characteristics that might yield a list of best practices, a set of electoral principles applicable to observation missions, despite particular differences in democratic regimes, as long as conditions would permit impartial and unencumbered observation.

In November 2003, after three years of extensive research and consultation in the region, EISA, in partnership with the ECF, convened a large conference of SADC election officials, politicians, civil society representatives and scholars to deliberate on, refine and approve a detailed list of Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC Region, or PEMMO as it became known (International IDEA).

These election principles were intended to build confidence in the election process among all stakeholders, most importantly partisan factions competing for office, and thereby enhance the prospects for peace and stability nationally and regionally. This, in turn, should also help sustain a country's larger democratic experiment. Having common principles accepted and followed would further facilitate the sharing of lessons among countries, each seeking to improve and sustain its particular democratic experiment.

The process might even facilitate greater regional cooperation by allowing neighbours access to the inner workings of each other's internal political affairs in ways that would not be construed as interference, but acknowledging that they could no longer be indifferent to the way each of them was governed if cooperation and independence were to deepen in mutually advantageous ways.

With the publication of electoral principles for Southern Africa EISA's international reputation and interests grew quickly, both in Africa and within a fledgling global network of international election observer groups also interested in PEMMO and in exploring the possibility of establishing a set of global electoral principles and code of conduct.

At the same time EISA was encountering difficulties in sustaining its own growth and development, relying only on the few SADC countries holding observable elections once every four or five years. Following the appointment of a new executive director, Denis Kadima, in December 2002, EISA and its staff went through another full review of the institute's operations and options. In 2003, following the recommendation of the staff, the institute's Board of Directors approved the transformation of the organisation reflected in its current name, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa.

The change of name reflected five strategic decisions, two of them implicit and three reflected in the words electoral, sustainable democracy and Africa. These decisions are important to note at the outset because they will be referenced repeatedly throughout this booklet.

First, EISA's board approved a continuation of the institute's central focus – providing electoral support, which still comprises roughly 80% of its work. The scope and nature of this support has changed, as is detailed in the second section of this publication.

A second strategic decision was to broaden EISA's mandate by linking electoral support to the achievement of sustainable democracy. The reference to sustainable democracy may sound overly ambitious but not if one considers how EISA views democracy. It neither prescribes nor follows a particular institutional formula, rather, all its programmes, projects and publications reflect the view that democracy is an open-ended process. Any country declaring itself to be a democracy, however, commits to an experiment in governance that is inclusive and accountable to ordinary people.

The exact nature of a democracy should be determined by those who live in it. By adding the term *sustainable*, however, EISA signals an awareness of the need for a rule-



bound (constitutional) process that precludes state capture by any particular individual or faction, however large and passionate. EISA does not directly engage in or comment on the nature of political bargains local stakeholders believe are essential to meeting their needs. But elections periodically test in important ways the separation of powers, transparency, accountability and inclusiveness of any democratic experiment. The challenges EISA faces in helping to ensure electoral integrity are as complex, varied, and often unforeseen as the behaviour of the people undertaking them.

The third strategic decision was to broaden EISA's reach to include the entire African continent. While this allows the institute more opportunities to provide electoral support than it would have if it confined its activities to the SADC region, it also creates challenges in managing effectively an operation on this scale.

The idea that a small NGO, still less than a decade old, could tackle the entire continent, even if only with regard to election monitoring, was, to say the least, audacious. Geographically, our mind's eye has been shaped by the distortions of a Mercator projection which fails to convey the fact that Africa's land mass is so vast it could contain the US, China, India and most of Western and Eastern Europe within its boundaries (see Appendix 1).

Africa is also the world's most ethnically complex region, home to 20 of the world's most diverse countries (see Appendix 2 and Fisher 2016). And, of course, this vast and diverse continent is today sub-divided into 54 mostly poor but sovereign states (see Appendix 3), with a majority of its people still engaged in subsistence agriculture.

So, in order to leverage its electoral support expertise better at continental level, EISA took another critical decision, to enter into partnerships with African intergovernmental organisations, first and foremost, the African Union. EISA's decision to support intergovernmental organisations actively and extensively in their electoral work differentiates it from other non-governmental international electoral groups.

Since signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the African Union in 2003 the institute has also provided technical support to all the electoral missions undertaken by that inter-governmental body and assists several of the AU's eight affiliated regional economic communities (RECs).²

Today, almost all African states stage multiparty elections every four or five years. Fifteen polls have been planned for 2016. The first half of the year saw elections in Benin, the Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Niger and Uganda, with elections also slated for the Democratic Republic of the

Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, the Gambia, Ghana, São Tomé and Príncipe, South Africa and Zambia. But have constitutions, electoral processes and term limits been respected, or have incumbents tried by all means necessary to retain the keys to State House? These, which are among the many questions that will continue to challenge EISA staff and their partners, are discussed below.

A final decision, which was the easiest for EISA's board, was to reiterate that the institute will remain an independent, non-partisan, not-for-profit international non-governmental organisation. Inherent in this decision is an important assumption about the nature of any democratic experiment and its sustainability, namely, that civil society must be allowed sufficient freedom and access to resources to enable it to be and remain a vital check on government operations – in this case regarding the role and integrity of electoral processes and institutions – and the separation of powers.

Citizens should be the ultimate beneficiaries of any democratic experiment and they are the most vulnerable and are often inadequately informed about or protected in exercising their basic human rights. So EISA continues to exemplify and, where possible, support the role of independent, impartial and credible civil society organisations involved in electoral work locally and transnationally.

Appropriately for an institute committed to pan-African electoral and other democracy support work, EISA has an all-African staff of 70 drawn from Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, CAR, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Nigeria, South Africa, Somalia and, previously, from Lesotho and Sudan. Of these, 34 are based in Johannesburg and handle a variety of short-term democracy support missions. The rest are assigned to the long-term field offices in troubled African countries recovering from conflict or otherwise facing difficult democratic transitions. Countries hosting EISA field missions either currently or recently include: Angola, Burundi, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Somalia and Zimbabwe.

This booklet unfolds in three sections:

The first provides a brief overview of the way Africa's leaders chose to interpret democracy's promises of greater peace, prosperity and inclusive development. It acknowledges the complex local, regional and global political contexts that continue, in varying and unpredictable ways, to influence EISA's programme priorities and impact in a period of rapid political, economic and social change for Africa and the world.

Fortunately, EISA rose to prominence in step with the emergence of a new pan-African consensus on democratic norms. Although the OAU (and now the African



Union – AU) declined to interfere in the internal affairs of its members, there was a new readiness not to be indifferent to domestic conflicts that could affect neighbours adversely and/or attract non-African intervention. Towards the end of EISA's first decade, however, democratic advancement appeared to stall, if not decline, in some African countries. Although it is hard to generalise about 54 diverse sovereign members of the AU, the general impression in the past decade has been of democratic decline on the continent. This not only affects EISA's outlook and planning but also that of the donors on whom the institute must rely.

The second chapter focuses on EISA's evolving mix of programmes and activities over the past two decades – the 'whats, hows and whys' of providing electoral and other support for the advancement of democracy in Africa. Approximately 80% of EISA's activities continue to be election related, but the scope of engagement has lengthened and deepened, especially in troubled countries where determining 'electoral integrity', not merely whether peace prevailed on voting day, is vital and often very difficult. Other aspects of democratisation have also been addressed over the years, including the role of parliaments, political parties, civil society, local government, institutions that protect human rights and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). These, too, are briefly noted and assessed.

EISA has also established field offices for longer-term and deeper engagement, especially in troubled countries attempting to make the transition from deadly conflict and/or long bouts of autocratic rule. Finally, the chapter notes the importance of the pan-African and global networks that inform EISA's work and generate the growing literature on elections and democratisation in Africa through annual conferences, with published proceedings, books, a journal and other forms of research, analysis and dissemination of results.

The final section considers the prospects for democracy in Africa in the decade ahead. Can democracy become an acceptable and sustainable formula for governance in and among the still sovereign 54 members of the African Union? Can democracies in Africa be sustained, for example, at a time of human-induced climate change, including extreme and unpredictable weather events and the secondary effects on land and water resources, disease, forced migration and conflict?

Sometimes related, and also subversive to democracy, are the transnational threats of terrorism, human and drug trafficking and other forms of criminal activity and the uncertainties and employment effects of globalisation and technological changes. African states remain weak, highly fragmented and economically poor. Yet democracy continues to flourish in some of the poorest countries and EISA continues to make

progress. But the coming decade is likely to raise new and daunting challenges that deserve concerned attention if democracy is to advance and be sustained.

AFRICA'S DECADE OF ADVANCING DEMOCRACY

The regional and global political context in which EISA was launched and grew during its first decade was propitious. Starting in the 1990s there was an historic opportunity, as former OAU Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim succinctly summarises:

So the end of the Cold War meant that Africa could assert itself. The mandate of the OAU insofar as liberation was concerned was coming to an end because South Africa was about to become free. In reality, the whole of Africa became free when South Africa attained its liberation and that was one of the primary objectives of the OAU ... Now that we were free and our countries, no longer had to deal with the question of liberation as such, what next?

Ndlovu & Strydom 2016, p 75

One leader who attempted to answer Salim's question and, in the process, set the tone and context for much of EISA's work, was Thabo Mbeki, South Africa's president from June 1999 until September 2008. Seizing the advantage of South Africa's spike in 'soft power', he drew on his enormous wealth of experience in Africa during his decades in exile to offer a fresh vision for post-colonial Africa, which he called the African Renaissance, a vision that might one day appeal to and even overturn long-running autocracies still prevalent in Africa.

In conceiving and promoting the African Renaissance, Mbeki sought to remove and deter non-African interventions on the continent, especially any attempts to engineer regime change, while also encouraging African governments to institute economic and political reforms voluntarily and in ways consistent with their priorities and the needs of their citizens. Democratic governance was also crucial, he believed, in helping end Africa's wars and ensuring a more peaceful and stable regional environment.

African-led economic reforms and better and more democratic governance, Mbeki urged, would not only benefit Africa's peoples but would provide a more promising foundation and confidence for more productive partnerships within Africa and with strategic partners internationally. The latter included major sources of finance, investment and trade, notably the international financial institutions and major economic powers in Europe, Asia and North America.

In the African Renaissance vision economic reform and good governance would require African governments to become transparent and accountable, first and foremost



to each other, by accepting greater and more intrusive oversight by and for Africa's intergovernmental institutions. Intra-African monitoring and assessment of democratic elections were key elements in this vision, which opened the way and continues to facilitate a special role for EISA. The vision also required reform of the Organization of African Unity. This, in turn, has encouraged reforms and strengthening of the eight affiliated RECs. These developments generated greater demand for EISA's technical assistance, with the aim of improving the electoral support work of the multilateral African bodies, as discussed below.

This lesson was not lost on South Africa's newly elected democratic government as it sought to design a foreign policy that was both opposed to foreign interference in African countries and sought new ways and means of preventing and ending abuses of power within states that might prove harmful to their citizens and pose threats of spillover effects on their sovereign neighbours.

Africa's leaders, even those unwilling to allow democracy in their own countries, took heart from South Africa's success as a vital counterpoint to the continent's chronic marginalisation in world politics and economic affairs. Ethiopia's late President Meles Zenawi describes Africa's global standing in the 1990s:

Africa was seen as a basket case and pundits in the West were publishing articles in respectable magazines such as *The Economist* as to whether the direct recolonization of the continent would be the only option to push African societies towards modernization. The only bright light across the dark African skies of the 1990s was the liberation of South Africa. The end of apartheid in South Africa was the crowning achievement of the struggle against all forms of colonialism. And as such, every African was and had every right to be proud. Even with the desolate political landscape in Africa at the time, many Africans felt that South Africa would be a great success and prove to the rest of the world that Africans are not destined to fail and be the playthings of world powers.

Ndlovu & Strydom 2016, p 44

In promoting his African Renaissance, and to help inform and shape his thinking, Mbeki personally encouraged African scholars to address various practical and moral dimensions of the broad vision.³ Publicly, he unveiled the vision in an address on 9 April 1998 entitled 'The African Renaissance, South Africa and the World', appropriately delivered at the United Nations University in Tokyo (Mbeki 1998).

He began by recalling the emergence of proud and successful African cultures dating back to the first century of the first millennium, called for a rebirth of African confidence

and self-determination, not led by emperors, holy men, or generals, but one that would effectively challenge 'many throughout the world [who] have the view that as Africans we are incapable of establishing and maintaining systems of good governance'.

Rejecting military governments and single-party states, he noted that one of the principal demands of SA's liberation struggle was simply 'the people shall govern', adding that this same vision had inspired at least 25 other African countries to establish multiparty democracies, each with its own characteristics, presumably negotiated in good faith by its citizens.

After outlining the manner in which the OAU and other bodies were beginning to change in ways supportive of domestic reform, he summarised the core strategy: 'necessarily the African Renaissance, in all its parts, can only succeed if its aims and objectives are defined by the Africans themselves, if its programmes are designed by ourselves and if we take responsibility for the success or failure of our policies.'

He then listed the many challenges and obligations South Africa and other African governments must accept as the price of greater freedom and dignity; standards still being debated, delineated and decided, and that opened the way for work that EISA and other pro-democracy groups continue to pursue, sometimes successfully, often not.

Democratic development is never a linear process and there have been losses from and additions to Mbeki's 1998 list. From his South African perspective, however, the success of the African Renaissance would require greater pan-African cooperation to help insulate from non-African interference locally negotiated and constitutionally sanctioned democratic governance capable of achieving resilient and sustainable development, economic, political and social. Authoritarian rule would only, in Mbeki's view, invite unwanted non-African exploitation, competition and attempts at regime change.

With the Cold War over, the threat became unipolar, with lessons drawn from America's failed adventures in Vietnam and, more recently, Iraq, Libya and, so far, Afghanistan. Across Africa the picture of widespread interference by former colonial powers, including attempts to effect regime change, had done more to abet authoritarianism than to advance democracy. South Africa's leaders, therefore, would proceed cautiously, looking first for African partners who shared the view that Africans should take greater control of their international relations, and that the first priority should be to try to end Africa's ongoing deadly conflicts, which often attracted foreign meddling and intervention, as well as the continent's large international debts and dependence on Western-dominated international financial institutions.



Kofi Annan gave a synopsis of the conflicts that had bedevilled Africa in the year EISA was founded:

Since 1970, more than 30 wars have been fought in Africa, the vast majority of them intrastate in origin. In 1996 alone, 14 of the 53 countries of Africa were afflicted by armed conflicts, accounting for more than half of all war-related deaths worldwide and resulting in more than 8 million refugees, returnees and displaced persons. The consequences of those conflicts have seriously undermined Africa's efforts to ensure long-term stability, prosperity and peace for its peoples ... Preventing such wars is no longer a matter of defending states or protecting allies. It is a matter of defending humanity itself.

UN 1998

The failure to prevent internal or intra-state wars had become the UN's greatest challenge. Between 1990 and 2001 only three of the world's major deadly conflicts were international, and most civil wars were in Africa (Anyanwu 2004). Meanwhile, the UN Security Council was no longer paralysed and there were more UN peace operations (47) underway simultaneously in the late 1990s than had been undertaken in the previous 50 years – of these 24 were in Africa (UN 2013).

The era's greatest failure to prevent an internal catastrophe was one that Annan took personally – the Rwandan genocide. That holocaust in 1994 might have been prevented had the warning signs of earlier human rights abuses and escalating ethnic tensions been heeded rather than regarded as a domestic matter. The limited mandate of the few UN forces already in Rwanda and the unwillingness of the major powers to muster an additional small force of 10 000 peacekeepers could have forestalled the killing of some 800 000 or more civilians, as the UN's force commander and many scholars have now documented (Powers 2002; Dallaire 2003).

For this horror to have occurred at the very moment that, in South Africa, several of the heroes of that struggle were being democratically elected to national office added to the poignancy and to the growing recognition that beyond the moral imperative appeal of respect for fundamental universal human rights was their practical importance in preventing and redressing the causes of deadly conflict.

Over the next decade South Africa's leaders and those of other African nations would experiment with new ways of reforming prevailing regional norms and institutions in response to a growing consensus that when member states showed warning signs of internal stress and conflict this would not bring 'interference' but it could no longer be treated with 'indifference'.

As noted below, this change in attitude eventually found expression in the replacement of the Organization of African Unity with the African Union, along with the adoption of other instruments of engagement and various complementary developments and reforms at the level of regional economic communities. International electoral support and observation, in which EISA played an increasingly important role, first in Southern Africa and more recently in Africa, was at the cutting edge of this transition.

Throughout the OAU's first 35 years national and regional plans for rapid economic growth and development, along with the absence of greater intra-African economic cooperation, were disappointing as Africa fell further behind a booming Asia and recently advancing Latin America. Public debt and increasing dependence on the highly intrusive International Monetary Fund (IMF) stipulations and World Bank-funded structural adjustment programmes left many countries virtual wards of international financial institutions (Brooks, Lombardi & Suruma 2014).

Sub-Saharan Africa's average stock of public debt to gross domestic product (GDP) had risen from less than 50% in the 1970s to over 250% in the 1990s, most of it owed to the IMF, World Bank and African Development Bank. Finally, in 1996, the year EISA was launched, the international financial institutions also launched a major initiative to reduce dramatically the unmanageable debt levels of 38 developing countries, known as the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC).

By the mid-2000s the G-7 wealthy nations had decided to augment the HIPC substantially with their own Millennium Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI). Both initiatives, of course, entailed many conditions that were heavily and deeply intrusive, leaving many Africans to conclude that their dignity had been demeaned and their freedom reduced to the fig leaf of sovereign rhetoric.

The first gradual step towards asserting African claims to greater self-determination in their crucial financial dealings with the IMF, the World Bank and major bi-lateral lenders and donors would depend on African leaders demonstrating a new willingness to commit to reforms that those they governed determined for themselves were necessary, and for which they were prepared to be held accountable in a process that pledged transparency and became known as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad). This complemented other politically sensitive steps towards demonstrating a new pan-African willingness not to be 'indifferent' to the domestic affairs of other states which might affect regional prosperity as well as security.

Nigeria's former President, Olusegun Obasanjo, described the origins of Nepad as a reaction to Western disregard for African concerns. Obasanjo recalls that in 2000,



when he was chair of the G77+China, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria was chair of the OAU and Thabo Mbeki was chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, each received a separate invitation to meet with leaders of the G7+Russia in Tokyo, ostensibly to discuss the African sovereign debt, a complex and contentious issue for virtually all 53 OAU members. All three accepted. Once in Tokyo they were, together, ushered into the G-8 for what was barely 30 minutes of perfunctory, if not patronising statements from the hosts. Although feeling frustrated and demeaned, Obasanjo recounts:

The three of us went back to our hotel and said, 'Look, if they had asked us what is Africa's programme we would have had nothing to put on the table.' So there and then we decided that we had to do something tangible and that was the beginning of Nepad.

Ndlovu & Strydom 2016, p 37

The three leaders immediately identified experts to begin developing the concept and, according to Obasanjo, agreed that Mbeki should host these experts, and that was the start of the process, which was intended to come up with a formula that would enhance African confidence and greater self-reliance, but in ways that could facilitate more equal partnerships with non-African governments – especially those that dominate the global economy and the international financial institutions – while also finding a politically acceptable way to have African countries become more open to each other about the ways in which they were reforming their economies and, in the process, be subject to an African peer review process.

As a leading South African economist, Wiseman Nkuhlu, chief executive of Nepad from 2001-2005, later recalled:

Afro-pessimism was at its peak around 2000/01. This was soon after *The Economist* published an article that defined Africa as a 'failed continent'. The author argued that Africa was a 'hopeless continent'. Mbeki and Obasanjo were very much aware of that negative stereotype. That was why President Mbeki played a very important role tackling Afro-pessimism and the negativity about Africa in forums all over the world ... His message was you are wrong, Africa is turning the corner and that the twenty-first century was going to be Africa's century.

Ndlovu & Strydom 2016, p 195

Obasanjo believed that Nepad, along with a peer review process, if endorsed by the member states of the African Union, would be an adequate base on which Africa could build 'strategic partnerships with the international world'.

The process of getting Nepad launched, along with the APRM, turned out to be more difficult than first envisioned. The experience then and since parallels the challenges facing EISA's efforts to provide effective electoral support, which entails an often politically sensitive and fraught process of peer review when the African Union and RECs send election observation missions.

Wiseman Nkuhlu recalls the resistance among African leaders to the proposal, especially the more intrusive aspects of the APRM that would allow experts selected by the Nepad secretariat to review, assess and comment on each country's plans and the progress of both economic and governance reforms.

According to Nkuhlu, two major obstacles had to be overcome: African scholars and civil society were very critical of the proposal because they felt it had been cooked up and would be served 'without African leaders consulting the people; secondly, they were skeptical about the commitments to good governance, the commitment to fight corruption, because there were leaders who were among the most corrupt on the continent' (Ndlovu & Strydom 2016, p 194). As discussed in the next section, EISA's concerns about both these issues prompted the institute to undertake a special project on the APRM.

While presidents Mbeki and Obasanjo criss-crossed Africa in 2001 and 2002, discussing Nepad and the APRM with African leaders, there was a simultaneous and very important effort underway to reform the Organization of African Unity to allow it to encourage voluntary political and economic reform and allow the inter-governmental body greater oversight and engagement in the internal affairs of sovereign members, especially if there was a military seizure of power, signs of a likely deadly conflict, or worse, the threat or start of another Rwanda-like genocide. Opening countries up to closer scrutiny of the nature and quality of the governance, most specifically the conduct of democratic elections, became a front-burner issue as well.

According to then OAU Secretary-General, Salim Ahmed Salim, the first and most radical proposal to reform the OAU after the end of the Cold War and the fall of apartheid came from Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, ahead of the 1999 annual summit he would host in Sirte. His experts offered a scheme for an African Union of one government, one defence ministry, and so on. The scheme was, notes Salim, 'very ambitious'. 'I think that he was well-meaning but it was not realistic' (Ndlovu & Strydom 2016, p 75). Once again, Mbeki, Obasanjo and Bouteflika worked together drafting what became the Sirte Declaration, which proposed an African Union that would be more modest yet mark a major shift towards showing African leaders to be willing to



address problems arising within member states rather than exclusively between or among sovereign states, as had been the case under the OAU Charter.

For the next three years pan-African diplomacy grappled with the complementary proposals for reforming the OAU Charter and its political/security functions, plus the less formal political/economic initiative, Nepad, with an APRM. The first to be accomplished was the launch of the African Union in 2002 at the OAU's last summit, in Durban, South Africa, while Nepad was adopted the following year.

The most notable reforms in the African Union's Constitutive Act, which supplanted the OAU Charter, dealt with regional peace and security issues within states. The AU became the world's first multilateral instrument to sanction (Article 4 (h)) the right to intervene, pursuant to a decision by the African Union's Assembly 'in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity' (www.au.int/en/about/constitutive_act). This mandate, now commonly referred to as the 'Responsibility to Protect' (Evans & Sahnoun 2001), which arose in the aftermath of the Rwanda genocide, was considered in the case of the 2015 Burundi crisis but is, as yet, untested.

A second reform is a new objective in the AU Constitutive Act, Article 3(g), which is of greater relevance to the work of EISA. It commits AU members to: 'promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance'. It is supported under Principles, Article 4(m), which mandates members to show '[r]espect for democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law and good governance'.

Both provisions, plus Article 4(p), the 'condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of governments', were adopted easily and unanimously because they were believed to be increasingly essential to conflict prevention and mitigation within states and do not suggest an African Union consensus, much less any prescriptions that particular kinds of democratic or governance arrangements are appropriate for any particular member state. Rather, the AU was endorsing general principles and processes related to good governance and the development of peaceful and politically capable states that could deal more effectively in larger international bodies with plans and proposals for increased regional cooperation and collective action locally, and thus fend off any unwanted foreign intervention.

Negotiations about how best to put the Constitutive Act's Principles and Objectives pertaining to the governance of member states into operation coalesced around what became the African Charter for Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), which was unanimously adopted by the African Union's Eighth Ordinary Assembly

of African Heads of State & Government on 30 January 2007. It has since become the principal source of authority and legitimacy for pan-African election observation missions (EOMs) deployed by the African Union (AU) and the RECs and opened the way for the path-breaking partnership between EISA and the AU discussed in the next section.

Implementing the ACDEG required national ratification by 15 member states, which was achieved in 2012 and, as of 2016, 23 of the African Union's 54 member states have ratified and are legally obliged to act in accordance with the charter's provisions. Those states that have endorsed but not yet ratified the charter must at least weigh up the political and diplomatic costs and benefits of cooperation or defiance.

Operationally, the most prominent and pervasive measure of the charter's facilitation of pan-African collective engagement in the domestic affairs of AU members has been in the monitoring and assessment of national democratic elections.

In the realm of Africa's peace and security, the ACDEG can be seen as operating in the spirit of 'Responsibility to Protect', although the AU and RECs generally lack the collective capacity and resolve to intervene in the domestic affairs of their still-sovereign member states.

Collective engagement, as envisioned by the ACDEG, is primarily political, rather than military, and is contingent on local terms and conditions. The role and importance of local and transnational civil society and other non-state actors as allies and occasional partners in these multilateral initiatives is increasingly evident. As EISA's partnerships demonstrate, this now includes efforts to advance transparent and accountable democratic governance. Adoption of the ACDEG at least signalled a general consensus that democracy is the generally preferred route to developing politically capable states that can resolve internal differences peacefully and become reliable and resilient partners with their neighbours, regionally and globally.

There are, however, wide and persistent degrees of resolve in responding to the goals and objectives of the ACDEG. The most frequent and widely used measure of this resolve has been and will continue to be the extent and effectiveness of pan-African missions to observe and assess national elections. The duties of these missions include publishing findings and recommendations about the credibility of the election and ways of improving the process in the future.

A key goal of EISA's efforts in support of African inter-governmental organisations conducting election observations is to encourage them to devote greater attention



and resources to monitoring and assessing electoral elements before and after the actual conduct of voting on election day. The aim is to improve the over-all integrity of the process and its legitimacy in the eyes of the nation and internationally.

When it was launched, the ACDEG was intended to complement Nepad, which, no less than the ACDEG, reflects the commitment, albeit in varying degrees of resolve and capacity, to pursue domestic policies that are more transparent, politically accountable and subject to the rule of law. Both Nepad and the ACDEG manifest the belief that the surest, safest and most productive road to sustainable political and economic development must be rooted in a form of democratic governance that, above all, commands the voluntary respect, allegiance and support of its citizens.

Nepad was provided with its own small secretariat, a panel of eminent experts, and is overseen by a Heads of State & Government Orientation Committee that reports to the AU Assembly on the country reports and its own teams' reviews of each of these. The ACDEG, on the other hand, is staffed by the AU Commission (secretariat) under its Peace and Security Department and reports to the AU Assembly and its Committee for Peace and Security.

A notable diplomatic innovation in both Nepad and the ACDEG is the APRM, which measures progress at national level so that partners acquire a better understanding of each other's internal processes, thus providing a more realistic basis for mutual assistance and sustainable cooperation and eventual regional integration.

Although the 34 members of the loose association of highly industrialised nations, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), has had a peer review economic process in effect for decades, the AU commitment is broader and precedent setting for the less advanced economies of the Global South and there are substantial differences in the scope, nature and impact – immediate and long-term – of the two processes.

By the end of 2015, 35 of the AU's 54 members had joined the APRM process, although only 17 had actually subjected themselves to country assessments by pan-African teams of leading economists. In recent years the fall-off of participation and the lack of funding for the APRM secretariat, including from Western donors, has left the mechanism on what one analyst rightly called 'life support', although there have been recent promises of resuscitation (Fabricius 2016; Du Plessis 2016).

Pan-African peer review processes manifest a strategic consensus and commitment among members of the African Union to seek African solutions for African problems

to deter any further non-African foreign intervention, which has cursed the continent for centuries. More positively, they also reflect a commitment to deepen mutual understanding and cooperation among the AU members and the legitimacy of these complex and difficult processes. At the same time, efforts sanctioned by Nepad and the ACDEG are meant to complement rather than detract from various attempts to promote peace and security and economic development and cooperation within Africa's several sub-regional economic communities.

RISING DOUBTS ABOUT DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA: RHETORICAL OR REAL?

Just when pan-African democratic breezes were helping to accelerate EISA's expansion into the rest of Africa, a growing number of African governments took steps to restrict the domestic democratic space. This poses new challenges for EISA if the universal norms of human rights and democracy these governments voluntarily embraced when adopting the AU's Constitutive Act and the more recent ACDEG are being undermined, or, at least, ignored.

From EISA's perspective, if the obligation to become more transparent and accountable to their citizens extends only to peaceful voting on election day, pathways to sustainable democracy won't go beyond the first baby steps. EISA's efforts to ensure greater electoral integrity and related conditions bearing on the development and entrenchment of democracy and good governance are discussed in the second and third sections, but first a few highlights of the changing context affecting its work over the past decade.

At the global level there were the many detrimental reverberations of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack in the United States, followed by the disastrous American invasion that brought regime change in Iraq, led to spreading violence in the region and abetted local tensions in Africa, notably the internationally-linked terrorist insurrections in the Horn, East, West, and Central Africa.

There were also shortfalls, beginning in the 1990s, in Africa's post-Cold War peace dividend. The end of the US-Soviet rivalry, which meant less economic and security assistance for their African clients, has not been replaced or augmented by economic and other support to foster and sustain democratic development. Increasingly, external powers, seeing terrorist threats in Africa, acted in ways reminiscent of the Cold War, rewarding governments allied with them in this campaign with political and economic support, while overlooking domestic actions detrimental to democracy and human rights.



The surge in violence, which appears to have peaked more than a decade after the start of the global 'war on terror', typically grew out of local grievances, and what is different this time is not the number of casualties (which have approached levels not experienced since the final stages of the Cold War) but that the number of countries seriously affected has so far been quite small. According to South Africa's Institute for Security Studies, excluding fatalities from just five of Africa's 54 countries (Nigeria, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and Libya), political violence elsewhere has remained at the low levels that prevailed during EISA's first decade, levels the Institute for Security Studies asserts are 'unprecedented by historical standards' (Cilliers 2015).

The 2007/2008 global financial crisis with its related cutback in foreign loans, investment and development assistance redounded around the world, hurting Africa's mostly tiny economies, which are still reliant on exports of primary commodities. Yet it is also the case that the HIPC and MDRI debt-reduction initiatives between 1996 and 2006, noted above, did have positive economic effects, cutting debt-to-GDP ratios in the 36 participating African countries from over 114% in 1999 to 19% in 2011, with public debt stock reduced to \$12 billion from \$117 billion (Brooks, Lombardi & Suruma 2014, p 4).

Since this debt relief Africa's overall economic growth has been robust, averaging around 5%, although varied and with primary commodity exporting countries leading at even higher rates. This has led to a surge in new borrowing, with the IMF reporting African sovereign debt levels at a ten-year high in 2014.

Another global recession occurred in 2015, less severe than that in 2007/08 but, ironically, having a more severe impact on Africa than the earlier one, primarily because of China's falling demand for African primary commodities. What lasting impact this downturn will have on democratic trends in Africa has yet to be determined, but it does point to one of the biggest changes in Africa's political economy during EISA's second decade, which has been the rapid and pervasive expansion of China's presence and influence.

To reassure African leaders of China's commitment to this partnership, China's President Xi Jinping personally co-hosted, with South Africa's President Jacob Zuma, in Johannesburg, the November 2015 Sixth China-Africa Forum, pledging another \$60 billion in assistance (Stremlau 2015).

Whether Africa has become China's 'Second Continent', as journalist Howard French argues, or seeks a more limited and opportunistic engagement, as scholar Deborah Brautigam carefully documents in *Will Africa Feed China?*, there can be little doubt that China's engagement in Africa may well be the most positive region-wide development since de-colonisation (French 2014; Brautigam 2015).

China's political positioning, especially with regard to democracy and elections, remains ambiguous and problematic. As the world's largest country that does not hold periodic popular elections, China has begun to deploy its own election observers to at least some African elections and, in the case of Madagascar, participated along with EISA and all the other groups in briefing the media on its findings, which were very much in line with those of the other international groups (*Global Times* 2013).

Chinese Africanists often argue that regime legitimacy accrues from rapid growth and normally steers clear of such political questions as the role of popular mandates conferred via credible inclusive democratic elections (Zhang & Song 2012). The argument is not unique to Chinese analysts (Okereke & Agupusi 2015). African governments and scholars increasingly debate whether economic reform should precede political reform or, in a line usually attributed to Singapore's long-serving autocratic leader, Lee Kuan Yew: 'Perestroika before Glasnost'. Whether political conditions allow for this is another matter.

I recall visiting South Africa just before transformation, when a group of distinguished foreign economists proffered such advice, only to be told by incumbent President F W de Klerk and his ANC challenger, Nelson Mandela, that delay was politically impossible. Yet the debate continues and, in recent years, has become known as the Beijing model or the Development State (Mkandawire 2001).

The presumption that democracy can only succeed in economically advanced countries gained currency among Western social scientists in the 1950s and today often passes for conventional wisdom. Yet, as Harvard Professor Pippa Norris's recent research suggests, this is not always the case.

Norris and her team have been running a large 'Electoral Integrity Project' for the past four years and her work, particularly the Africa survey, will be used in the next section to gauge the impact of EISA's projects. In her book *Why Electoral Integrity Matters* (2014) and a subsequent global assessment involving 2 000 electoral experts in 139 countries, she has sought to answer the question of whether the fact that democratic regimes have emerged only after countries have reached a level of prosperity – \$8 000 per capita has become the benchmark – means democracy is still beyond the reach of most African countries (Norris 2014).

While conceding that 'the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy', she goes on to observe that if lack of development is the root cause, then electoral malpractices such as coercion, vote-buying and fraud would be particularly severe and ubiquitous in the poorest societies of Africa. But her global



survey shows this is not always the case. She scored all African countries according to a complex set of integrity indicators and found that in each country's most recent election some were terrible – for example, Burundi, Equatorial Guinea and Ethiopia all failed, with some of the lowest integrity ratings in the world, while others, for example Benin, Mauritius, Lesotho, South Africa and Namibia, all had high integrity ratings. She concludes that there is little evidence in Africa, the world's poorest region, that wealth and poverty are correlated with levels of electoral integrity.

'Elections,' Norris writes, 'are the heart of the representative process. Flawed contests damage party competition, democratic governance and fundamental human rights.' She recommends that rather than abandon support for African elections because so many countries are hostage to autocratic leaders who defy or overturn term limits and blatantly rig elections international donors and civil society groups that support the advancement and sustainability of democracy should re-double their efforts.

The next section, which focuses on EISA's work, strives to justify Professor Norris's recommendation.

In recent years it has begun to become evident that donors may be losing their appetite for funding elections and the work of those charged with assessing impartially degrees of electoral integrity and therefore political legitimacy. Democracy and Africa expert Nicolas van de Walle of Cornell University detects a 'democracy fatigue' among some Western donors (Van de Walle 2016; Moore 2016).

David Moore, a professor of Anthropology and Development Studies at the University of Johannesburg, however, perceives a more ominous trend, what he labels in an article for a forthcoming edition of the *Socialist Register* 'An Arc of Authoritarianism in Africa'. There is, according to Moore, a continental cancer that threatens African efforts to entrench democratic values and institutions,

a wide gap between those for whom 'freedom' meant the sovereign right for African leaders to do what they want, mostly phrased within the predictable patterns of anti-imperialist posturing, and cosmopolitan versions of liberalism aspiring to restrict that liberty to those who do not kill their subjects wantonly.

Moore 2016

This is, of course, not a uniquely African problem but one that may be driving up democratic deficits in countries around the world, as Columbia University political scientist Alexander Cooley argues compellingly in the headline article of an issue of the *Journal of Democracy*, entitled 'Authoritarianism Goes Global: Countering Democratic

Norms' (Cooley July 2015). The counter-norms to liberal democracy Cooley analyses are congruent with Moore's views of Africa: authoritarian rationalisations that privilege state security, 'respect' for civilisational diversity and 'traditional values'. These appeals, while backed by state power, may also resonate with the more conservative male-dominated sectors of society, which favour the 'stability' of electoral autocracy and the abrogation of executive term limits that now often confirm the forceful entrenchment of these regimes.

Aging autocrats are especially prominent in Africa, but whether they herald a future or a faltering trend is as yet unclear, justifying the need for more in-depth research, as exemplified by the case studies in this volume. David E Kiwuwa of Princeton University recently published a survey tallying and comparing the ages and years in office of all current African heads of state. Several, notably the incumbents in Zimbabwe, Angola, Uganda, Algeria, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, have been in power for decades, and the average age of Africa's ten oldest leaders is 78.1 years, compared to 52 for leaders of the world's ten most-developed economies (Kiwuwa 2015).

Paradoxically, this trend runs counter to Africa's demographics. The IMF estimates that by 2035 more Africans will be entering the global labour market than people from the rest of the world combined (IMF 2015). Already Africa is the youngest and fastest-growing region, with a population that is projected to grow from 800 million to over 2 billion by mid-century. Many countries are already showing signs of restiveness and frustration, risking political instability, especially where elections are seen to be fraudulent, lacking integrity, and responsive to public demands for changes of policies and personnel at all political levels.

Kiwuwa notes that only 21% to 25% of Angolans, Ugandans or Zimbabweans were even born when their leaders came to power. Whether the spark that will ignite them will be demagoguery or democracy is always the issue – in the struggles to overturn the evils of US segregation and South African apartheid it was the youth who were at the vanguard.

Extreme inequality and the denial of social and economic rights to education, health care, basic housing and fair employment opportunities are generating pressures that may prove impossible to suppress in the absence of more democratic social contracts.

Most of these long-serving and entrenched leaders hold regular elections and have become known among academics as 'electoral authoritarians'.⁴ Presidential term limits, which, in the majority of democratic constitutions adopted in Africa during the 1990s, would not allow incumbents more than two terms, have been overturned, ignored or defied in at least 15 countries since 2000. Most credible independent international



election-monitoring groups will not even consider observing such elections, but, as noted in the next section, this has become an issue of importance for EISA in its dealings with the African Union, which is obliged to send observer missions to the elections of all AU member states.

Further complicating the picture is the ever-simmering debate over whether 'democracy' should be regarded as rooted in universal values or values more appropriate to particular regions and cultures. It is a big and complicated debate which cannot be explored here. It does, however, bear on judgements of electoral integrity and it lies at the heart of Thabo Mbeki's vision of an African Renaissance and the way the African Union Constitutive Act and the African Charter address democracy, good governance and elections.

Mbeki and the framers of the AU instruments clearly wanted Africans to aspire to and be respected for and held accountable to universal standards. And should these standards evolve over time, African views on any emerging global consensus should be taken into account, no more or less than those of the citizens of any other region of the world.

The fact that the current UN structures deny Africans adequate representation and that when a major power, notably the US, appeals to Africa to be 'more democratic' this risks arousing local anti-democratic forces who see democratisation as a cover for military or other interests, much as was the case during the Cold War, when the West advocated democracy while allying itself with dictators like Mobutu or regimes as bad as that in apartheid in South Africa.

Democracy needs and will inevitably acquire 'local characteristics'. Democratic governance is, after all, about finding viable and resilient compromises that allow power to change hands peacefully, regimes to evolve in response to changing circumstances locally and internationally and the state to become more resilient and a more politically capable partner regionally and globally.

The challenge for independent electoral support organisations, notably EISA, is to reach a fair and full determination of when 'local characteristics' of any avowed democracy violate democracy's 'universal characteristics'.

Some false claims are easy to spot. China's pitch for economic growth ahead of democratisation deserves the careful critical consideration of African governments facing growing demands for greater transparency, accountability, and citizen

empowerment. When leaders of the People's Republic of China say their regime is a true democracy with 'Chinese characteristics' few real democrats take the claim seriously. And when the ageing autocrat and president for life, Robert Mugabe, says that Zimbabweans are determining their own future that, too, lacks credibility, although this did not deter the African Union from electing the long-ago freedom fighter to be its chair in 2015. Another authoritarian leader, Idriss Déby, the long-serving president of Chad, succeeded Mugabe as AU chair in 2016.

The majority of African regimes are neither definitely dictatorships nor definitely democracies, but rather 'partly free', in the term popularised by Freedom House's annual democracy index. This is an area of profound political ambiguity, justifying the scholarship that EISA supports or contributes to in partnership with scholars and researchers at leading African universities and think tanks.

There is also a growing academic literature on the 'Africanisation of democracy' (Decker & Arrington 2015; Gruzd & Turianshyi (eds) 2015). Research, analysis and advocacy focused on 'non-Western' alternative models of democracy has gone global. The many complexities and the scope of this topic are neatly surveyed and analysed in a new book by Richard Youngs, *The Puzzle of Non-Western Democracy* (2015).

Youngs is also perplexed, noting in his foreword: 'In my fifteen years working on democracy support, there have never been so many or such vociferous calls for democracy to be encouraged along paths very different from the Western model.' After hundreds of interviews with practitioners, activists and analysts around the world he concludes that greater efforts must be made to bridge the work of international democracy promotion and support and the analytical exploration of the concept of democracy itself, a mixing of the 'how' and the 'what' of democracy support, a challenge EISA has pursued since its inception.

In a brief section on Africa Youngs rightly stresses that the legacy of colonialism weighs heavily on national political configurations as it reinforced sectarian divisions and produced many *sui generis* and illegitimate institutions that favoured particular segments of the population. He quotes a now well-known indictment by Nigerian scholar Claude Ake, published in 1996, the year EISA was founded, that Western liberal democracy

is not in the least emancipatory ... because it offers the people rights they cannot exercise, voting that never amounts to choosing, freedom that is patently spurious, and political equality which distinguishes highly unequal power relations.

Youngs 2015, p 51



Youngs summarises what he surmises are four elements of the case for an African form of democracy based on traditional political institutions: communalism, non-partyism, consensual decentralised decision-making and chieftaincy. While urging more research and engagement, especially in states regarded as 'partly free' or 'in transition', he makes two important, if tentative, observations. One is that a concept of 'African democracy' that incorporates the four traditional elements rests on apparently contradictory arguments: Africans are said to value consensus over adversary competition, yet are divided by too many ethnic, religious, linguistic and other primary identities to forge workable majoritarian rule (Youngs 2015, p 53).

He concludes, however, on a hopeful note:

It is difficult to detect a strong trend toward a completely different model of democracy. Afrobarometer and other polls show not only that the demand for democracy is rising across Africa but also that ordinary citizens make the same judgments about what is and what is not 'democratic' as elsewhere in the world.

Youngs 2015, p 56

Advocating and adhering to universal democratic values, including increasingly accepted universal democratic election standards rooted in the public international human rights laws and norms all governments endorse, is especially vital in Africa, home to the most ethnically diverse countries in the world.

Identity voting patterns and preferences, as noted above, have become a renewed interest among analysts trying to understand recent political upheavals in Western democracies, most notably the US, Britain and members of the European Union. Yet according to a decade-old global assessment of ethnic identities within states, the 20 most ethnically diverse countries in the world are in Africa, with Uganda and Liberia heading the list (Fisher 2013).

By contrast, the most homogenous are Asian – Japan and Korea, while Europe – where current anti-immigrant tensions are driving dangerous xenophobia – endured centuries of deadly conflicts until recently reaching today's situation where most large ethnic groups have a country of their own. This is not generally an option for African governments, regimes or states.

International electoral support groups, including EISA, should not and cannot discourage identity voting. The realities in virtually all democracies, social scientists have shown, is that people tend to vote for the candidates and parties they feel to be most 'like them'. At best, the challenge of keeping democratic processes alive and

sustainable is ensuring that elections at least mediate and manage factions, whether organised according to special interests, a particular racial, ethnic, religious, gender or other identity, or both.

The central challenge for local civil society and international electoral support groups, including EISA, is to draw attention to the risks of one identity group unfairly dominating others, whether the incumbent leader represents a majority or a minority group. Of course, identities can include categories greater than ethnicity, as in South Africa's or America's black/white racial divide, and another that is currently receiving much media attention – generation.

Generational differences across Africa are becoming increasingly potent as, demographically, Africa has the world's fastest-growing population, with a potentially explosive 'youth bulge', large proportions of which are unemployed, poorly prepared and frustrated. At the same time, Africa's youth, more than any prior cohort, is information and communications and socially networked and that, in the future, could have far-reaching possibilities for political mobilisation and manipulation.

In Africa the speed of the spread of personal communication devices has been stunning. In 2002 fewer than 1 in 10 Africans owned a mobile phone, but today, at least in Nigeria and South Africa, they are as ubiquitous as they are in the US, with smart phones connected to the global internet increasingly common among elites, according to a 2015 Pew Research Center survey of the continent.

Socially networked, politically aware young people who have little or no prospect of gainful employment are but one of the many challenges facing governments all over Africa. In South Africa, then-President Mbeki was often quoted by aides referring to the unmet needs and aspiration of unemployed urban youth – especially young men – as his greatest challenge, one he later conceded he failed even to dent, and that could soon threaten the sustainability of the country's democracy. Presumably many other leaders share this apprehension.

Looking ahead – the focus of the final section of this booklet – African governments will face not only the familiar problems of unemployment and rising inequality but the unprecedented challenges resulting from climate change and extreme weather events, affecting land use, food, water and disease.

The recent Ebola epidemic in West Africa showed the dangers posed to crowded urban areas when a powerful virus jumps from animals to humans and spreads rapidly through a vulnerable population. States most affected in the Mano River Region had



only recently recovered from devastating civil wars and long periods of authoritarian rule. Their holding of successful national democratic elections was widely seen as a vital step toward development but belied the continued fragility of regimes and states with health systems too weak to deal with the disease. This is, no doubt, a harbinger of the dire dangers ahead, but it did show that international global health networks can forge critically important partnerships that are rightly seen to be in everyone's interest.

To deal with such contingencies in timely and effective ways was the vision and aspiration of the African Renaissance and the reforms of the pan-African institutions described above and that provided an important context for and conditions conducive to EISA's expanded role in electoral assistance and other contributions aimed at helping to entrench and sustain democracy.

It was hoped that by now African leaders would have made a lot more progress in assuming a greater and more appropriate role in designing and advocating their preferred solutions to common and shared problems, whether with public health, food security, safe water or a host of other issues. These also require international partners, but partners who accept that final judgements of the success and value of any ventures lie not with them but with African peoples democratically empowered and secure enough under law to hold their own leaders accountable.

Unfortunately, since President Mbeki was recalled in October 2008 no leader of comparable pan-African standing and vision has succeeded him to advance Africa's international relations, nor has there been any cluster of leaders able to drive pan-African reforms and consensus as did Mbeki, along with presidents Obasanjo, Bouteflika and several others, such as John Kufuor of Ghana and Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia. The current pan-African leadership vacuum is perilous and affects many initiatives, including the important work of a small NGO such as EISA.

The decision not to award the \$5m Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership in 2015, announced on 16 June 2016 by the chair of the Prize Committee, Salim Ahmed Salim, is significant. Salim gives his reasons in an essay that was widely distributed through Africa's independent media (Salim 2016). They indicate the broader problem of national and pan-African democratic leadership, also reflected in the annual Ibrahim index of African Governance.

The 2015 edition is the ninth since the Sudanese philanthropist and former cellular communications business leader, Mo Ibrahim, launched the index in 2007. The main conclusion of this survey of 54 African countries is that 'overall governance progress in Africa is stalling', just when the 193 United Nations members had unanimously

adopted the 2030 sustainable development goals, including the imperative for better governance to carry out the other 16 goals with 157 operational objectives (Ibrahim Index 2015).

The accuracy and fairness of Ibrahim's numerical ranking of each country's performance in terms of the 14 good governance categories will be endlessly debated. What it does convey to election observers, whether pan-African or from abroad, is the huge diversity of and variation in governance among the 54 countries.

On a scale of 100, 70 points separates the best performing country, Mauritius, and the worst, Somalia, with the others dispersed widely among the political, legal, economic and social categories.

The Ibrahim Index provides a useful reference for planning and setting realistic objectives for comprehensive election observation missions. It also points to the importance of more in-depth and comprehensive monitoring and assessment of the integrity of a country's entire electoral process, as will be addressed in the next section.

This opening section should allow the reader to locate EISA's activities within the national, regional and global trends and disruptions since 1996 that had an impact on its work, opening unexpected opportunities and new – often daunting – challenges to the provision of impartial substantial electoral assistance and support for countries struggling to sustain democratic governance in difficult, complex and often unpredictable circumstances – a vital indicator of democracy, especially in fragile countries making the transition from conflict and authoritarian rule.

Shortly before he died in November 1997, political philosopher Sir Isaiah Berlin was asked to name the biggest challenge that would face humanity in the 21st century. He replied: 'Cultural self-determination with a political framework is precisely the issue ... Unless there is a minimum of shared values that can preserve the peace no decent societies can survive' (Gardels (ed) 1995). Berlin's comment seems especially pertinent given Africa's density and diversity of cultures too small to survive alone yet unwilling to be subservient. Lending support to Africans who seek to develop viable and resilient frameworks to manage cultural diversity democratically is the essence of EISA's mission and the way it has attempted to do so and with what effects will be considered in the next section.



NOTES

- 1 The original 14 SADC members were Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Madagascar joined several years later. Impartial external observation of elections in Angola and Swaziland were deemed to be impossible and there were similar problems at times in other SADC member countries.
- 2 The AU recognises eight RECs, the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and SADC.
- 3 A good example of this is the collection of 30 essays in Makgoba (ed) 1999.
- 4 Electoral authoritarians are not unique to Africa. See Morse 2012; LeBas 2016 and Vencovsky 2016.

Putting Democratic Principles into Practice

EISA's First Twenty Years 1996 – 2016

EISA's leaders and staff remain firmly committed to pan-Africanism and democracy, two ideals difficult to define precisely and even harder for an African transnational non-governmental organisation to fund and pursue on a large enough scale and in ways that will create positive practical sustainable benefits for Africa's people and politics.

This section attempts to offer a comprehensive view of both the breadth and depth of EISA's democracy-support work. There is no attempt to report on all its myriad activities since 1996 and countries are cited or listed to illustrate the extent of the institute's reach and priorities in the main programme areas consistent with the emerging pan-African identity of the African Renaissance.

The leadership and staff of the institute believe democracy can never be imposed from above. To thrive it must be 'home grown'. EISA also believes and works to ensure that as countries experiment with democratic governance the lessons they learn – for better or for worse – should be shared, for the benefit of other democracies in Africa and beyond.

The longest segment of the section deals with EISA's work on elections and related political processes. The mainstay of this work is election observation, which enjoys broad pan-African political legitimacy. This allows EISA a cost-effective entry point from which to assess relative democratic commitments and progress in virtually all African countries. Yet generally country-specific engagements are brief and only intermittent, taking place once every four or five years.

In Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Egypt, Mozambique and Rwanda, where EISA has established short-term field offices, it has implemented programmes to support



citizen observation groups in establishing networks to strengthen their engagement in the electoral process, including conducting statistically-based evaluations of election results and assessing multiple stages of an electoral cycle.

In other cases, to acquire a deeper understanding and contribute in more sustained ways to national democratic experiments, longer-term field offices have been established to deal with issues other than those pertaining to elections, including constitution-building, technical support to the electoral management bodies, to political parties in poll watching and to civil society in civic and voter education and the prevention and resolution of electoral and other societal conflicts.

In 2016 there were nine field offices, in the Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Somalia, and Zambia as well as a sub-regional office in Gabon. The offices in Mali and Chad have since been closed.

An important long-running project that complements EISA's electoral monitoring and assessment work is its special project on the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), established in 2004.

This section concludes with reference to EISA as a 'learning' and globally connected institute by virtue of its extensive research and publications programme, annual conferences and forums and leadership of a global network of electoral support groups, which meets annually.

During its first decade the global and continental political winds were generally at EISA's back as it pushed outward from South Africa to help advance pan-African democracy. In its second decade the institute was buffeted by cross currents as democratic progress faltered or stalled in many places in Africa and for many reasons. Those African leaders cited in the previous chapter had left the scene, with successors still not in sight. Despite these setbacks, EISA has continued to prosper and continues to play an important role in keeping alive the vision of pan-African democracy.

EISA took a strategic decision to adopt a continental approach and to align itself formally with the inter-governmental bodies of the African Union and the regional economic councils (RECs). Although the decision to do so has been criticised by important civil society groups and EISA has battled to maintain its reputation for impartiality and evidence-based forthright reporting, in aligning itself with these organisations it has been able to maintain its commitment to help advance and sustain pan-African democracy.

This section tries to answer the question of whether EISA takes on too much in a bid to be relevant both locally and in a pan-African context, as well as credibly independent. It seeks to do so against the backdrop of the dynamic political contexts – national, continental, and global – highlighted in the previous section.

In reviewing and assessing EISA's main programmes and lessons learned it also seeks to inform judgements about whether the institute can and will continue to flourish in the extremely challenging decades immediately ahead for Africa and the world. One of the institute's most attractive attributes is that the people who work there and determine the institutional culture tend to operate as 'idealists without illusions'. It is a label somewhat different from the more familiar one of political realists because they must find ways of adhering to enduring democratic principles while adapting to changing political circumstances.

The decision to go continental was based on an acceptance of the vision of an African Renaissance, described in the first section. Or, as Julia Katherine Seirlis concludes in her detailed report of EISA's first ten years, the underlying goal of Executive Director Denis Kadima's advocacy of continent-wide programming in areas of elections and democratic governance is to challenge 'existing definitions of centre and periphery, of what is allowed – or supposed – to constitute international and global best practice' (Seirlis 2008, p 137). She adds a telling quote from Kadima: 'Why should we say anything that comes from the United States is global? We want to be seen as setting trends, and that what we can do is world class' (Seirlis 2008).

To make this point credibly meant that EISA's electoral assistance henceforth would encompass all 54 African states. The only way this could be managed effectively would be in association with the African Union. A Memorandum of Understanding was formally signed in 2008 and renewed for another five years at a formal signing in Addis Ababa on 9 June 2014. Several similar agreements have been signed with regional economic communities.

Formal agreements would not have been sought or possible with the AU's predecessor, the Organization of African Unity, which was constrained by its commitment to stricter adherence to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states. The AU, while still committed to the principle of non-interference, has adopted a more nuanced informal norm, which encourages the Union to be 'not indifferent' to conditions within member states, especially those that might threaten regional peace and security. Election observation, as noted above, has become a legitimate pan-African instrument for gaining access to the internal political affairs of member states and, in



principle, allows for early warning signals of trouble as well as encouraging acceptance and entrenchment of democratic processes procedures and principles.

Gauging the actual integrity of particular elections remains an enormous and complex challenge for EISA, especially where it is operating under the mandate and authority of the AU and/or one of the RECs. Independent impartial international election observer and electoral support groups, such as The Carter Center, will not and cannot operate without the formal invitation of a host government and within guidelines determined by those governments and their purportedly impartial national electoral management bodies.

As long as EISA operates independently it can evaluate the terms offered by host governments, undertake whatever pre-election assessments it deems appropriate and necessary and then decide for itself, contingent also on donor support, whether, for how long and how many people it will deploy to observe a particular African election.

EISA has gambled, so far successfully in my view, on the African Renaissance ideal – the notion that democracy must be home grown within any society. From a practical perspective it correctly assumed, along with the leaders who successfully reformed the AU, that Africa is too culturally diverse and territorially fragmented and lacks the resources to impose unity from above, by a single leader, faction or exclusive coalition. Nor can it be imposed from outside. But the likelihood of sustainable democracy can be improved if it is carried out in the sunlight of international, credible, impartial external observers in terms of mutually agreed ground rules.

Successful elections are today widely accepted as a necessary if insufficient step towards achieving local democratic governance and developing a more politically capable state that will be a more reliable regional partner. This should also serve the wider objectives of the resolve for collective action to enhance regional security and prosperity and to engage the rest of the world more effectively and on a more equal footing.

For centuries Africa has been the victim, rather than the beneficiary, of the two longest-running attempts to establish order in an anarchical world prone to chaos and deadly conflict. The oldest and most ubiquitous was 'empire', or what, for centuries, were cycles of imperial ascendancy and collapse as insatiable greed and ambition became unsustainable. The second model comprises variations of diplomatically improvised and militarily backed balances of power that arose in Europe out of the 17th century's successful curbing of local religious wars and led to more bounded imperialism, which, in Africa, resulted in the colonial exploitation and fragmentation that is now the continent's dysfunctional interstate system.

That system was, of course, sustained during the latter half of the 20th century by the anomalous US-Soviet bi-polar nuclear-based balance of power that wrought havoc in post-colonial Africa. As the world struggles to find a new, better and more lasting pathway to peace and prosperity, the shared vision of the African Renaissance and of EISA is that Africa, for once, will become one of the co-founders of a new order, not one of its exploitable objects. Africa, according to this vision, can only thrive as a community of democracies, regionally and globally.

Overall, EISA's record in the past decade in contributing to building a more citizen-based national and regional democratic order has necessarily been mixed. African governments continue to be vulnerable to domestic factionalised violence, abuses of power by incumbent authorities, evidence of rampant corruption, sometimes pernicious foreign influences of governments and multilateral financial institutions and threats of global terrorist and criminal networks.

Thus far a weakened but still discernible consensus in support of pan-African democracy persists and EISA plays an important role in helping to sustain it through its major programme, which supports 'Elections and Political Processes' and its other programmes, which focus on helping to sustain the African Peer Review Mechanism, assisting African parliaments, strengthening civil society and political parties and producing research into and publications about a wide array of Africa's democracy issues and institutions.¹¹

Elsewhere in the world there has been a disturbing escalation in ugly political forces, nativism and xenophobic nationalism. These outbreaks, in 2016, dominated world headlines as they took place in several of the world's oldest and most stable democracies, as well as among the so-called 'Big Emerging Markets'. The leaders of Africa's generally politically weak and economically poor states cannot afford confrontation with outsiders or severe repression internally so will continue, to varying degrees, to endorse democratic norms and processes, ensuring continuing demand for EISA's pro-democracy services and support.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PROCESSES

EISA has sent its own election observation missions to more than 30 African countries, all but one (Egypt) sub-Saharan, and several on multiple occasions since 1996.²

Since 2014 the institute's technical support teams have been deployed to all AU Election Observer Missions (EOMs). In its first year the countries monitored were Algeria, Botswana, Egypt, Guinea Bissau, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, São Tomé and Príncipe, South Africa and Tunisia.



In 2016 it has assisted African Union EOMs (AUEOMs) to Benin, the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Comoros, Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Niger and Uganda and plans to go to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (if elections are held), Equatorial Guinea, the Gambia (despite a decision by the Economic Community of West African States not to do so), Ghana, São Tomé and Príncipe and Zambia. EISA's support typically includes technical advice to each mission co-ordination team, facilitating observer briefing and orientation sessions, supporting the use of better information technologies, such as tablets, to speed up and render more comprehensive reports of voter conditions and contributing to drafting key AUEOM statements, reports and the handling of public relations (<https://eisa.org.za/index.php/support-to-the-african-union>).

In 2016 EISA, on its own, mounted a mission to the Ugandan presidential and parliamentary elections and a limited observation team to the volatile South African municipal elections and to the 11 August Zambian presidential election.

EISA supports AU and REC EOMs, mostly operating according to the terms agreed to under memorandums of understanding (MoU) with each of these organisations. The Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African REC with which EISA has had the longest and most extensive partnership, is not covered by a MoU.

In 2015 EISA opened and continues to staff a liaison office in Gabon for one of the weakest of the RECs, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). Other MoUs are operative with the East African Community (EAC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and, for over a decade, EISA staff have worked closely with SADC's Secretariat in Botswana, including the Directorate of its Organ on Politics, Defence and Security.

In addition to its inter-governmental pan-African work EISA has also called attention to the importance of empowering domestic civil society groups in all countries in which it operates, noting that:

Political considerations remain a challenge, as they continue to hamper the ability of these regional and continental bodies to effectively confront the ills of electoral processes. EISA believes that electoral processes on the continent stand a better chance of credibility and improvement if they are closely monitored by the people of the countries in which they take place. To achieve this, EISA has placed emphasis on supporting civil society organisations in their efforts to conduct domestic election observation.

<https://eisa.org.za/index.php/partnership-and-support-to-regional-economic-communities>.

The institute does not need to rely on its own criteria and prescriptions for conducting peaceful, open and inclusive democratic elections. As noted above, EISA was one of the original contributors to and endorsers of the 'Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation' (DoP), launched in October 2005 at the United Nations headquarters in New York, a ceremony at which EISA was present, as well as the 'Declaration of Global Principles for Non-Partisan Election Observation (GNDEM)' commemorated in April 2012 also at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Since then the DoP has been endorsed by 52 organisations and the GNDEM by more than 200 election-monitoring groups in more than 100 countries.

In addition to applying the DoP, which EISA documents refer to as a 'Global benchmark', the institute relies on several African benchmarks, including:

- OAU/AU Declaration on Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, African Union, 2002;
- EAC Principles for Election Observation and Evaluation (Guidelines for EAC Election Observation Missions; Code of Conduct for Election Observers), November 2012;
- Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol A/SPI/12/o I on Democracy and Good Governance Supplementary to the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, Dakar, December 2001;
- International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, 1 December 2006;
- SADC, Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (Revised 2015), Adopted by the Ministerial Committee of the Organ (MCO) on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation on 20 July 2015; SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, 17 August 2008; SADC Parliamentary Forum Norms and Standards for Elections in SADC Region, Adopted by the SADC Parliamentary Forum Plenary Assembly on 25 March 2001;³ and
- The Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC region

(<https://eisa.org.za/pdf/pemmo.pdf>).

AU and REC missions have usually reached consensus with other non-governmental and non-African inter-governmental groups monitoring voting practices in member countries.

Agreement among various observer groups should encourage greater confidence in any regime's legitimacy at home and abroad. At the same time there must be greater



clarity about and mutual understanding of the priorities and interests different NGO and intergovernmental observer groups bring to complex and often volatile local politics that could topple or sustain a regime, including the outbreak and escalation of deadly conflict.

Conflict management mechanisms

An area of innovation is the introduction of the EISA Conflict Management Panels (CMPs), an alternative dispute resolution mechanism to manage and resolve election-related conflict. In 1998 EISA conducted a survey on resolving election-related conflicts. Respondents, who included election stakeholders in the region and members of all 14 SADC election management bodies (EMBs), identified the need to consider an alternative dispute resolution mechanism.

EISA designed and developed an election conflict management programme entitled 'Democracy, Elections and Conflict Management' and conducted training together with the EMB in each SADC country, training trainers, who, in turn, trained mediators in alternative dispute resolution. In 1999 EISA, in partnership with South Africa's Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), introduced conflict management panels. Mediators were selected from among the stakeholders and were trained and deployed to assist the IEC in responding to election related conflicts. This model has since been replicated in several countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo (where 3 300 mediators were on the ground in 2005 and 2006), Lesotho, Malawi and Zambia. In this way facilitation and problem-solving has become part of the repertoire of conflict handling skills for key election stakeholders and mediation has been used as a speedy tool to resolve certain kinds of electoral conflicts.

In some countries, among them South Africa, the resolution of conflict by mediation or conciliation is part of the electoral law.

Electoral best practice

EISA has been at the forefront of the development of a set of criteria to guide electoral practice and foster a sound enabling environment in which elections can take place. As mentioned in the previous section, an initiative between the institute and the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC countries (ECF), the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC region (PEMMO) was adopted on 6 November 2003. Drawing together more than 100 participants from governments, electoral commissions, political parties, civil society, research institutions and electoral and political experts from the SADC region, PEMMO was a collective and consultative process offering a guide to 'best electoral management practice'.

PEMMO has been used by various institutions and organisations, apart from EISA and the ECF, in their election observation assessments. EISA has also joined the international community in providing a framework for a systematic and professional assessment of credible elections and, as stated above, is a signatory to the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. EISA continues to remain a strong contributor to the quest for improved and better electoral practices on the continent.

ELECTORAL INTEGRITY: ELUSIVE AND ESSENTIAL

Determining the integrity of an entire electoral process poses challenges in identifying and evaluating allegations and evidence of fraud and abuses of power. Those most responsible, at least initially, for such abuses are usually the incumbent authorities with privileged access to state financial, security and patronage resources – leaders and interests with the most to lose in an upcoming election, especially in states where the rule of law and respect for constitutional constraints are weak and ineffective.

Khabele Matlosa, Gilbert M Khadiagala and Victor Shale, however, note in their introduction to *When Elephants Fight*, a collection of essays on election violence, that:

While in some countries the integrity of the electoral process has ensured the positive contribution of elections to democracy, peace and development, in others elections are used as a shield for authoritarian governance. The fact that elections can be used both to promote and to undermine democratic governance is a paradox which has given rise to a lot of questions about the value and meaning of elections in Africa.

Matlosa, Khadiagala & Shale 2010

Susan D Hyde (2011) explores this paradox at greater length, noting that election observation has become such an international norm that undemocratic leaders risk international legitimacy and access to many benefits if they do not welcome international observers. The presumption is that if they were the democratic leaders they claim to be there would be nothing to hide. So the game becomes one of deception with the risk of discovery. Hence the challenges and importance of more comprehensive informed electoral observation, especially by the AU and RECs.

Non-partisan election observers, including those from the AU and the RECs, can gain valuable information about previous and comparable election behaviour by accessing at least two data sets on the conduct of hundreds of elections around the world. Each has been organised within a common and comprehensive electoral process framework that allows comparisons of current electoral conduct with previous elections in a particular country as well as elections in other countries, both African and non-African.



The older and less prescriptively ambitious of these dates back to 1998 under the auspices of a consortium of international observer groups, including EISA, known as the Administration and Cost of Elections Project (ACE). The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network is an online knowledge repository that provides comprehensive information and customised advice on electoral processes, plus global statistics and data and an encyclopaedia on elections.⁴

The other is the more recent and ambitious Electoral Integrity Project (EIP), launched in 2012 and now jointly run by Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and the University of Sydney's Department of Government and International Relations under the overall direction of Professor Pippa Norris (www.electoralintegrityproject.com).

On 15 June 2015 the EIP issued its first regional report, based on surveys conducted in 28 African countries from the second half of 2012 to the end of 2014 (EIP 2015). The country assessments comprise surveys of 'experts' in all phases of the country's electoral process. Questionnaires were sent to 1 070 experts (about 40 per country), with a response rate of 23%.

The elements assessed were:

- Electoral laws;
- Electoral procedures;
- Boundaries of voting districts;
- Voter registration;
- Party and candidate registration;
- Campaign media;
- Campaign finance;
- Voting process;
- Vote count;
- Results; and
- Electoral authorities

Results in each category were as varied as the countries holding elections.

Regarding the key elements of an electoral process most vulnerable to fraud and abuse, and/or decisive in rendering overall judgments about the integrity of an African election, EIP leaders would only conclude that this depended on conditions in each of the countries.

Among other general conclusions of the report were:

- The degree of threat to electoral integrity is more severe in Africa than in the rest of the world;
- The types of problems in Africa are similar to those found in the rest of the world;
- Elections can fail long before election day, so attention should be paid to the electoral dynamics and institutional quality over the entire election cycle;
- State resources for elections are important but not determinant;
- Difficulties in regulating campaign finance extend across the continent;
- The vote count is consistently the highest-rated part of the election cycle;
- Countries with good overall electoral integrity may still perform poorly in certain dimensions ... [and] low overall performers may excel in certain dimensions; and
- Case studies of two countries with similar levels of economic development can reveal vastly different levels of electoral integrity.

As should be evident from this thumbnail summary, the EIP can serve as a general guide for observer missions to African elections. If guidelines for more in-depth reporting are to be developed and accepted, much more work is needed on each element in a particular situation and this will take time.

Meanwhile new EOM groups – domestic and international as well as inter-governmental and non-governmental – are being helped by expanding and stronger and better-connected networks of international observer groups in Africa and globally.

To address issues relating to the integrity of an election beyond the actual voting there are new attempts to develop and make easily accessible a set of 'democratic election standards' to cover all ten elements in the EIP electoral process.

These standards are rooted in public international humanitarian laws and covenants most governments have already vowed to respect and, in many cases, have endorsed formally and, when appropriate, ratified. Together with more specifically election-related instruments such as provisions in the AU Constitutive Act and the ACDEG, these commitments or obligations could provide a legitimate template with which to assess the overall integrity of an electoral process.⁵

Twenty attributes against which observers of the full election cycle could assess a host government's performance are familiar democratic rights and freedoms which few, if any, governments ever fully satisfy. And degrees of performance under each require



careful informed judgements by election observers, with results that are bound to be somewhat subjective and often spark local controversy and sometimes disagreement among various observer groups, foreign and domestic.

The 20 attributes are:

- Right and opportunity to vote;
- Right and opportunity to be elected;
- Right and opportunity to participate in public affairs;
- Freedom of association;
- Freedom of assembly;
- Freedom of movement;
- Freedom of opinion and expression;
- Transparency and access to information;
- Right to security of the person;
- Freedom from discrimination and equality before the law;
- Equality between men and women;
- Right to a fair and public hearing;
- Right to an effective remedy;
- Universal suffrage;
- Equal suffrage;
- Secret ballot;
- Periodic elections;
- Prevention of corruption;
- State must take necessary steps to give effect to rights;
- Rule of law.

Readily available and widely applied election principles and codes of conduct for EOMs, along with the continued development and acceptance of democratic election standards and the EIP should contribute to better, more in-depth reporting, not just on voting but on the overall integrity of the electoral process.

Tensions between EOMs and host governments are varied and frequent. International NGOs are less constrained politically than their inter-governmental counterparts and sometimes issue the most critical assessments, based on their evidence of fraud, intimidation, and other actions that call into serious question the credibility of official results. Reports and recommendations issued by inter-governmental EOMs, however, presumably carry greater weight with the host government, which may be a member of that organisation. When providing technical assistance to AU and REC missions, EISA staff sometimes have to stand by while the findings issued by those missions are less critical of the conduct of a particular election than EISA's would have been.

To improve its work with the AU and REC election observation missions EISA is to publish a book on electoral integrity, which includes seven country case studies and concludes with recommendations for improving the credibility and effectiveness of these inter-governmental missions.

EISA recommends that inter-governmental EOMs cooperate and coordinate more closely to allow the more capable partner, most often the AU, to help strengthen the sub-regional bodies and, where possible, work out a mutually satisfactory division of labour for fuller coverage of all electoral elements.

EISA also recommends attempting to forge consensus findings and recommendations for improvements in future elections. To do so risks withholding critical findings and judgements, but holding EOMs to internationally accepted principles and standards should help. EISA sees as a positive development the rapidly growing and increasingly professional networks of grassroots organisations within African countries which are closer to the problems of local voter registration, boundary delimitation, the role of local police, abuses of incumbency advantages and many other issues.

Citizen election observation groups are also often well connected through cellular communication, which can provide early warning functions and alert foreign EOMs to patterns of abuse. In many African countries these groups have, or will soon acquire, the capacity to produce their own independent parallel vote tabulations.

EISA recommends closer communication among these groups and the inter-governmental EOMs to discourage public confusion and possible unrest because of the release of information ahead of official results, but also as a useful check and the possible source of questions about the validity of official results. Regular consultation with civil society representatives and involving major groups in inter-EOM information-sharing and, where possible, issuing joint statements, can add to the overall credibility and validate the integrity of the process.

Electronic tablets provide EOMs and local civil society organisation observers with an important tool for assessing grassroots electoral behaviour quickly and comprehensively and relaying information, including any gaps between the behaviour of key stakeholders and previously agreed national and local rules, as well as applicable regional and international treaties, covenants or formal declarations.

EISA began exploring the use of this technology in the field in 2011 and devoted its annual symposium that year to the role and potential of information and communication technologies in electoral processes.



In 2013 EISA launched open source free software for computers, tablets and cellphones, which it named *Popola*, a Zulu term meaning 'to examine or to look closely', first testing it in Malawi that year. Since 2014 *Popola* has been used by more than ten AUEOMs and in EISA's own EOM to the 2016 Uganda election. Beyond more rapid and detailed reporting of facts, *Popola* can also access more than 200 international legal instruments that may be relevant to the broader determination of electoral integrity. The information, compiled by the Carter Center's Democratic Election Standards project is organised and cross-referenced in terms of 21 categories of basic rights and takes account of all ten stages of an electoral cycle (www.getemlo.org).

Access to this information allows observers to question and evaluate government electoral policies and behaviour, not in terms of some formula devised by the observers, their donors, or in accordance with a preferred ideology, but strictly in terms of that government's own decisions to adhere to these principles, standards and obligations. The role of impartial observers becomes one of seeking clarity and an explanation for any apparent gaps between them and a country's behaviour, and this information can then be used to judge electoral integrity beyond the day of actual voting.

EISA is also lobbying for the AU and REC EOMs to ration their resources better by setting annual election priorities, with longer-term and more robust missions to countries that are recovering from civil wars or authoritarian rule or are under apparent internal stress and are prone to violence for other reasons.

Member states with more stable and resilient democracies and an established record of successful national elections require only minimal external monitoring. In countries with a history of partisan violence or where strong early warning signs of conflict are evident, mediation by the AU or RECs could have a positive effect, but such mediation should not be linked to the tasks of election monitoring and assessment.

Finally, EISA is encouraging AU and REC EOMs to produce, publish and disseminate reports on each mission as quickly as possible. These allow member governments, civil society, political parties and other election stakeholders to learn important lessons from each other and to develop local and regional 'best practices'. In mandating members to hold regular elections subject to external observation by EOMs comprised of citizens from neighbouring countries and other member states, the AU and RECs are encouraging a peer review process intended to reveal potential dangers to the democratic process.

IN-COUNTRY DEMOCRATIC PARTNERS

In the past 20 years EISA has forged a variety of trust-based partnerships that complement and advance its core strategy of providing support for democratic

elections and political processes. These partnerships aim both to help the country that is directly benefiting and to yield lessons that may be applied elsewhere. The main partnership categories are: electoral management bodies (EMBs), political parties, parliaments and other legislative bodies, CSOs and local governments.

In those countries in which it establishes long-term field offices EISA does its most extensive and in-depth work with grassroots civil society, political parties and political institutions. It also advances the role and influence of women. The ten countries in which EISA has concentrated such efforts are all under severe internal political stress, either because of a history of internal conflicts, current threats to fragile stability and/or autocratic rule. They are widely dispersed geographically and are culturally diverse and EISA concluded that each also has the potential to contribute to democratic development.

Somalia, which poses security challenges for EISA staff, is probably the most politically difficult terrain in which it works. The Somali government and civil society are extremely weak, but EISA's field office has been able to work with fledgling civil society groups, undertake citizen education programmes and assist fragile political parties and Parliament.

Other notable projects it shares with political parties and parliaments are in Kenya, Mozambique and Madagascar. And while helping advance gender equality is a priority for all field offices, support for women's rights and greater roles in politics have been especially strenuous and sustained in Madagascar.

EISA has worked with CSOs in other African countries as well, training citizen observers, enabling them to assess electoral processes in credible and professional ways and often contributing to electoral reform efforts. In Côte d'Ivoire this entailed training political party poll watchers ahead of the 2015 presidential election, in which 10 candidates competed.

In the democratically troubled state of Rwanda EISA helped launch or sustain CSO electoral support networks, while a looser process prevails in Egypt, with EISA sharing its recommendations with CSOs to assist them in strengthening their observation processes and encouraging greater coordination among citizen observers.

Voter education programmes have been a focus in South Africa, where EISA is an active member of the South African civil society observation and voter education network.

CSO observers are not always trained in their own countries. For example, in 2009 EISA held a session in South Africa for representatives of CSOs involved in citizen



observation in Algeria, Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. A second training session was held in Dakar, Senegal, that year for CSO representatives from Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Congo (Republic), Côte d'Ivoire, the DRC, Gabon, Madagascar, Niger, Senegal and Togo. These sessions are not only important for the training of individuals but help to create networks of pro-democracy colleagues spread out across communities all over Africa but who remain socially and professionally networked and able to continue sharing electoral lessons and experiences.

Among Africa's eight RECs, EISA has the longest and most extensive experience in contributing to building the capacity of CSOs in the SADC countries. As national networks have gained skills and confidence not only in poll-watching but in running civic and voter education programmes they have increasingly come to standardise good practices across the region, in accordance with PEMMO. When one or more countries lag in applying PEMMO and other election principles, they come under peer pressure to reform. For the most part this has had positive effects, ensuring that the benchmarks set in PEMMO influence new laws positively.

EISA rightly believes that electoral processes stand a better chance of credibility and improvement if they are closely monitored by citizens of the countries in which they take place.

Related to its work in support of CSOs, EISA has, since 2007, become concerned with strengthening parliaments and political parties, particularly in countries such as the DRC, Madagascar and Kenya, where it has field offices. Its activities in this regard include:

- Strengthening the capacity of members of parliament to play a more effective role in legislative, representation and oversight functions, especially with regard to electoral processes at national, provincial and local levels;
- Assisting parliaments and national civil society organisations to develop effective mechanisms for allowing civil society participation in legislative processes; and
- Sharing best practices among African parliaments, through exchanges and helping the Pan African Parliament to become a more effective partner of national legislatures.

Over the years EISA staff have undertaken fact-finding missions to many African countries to gain a better understanding of the different roles played by parliaments and especially their strategic plans and powers relative to other government branches. Here too, EISA has been able, informally, to encourage peer learning among parliaments.

EISA's broader interest in national governance beyond electoral support prompted some experimentation in its first decade, but, in 2010, it decided to wind down work with local governments in South and Southern Africa, as well as projects on national democracy protection institutions such as human rights commissions. Priority would be accorded instead to expanding work on political parties, initially, and still concentrating most in-country work in South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho and, to a lesser extent, Swaziland. With the expansion of its field offices around the continent EISA's representatives have been responsive to requests for assistance for political parties, provided this can be effected on a non-partisan basis.

Working with political parties is always a highly sensitive process and EISA staff adopt an 'adaptive, flexible and responsive' approach to requests for assistance that reflects local political particularities rooted in different constitutional provisions, institutional arrangements and degrees of democratic development. An area where EISA has found frequent interest and support is in helping parties to include young voters and women. It has also had notable repeated success in building on its electoral work by assisting political parties to enhance their ability to monitor the electoral process.

Wherever the main contending parties in an election are able to deploy their own trusted and professionally trained poll watchers to report accurately and quickly to their party headquarters, along with the reporting that is being tabulated officially and, in more and more cases, by socially networked CSOs, the likelihood of claims of fraud and abuse can be addressed more rapidly and effectively according to evidence-based reporting from trusted sources.

EISA's pan-African effort to assist political parties brought party representatives from all over the continent to Johannesburg for a conference in 2010 for the purpose of debating, refining and taking home a set of 'benchmarks' for self and peer review purposes. This document, or check-list of some 124 items, is organised in two broad categories. The Political System covers the rules, rights and responsibilities of parties and the Political Party Institutional and Organisational Focus deals with structural issues.

The aim of the benchmarks has been 'to enhance the capacity of parties in Africa to be effective, accountable, responsive, transparent and internally democratic'. Whether or not this has occurred in specific instances may eventually become evident should the APRM function as originally envisioned.



APRM

When the New Partnership for African Development (Nepad) was established in 2003, agreeing to reciprocal access to elections was an important start, but in order to build more solid regional peace, stability and cooperation, more extensive peer review of governance was recognised as important, as was the APRM, which was established in the same year. In July 2008 Nepad was incorporated into the AU.

EISA began to develop a new programme interest in the APRM in 2004. Playing to its strengths, it began engaging national APRM processes in six countries it already knew well and that were among the first to sign up for peer review. These were Kenya, Mauritius, South Africa, Mozambique and Malawi. Its focus in each case was 'to capacitate and empower civil society to engage with national governments and the official APRM structures on a continuous and mutually beneficial basis' (<https://eisa.org.za/index.php/african-peer-review-mechanism-support-program>).

The peer review process promised to cover areas of good governance that might have a bearing on electoral integrity and EISA's emerging strategy to help sustain democracy on the continent. However, there was some doubt about whether African governments signing up to Nepad and the APRM were really committed to addressing issues of governance. The process would take place exclusively among governments and, initially, little or no account would be taken of the views, interests and democratic aspirations of Africa's civil society groups or of public opinion.

The leaders and staff of EISA were naturally concerned. The institute, having itself emerged out of a domestic pro-democracy civil society organisation, was well aware of the crucial role international civil society had played in monitoring African elections and in encouraging greater involvement by civil society EOMs.

The number of countries signing up for peer review grew slowly and, by 2016, 35 of the AU's 54 members had acceded to it.

The result of Nepad's incorporation into the AU was that the APRM was left on its own to the extent of having its own structures, budget and operations. These include:

- At the highest level, the APR Forum, a Committee of the Heads of State and Government of those countries voluntarily participating in the APRM;
- A panel of seven eminent persons with 'expertise in areas of political governance, macro-economic management, public financial management and corporate governance' who are appointed by the forum and whose primary task is consider and review each country's report and to make recommendations to the forum;

- These findings are based on the work of an APR Country Review Team appointed by the APR Panel and proposes steps that the Panel and ultimately the Heads of State APR Forum could recommend the country under review take until the next country report was issued; and
- An APR Secretariat based in South Africa, which coordinates the work of the others and with the national structures responsible for generating the data, analysis and drafting the country report.

In the early years of the APRM several countries, starting with Ghana, completed self-reviews and received feedback from the forum. By 2008, when the APRM was cut loose from Nepad, the process was faltering badly. EISA's APRM project had helped countries to prepare their reports and believes it played an important role in drawing civil society groups into the process.

This entailed persuading governments of the need to have greater civil society input into the reviews and, more importantly, to improve policies, gain public acceptance and advance better governance. Simultaneously, EISA also played an important role in convincing civil society leaders that the APRM should not be dismissed as mere window dressing for imposing International Monetary Fund/World Bank programmes on African countries. Several country reports generated critically positive reviews both locally and internationally.

By 2008, however, the biggest proponents of Nepad, presidents Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, had both left office. The APRM Secretariat faltered and then was without a leader for several years. For a time Ethiopia's Meles Zenawi chaired the forum, but he was no democrat and then died suddenly while still in office. Liberia's Ellen Johnson Sirleaf succeeded him and seemed keen to revitalise the process but became preoccupied with dealing with her country's Ebola epidemic. Meanwhile, terms of APRM panel members expired and were not renewed, the secretariat was without an executive director and funds were running low and not being replenished as African governments appeared to lose interest and failed to pay their bills.

Ironically, until recently the most vocal advocates for continuing and for strengthening the APRM were not government champions but rather former sceptics from civil society groups.

However, since President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya was elected chair of the APRM in 2015 he has become a champion of its revival, possibly hoping to be remembered as a leader committed to Thabo Mbeki's earlier vision of an Africa able to take care



of itself without foreign interference and to offer the rest of the world partnership opportunities based on mutual respect, interests and shared democratic values.

Whatever Kenyatta's reasons, the APRM appears to be undergoing its own version of an African Renaissance, with a revitalised panel ably chaired by Algerian scientist Mustapha Mekideche and a dynamic new executive director, Professor Eddy Maloka of South Africa.

Four missions were undertaken in the first half of 2016, to Liberia, Chad, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, and others are planned to Sudan, South Africa and Uganda. For several countries, notably South Africa and Senegal, which have already been reviewed, there will be baselines available for comparison, to see whether any of the initial recommendations have been adopted.

SHARING ANALYSES OF AFRICA'S DEMOCRATIC IDEAS AND INNOVATIONS

EISA has devoted substantial amounts of time and institutional resources to being more than an operational pan-African NGO. It also is an important centre of learning and teaching about democracy, elections and governance. If it is to retain its leadership in offering and providing electoral support, the philosophical and practical analytical underpinnings, backed by serious research, will always be essential.

Every country committed to finding its own democratic path forward has to compromise among competing factions that are reflected in flawed constitutions, institutions that are less than ideal and regulatory loopholes. The more thought and analysis independent impartial groups and individuals such as the staff and associates of EISA can bring to these political experiments, including sharing comparative lessons across countries and regions, the better.

With the introduction in 2006 of an annual continental symposium, opportunities have been created for EISA's partners, donors, academics, political parties and key electoral stakeholders, including EMBs and civil society, to interrogate pertinent issues of democracy, elections and governance.

Each symposium considers a broad theme of importance to the advancement and sustainability of democracy. Past symposia have addressed, among other topics, constitutional reforms, gender equality in politics, the causes and consequences of political party alliances, the lessons learned from decades of election observation on the continent, the role of new technologies in electoral processes, preventing and managing violent election-related conflict and strengthening democratic governance through

the APRM. All these symposia have resulted in publications that are disseminated across the continent and beyond.

EISA's robust publications programme includes much more than these books – conference proceedings, occasional papers, research reports and the factual and technical reports of electoral missions. EISA's *Journal of African Elections* (JAE), first published in 2002 and the only African accredited journal on the subject of elections, is widely distributed. The JAE typically deals with a pertinent theme and attracts contributors from African universities, think tanks and civil society organisations, who share their research, experience and insights.

Although staff are expected to produce their own articles, edit books on work-related topics and even, occasionally, write a book, the time for such intellectual pursuits is severely constrained. As a result, informal partnerships and collaborative links to universities in South Africa and elsewhere have emerged over the years, to mutual advantage.

EISA recruits and uses to great advantage student interns from nearby universities and, in 2016, introduced an essay competition for young learners entitled 'Youth Perspectives of the Future of Democracy in Africa'. EISA staff have occasionally offered seminars on their experiences and have lately begun to experiment with new courses in international politics and the comparative politics of African democratic elections. However, they face the constant pressures of electoral mission deadlines and administrative duties that pre-empt time for writing, research and engaging scholars and students interested in learning more about democracy at home and in Africa.

DONORS

EISA operates on an annual budget of between R75 million and R100 million, depending on the current mix of projects and programme activities. All this money must be raised from foreign donors. There are normally about 12 or 15 contributors, the largest being the democratic Nordic governments – Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden – with the Swedish international development agency (Sida) the most generous over the years.

Substantial assistance has also been received from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the European Commission. The State Department of the United States and the Open Society Institute for Southern Africa (OSISA) have made contributions.



So far EISA has been very successful in funding fully its growing array of democracy support activities across Africa. There are, however, at least three looming issues that might make it difficult to meet funding goals in the future. One is that European donors are facing new demands on their budgets that could lead to major reductions in foreign assistance. The huge influx of refugees from the Middle East and immigrants from Africa is one cause, which may have secondary political effects if right-wing nationalist and isolationist politicians come to power. The United Kingdom's recent decision to leave the European Union has already caused a sharp drop in the value of the British pound, with indications of a major economic recession ahead.

A second constraint results from decisions by several African countries to impose new restrictions on CSOs and on foreign donors wishing to support them. Even if these decisions are not directed at EISA, partnering with African CSOs, providing them with capacity-building assistance and collaboration and supporting their efforts to contribute to APRM reports and other efforts to advance good governance may be constrained.⁶

A third issue is that Africa may face an array of challenges in the coming decade, many arising from the effects of climate change, rapid population growth, globalisation and threats from transnational terror and criminal networks that will make EISA's work ever more difficult and costly. The next and final section of this booklet speculates on the scope and nature of these developments and how EISA might begin to plan for some of the more likely contingencies that could have an impact on the prospects for sustainable democracy in Africa.

IN RETROSPECT

EISA may be one of the world's most modestly audacious non-governmental organisations. It has played an important supporting role in advancing the African Union's decision obliging all members to hold periodic credible national elections and to allow AU electoral observation missions to monitor the voting.

Degrees of electoral integrity vary as widely as the size, nature and cultural diversity of the AU's member states, yet EISA presses on, confident in and determined to help ensure the long-term goal of sustainable democracy throughout Africa as the only viable way of gradually accreting regional integration.

EISA will host three events as part of its October 2016 20th Anniversary celebration, all forward looking. One will be its 11th Annual Symposium, on the topic: 'Current Democratic Realities in Africa: Where Are We Headed Beyond the Vote?' Hundreds of African democrats from more than 20 countries are expected to attend, including

such key democratic stakeholders as election management bodies, CSOs, the AU and RECs, members of parliaments, leaders of political parties, international NGOs, aid agencies and scholars working on democracy issues. They will analyse and debate papers assessing the forces that are pulling African states closer to democratic consolidation as well as the countervailing ones pushing democratic descent.

Several of the issues raised in this booklet will be discussed at the symposium, among them, the entrenchment of incumbent leaders who remove or defy constitutional restraints; inclusiveness vs marginalisation of identity groups in a national electorate; tensions between national security and human rights stated goals in light of actual policies; separation of powers and ensuring the independence of electoral management bodies in countries where executive power defies intended constitutional constraints; the role of partisan money in African political campaigns and citizens' access to information, including unencumbered social media networks amid real or purported national security concerns. Among the symposium's objectives the most important is to '[o]ffer prospects for the sustenance of democratic consolidation in Africa'.

EISA will also host a second event, the eleventh annual meeting of election observation groups from around the world. Only two of these annual gatherings have been held in Africa. The previous one, in 2008, was also hosted by EISA and met in Maputo, Mozambique.

Of the 52 organisations that have endorsed the Declaration of Principles for international Election Observation and Code of Conduct, about half are expected to attend. Although this gathering is less formal than the symposium, the themes to be discussed this year will be complementary and include: 'The growing trend of entrenched incumbency'; 'Support to civil society groups working in closed societies'; 'Conflict and electoral violence'; 'Disability and other inclusivity issues'; 'Money in politics and abuse of state resources'.

The third event is EISA's first youth essay competition, giving African democrats under the age of 25 an opportunity to think, write about, and be recognised for their views on the theme, 'Democracy in Africa today and the future I see'. In sponsoring this competition EISA is not only encouraging a new generation of democrats but is also pledging to disseminate the results through its inter-governmental and other networks so that the perspectives of young Africans can contribute to discussions of these issues across the continent.⁷



The importance of EISA continuing to provide electoral support seems clear, although priorities and programmes may need to be adapted in response to changing circumstances, including among EISA's African inter-governmental and donor partners. EISA has forged increasingly fruitful partnerships with regional economic communities. Although these RECs are as varied as the states comprising them, they are the potential building blocks for a new and more democratic pan-African continental community.

NOTES

- 1 EISA has produced more than 300 publications. A list of these, along with descriptions of all programmes and activities, can be found on its website, <https://eisa.org.za>
- 2 Countries to which EISA has sent election observation missions are: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, DRC, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zanzibar, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
- 3 Full texts available at the website of each REC.
- 4 ACE is a collaborative effort among nine organisations: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, EISA, Elections Canada, the National Electoral Institute of Mexico, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, The Carter Center, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme and the UN Electoral Assistance Division.
- 5 The Carter Center has reviewed close to 200 human rights treaties, covenants and other instruments relevant to elections and has developed an easily searchable 'Election Obligations and Standards Database' (see <https://www.cartercenter.org/>), see www.eos.cartercenter.org
- 6 This problem is not unique to Africa, but, according to Thomas Carothers, democracy expert at the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, reflects a much wider trend, with China, India and Russia prominently curtailing CSOs (Carothers 2015).
- 7 Preliminary proposals have been received from 21 students in Burundi, CAR, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Tanzania, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria and Zimbabwe.

African Renaissance Redux?

2016-2026

The focus of this concluding section is on the decade ahead. It offers two sets of scenarios distilled from the data sets and analysis of research institutions, one focused on global trends, the other on alternative futures for Africa, with particular attention paid to the impact on the continent of climate change, to inform our thinking about the prospects for sustainable democracy.

Africa's leaders have endorsed a vision for sustaining democracy in Africa over the next 50 years as a key element of the African Union (AU)'s Agenda 2063, an aspirational plan for incremental integration unanimously adopted at the union's 2013 Summit, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Organization of African Unity in 1963 (<http://archive.au.int/assets/images/agenda2063.pdf>). EISA remains committed to helping to ensure sufficient electoral integrity to sustain democratic experiments in as many AU members as possible.

Thus far the most energetic, diplomatically engaged and effective national advocate for an African Union capable of supporting and willing to support sustainable democracy in Africa has been South Africa's second president, Thabo Mbeki. As noted in the first section, Mbeki's international efforts were consistent and complementary with the vision he advanced so eloquently in his 'I am an African' speech' (Mbeki 1996).

In that speech he carefully identified and praised every major identity group. Extending this vital civic principle of universal democratic inclusion to the rest of Africa was at the heart of Mbeki's proposal and plan for the African Renaissance. It was proposed as a way for all the people of Africa regardless of their ethnic, religious, national or other identity, eventually to gain dignity and self-respect as Africans and human beings inherently equal to all others. The advancement of sustainable democracy as desirable for all African nations, regardless of circumstance, he argued, would also establish the basis for more equitable and resilient partnerships with non-African partners.



Mbeki's vision faltered after he was removed and amid other countervailing forces noted in the previous sections. Yet the essential ideas of the African Renaissance are now embedded in the Constitutive Act and other binding instruments of the African Union.

A central issue raised in this section about the sustainability of democracy in Africa is whether, how and to what effect the democratic spirit of the African Renaissance can be revived.¹

For as it was initially proposed and gained political currency it appeared to have the potential both to inspire a deeply hopeful vision of Africa's future and to recognise the enormity of the continent's many economic, political, cultural and psychological challenges.

Inspiring greater cooperation and collective action involving not only governments but civil society, political parties, the private business sector, labour, media, academe and all other democracy stakeholders is a tall order, for it is a familiar need made ever more urgent by proliferating global pressures and local vulnerabilities, many beyond the power of governments to regulate or control.

In considering what might be required to rekindle the African Renaissance there are a few key ingredients to keep in mind. Democracy can seem to be a mysterious process but in considering its sustainability in Africa amid the forces cited in the three scenarios below, the following elements provide a framework:

- **Champion**, another term for the vital role played by leadership, an ingredient currently lacking in Africa's international relations and at the national level in too many countries, not only in Africa;
- **Constitutional**, a rule-bound process accepted by all, most importantly by our greatest champions, who, as Nelson Mandela demonstrated when serving as president of South Africa, are never above the law;
- **Comprehensive**, a synonym for both pluralism and inclusivity;
- **Continual**, which acknowledges that the goal of any democratic experiment is to keep the experiment going and the always difficult challenge of settling for compromises that sow seeds of future deadly conflict like that which has scarred so many democratic experiments, among them that of the United States; and
- **Citizen consent**, the final arbiter and judge in sustaining democracies in Africa and abroad and the ultimate 'object and subject' of the other four elements.

Scenario-writing could give us a better sense of the possibilities of and prospects for sustainable democracy in Africa and the interplay of these five elements. But this requires large data sets and the capacity for the type of situation-relevant analysis that has been done in the more industrialised and institutionalised democracies.

Globally, a broad set of scenarios with a 20-year horizon is produced and made publicly available every four years by the US National Intelligence Council (www.dni.gov). It provides a context for Africa and in this section I will briefly summarise the main trends it focuses on ahead of a more detailed description of a pioneering Afrocentric effort undertaken by a South African think tank, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) (Cilliers & Hedden 2014).

This will be followed by mention of some of the biggest and least understood challenges ahead for African democracies, the most important of which is adapting to the effects of global climate change.

GLOBAL TRENDS

Democratic trends in Africa will invariably be influenced by global forces, even if the cliché 'all politics are local' continues to be a central truth about the nature of any genuine democracy. At the time of writing, the United States, Great Britain and several European democracies are in political crisis, essentially of their own making, and the result of deep democratic deficits in their structures and processes of governance (see, eg, Hirsh 2016; *The Economist* 2014). The resurgence of racism, nativism and isolationism in Britain, America and elsewhere in the industrial world are beyond the scope of this report, although these developments will no doubt add to the richness of the debate about the future of democracy in Africa.²

Under these and other circumstances identity politics are proving yet again to be ubiquitous, whatever variations they assume and whether the effects advance or impede democratic development.³ Although African nations are not the only ones facing fears and disruptions resulting from globalisation, demographic dynamics, technological changes and inequalities, they also have to adapt to trends they neither caused nor possess the power and resources to mitigate.

Global Trends 2012 (www.dni.gov) identified four 'mega-trends' that provided the basis for developing its main scenarios looking forward to 2030. The council's current chair, Dr Greg Treverton, indicated in recent public remarks (Stremlau 2016) that he does not expect the fundamental trends to be any different when he releases the next edition. The trends are:



- **Individual empowerment**, due to such factors as a worldwide decline in poverty, with a rapid rise in the middle class in China, India and in African and many other countries, widespread availability of information and communication technologies and a troubling rise of powerful new non-state actors that individually and in loose networks find expression in the terrorist attacks that account for so much of the current violence in Nigeria, Central Africa, the Horn of Africa and Kenya.
- **Diffusion of power** within and among countries as emerging markets expand, rich countries age and growth slows, exemplified by the rise of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).
- **Demographic change** brought about by urbanisation, forced migrations, youth bulges and longer life expectancy. The first three are well known to governments in Africa and are factors of major importance in any Africa-specific future scenarios.
- **Severe strains on vital resources** such as access to food, energy and water as populations grow and consumption increases and exacerbated by climate change, with growing dangers of conflicts.

The trends evident across Africa do not take place in isolation, they cause powerful synergies that could, in varying ways, severely test the sustainability of democracy. For example, rapid urbanisation, the world's fastest-growing population, including a large unemployed youth bulge, and migration are straining already scarce resources of food, energy and water.

Less obvious, but also of concern to Africa, are the trends towards individual empowerment in the north and in newly affluent countries. There is also a trend of further diffusion of power within and among countries. These exacerbate partisanship, protectionism and exclusive patriotism, especially in the most powerful and prosperous countries. The detrimental effects on African countries are likely to be further exacerbated by opposition to the overdue reform of multilateral institutions and greater collective action to overcome widening inequities.

These global trends are all topics of foreign affairs debates across Africa and the diffusion of power, especially if it constrains US adventurism, is regarded as positive. More intriguing at the time of writing is the upheaval in US domestic politics, a reminder that no democracy is ever secure from the possibility of a populist surge that could empower as verified a racist, sexist, untruthful, and politically inexperienced leader as Donald Trump (Stremlau 2016).

Trump's election would be further evidence that a profound trend in world politics, an openly xenophobic nationalism, is in the ascendant (Hirsh 2016), whereas the election of Hillary Clinton would signal a continuation of the fundamental shift in American politics toward great equality among its diverse identity groups, and perhaps less emphasis on individual equality. Their public statements so far suggest a Clinton administration would be a more reliable and constructive partner internationally than a Trump presidency, on such vital issues for Africa as climate change, trade, multilateralism and respect for the large number of Africans living in the United States, reminders of the complex implications of national politics for Africa's democracies.

Up to now little modelling has been done of alternative futures by and specifically for Africans and much of Africa lacks the advanced research and skills capacities required to develop and analyse large and complex data sets for discerning the underlying 'mega-trends'.

This is starting to change, however, and, in South Africa, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) has recently done some path-breaking modelling of alternative futures for Africa, primarily drawing on conflict data sets but also highlighting the role played by economic development and governance.

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

ISS released scenarios for Africa in November 2014, with a 49-year time horizon to conform with the ambitious aspirations of the African Union's Agenda 2063 (Cilliers & Heddon 2014). As the paper dealt primarily with Africa's long-term trends in political violence the main data set used was compiled by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, whose conclusion generally supports the thesis that our world has entered a period of peace unprecedented in modern history (Pinker 2011).

Cilliers and Hedden find this to be the case in Africa, too, noting that the uptick in violence since 2010 has been mostly in five countries – Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan, Central African Republic and Somalia, which, together, accounted in 2014 for 75% of all conflict-related deaths on the continent.

In coming up with long-term scenarios for future stability, the authors sought to understand the underlying drivers of conflict, which drew them to the broader forecasting system of International Futures (Ifs) at the University of Denver. And by incorporating economic, social, political and other factors pertaining to governance, they have generated results pertinent to EISA's concerns about the long-term sustainability of democracy in Africa.



The ISS study offers three possible futures for Africa.

The Base Case foresees continued economic growth in a growing number of countries and is cautiously optimistic:

Things improve across all dimensions of development, but poverty levels come down slowly ... Average GDP growth per annum until 2063 is forecast at 6.2%, although the rates vary considerably over such a long time horizon, peaking at over 7.5% in 2039 before declining again. Africa is also unable to reduce inequality in any significant way over time from its current high levels ... Africa's very high population growth momentum offsets improvements in development and the large youth bulge, while a source of labour is also a source of instability if youth are unemployed. Although services improve for the vast majority of people, pockets of poverty, hunger and instability remain. Peace and security improves but instability remains in a number of long-term fragile states ... This scenario unfolds against a backdrop of global flux ... power is more diffuse within and between countries ... Africa benefits from attention as the last large potential consumer market and low-wage manufacturing destination, attracting interest from China, India, the US and the EU ... [but] global growth is significantly less based on resources than in previous centuries and Africa's efforts towards beneficiation of the continent's resource bounty as a driver of future growth have limited success.

Politics of the Belly, the worst case scenario, would be a democrat's nightmare, with the majority of African governments failing to mitigate the effects of negative external developments, including climate change, on their economies, with many ruling parties favouring authoritarian rule, exploiting power for personal gain, limiting economic development and exacerbating instability, poverty and inequality.

An African Renaissance, by contrast, offers the best-case scenario for 2063. First, among the good ingredients is the rise of a league of forward-looking leaders, democratically elected in several key states and capable of driving Africa's regeneration, a process that began with the founding of the African Union but has stalled during a period that has coincided with EISA's second decade. It is a grand vision, with the larger countries – Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Algeria, Ethiopia, and Kenya – gaining influence by 'improved management of their economies, combatting corruption and seeking to advance inclusive growth'.

Among the three African scenarios, unquestionably the third, a revival and realisation of the vision of the African Renaissance, is the most desirable. But is it feasible? The authors of several recent books have argued that Africa's long-term future is much

more positive than daily crisis headlines about civil strife, terror, and famine suggest (see, eg, Olopade 2014; Jerven 2015; Thakkar 2015; Bright & Hruby 2015).⁴

More immediately, what practical steps are required to rekindle the process that began with the establishment of the African Union and the adoption of a normative framework, including the African Charter for Democracy, Elections and Governance? This framework was, after all, intended to guide a gradual, incremental process of pan-African democratisation, economic development and integration.

The ISS paper concludes that in all three scenarios governance is the key, and that severe democratic deficits have afflicted all of Africa's most conflicted countries. Yet there is also evidence that conflict and poverty may not just be a function of the absence of democracy. Authoritarian governments are capable of providing stability and of directing resources to the most needy, as they wish. Rather, the more frequently troubled states are those with mixed systems of governance, neither entrenched democratic nor authoritarian regimes, what the ISS and others have described as 'anocracies'.⁵

CONTINENTAL NORMS

The African Union encompasses all regimes, even as its founders chose to identify inclusive, non-sectarian, democratic governance as the most promising route forward. Some might have assumed that, in the absence of any ideological alternative in the aftermath of the Cold War, there was no realistic alternative for building a regional, stable and prosperous pan-African community. Some might also have shared the view of the ISS, EISA and other African pro-democracy civil society organisations that along with rising levels of education, income, and popular awareness of basic human rights, African citizens will drive democratisation in more and more countries.

The countervailing forces that thwart democratisation will persist and present special challenges for any and all African regimes. A quick list includes: difficulties dealing with masses of unemployed youth, persistent poverty and severe inequality, the lack of credible uncorrupt democratic leaders, disruptions of land use, food security, adequate potable water and the eruption and rapid spread of virulent new and old viruses, all related in various ways to climate change Africans did not cause, cannot mitigate and must find ways to accommodate. African governments that are affected and aware that other national factions are relatively better off, are gaining access to information and demanding redress, whether by democratic means or, more likely, in response to those advocating more extreme action.

Reviving the African Renaissance vision and its reliance on incremental, bottom-up change, adapting to local circumstances while adhering to by now well-known



AU principles, presents EISA with familiar yet ever more daunting challenges. This concluding section considers the prospects for building upon the past two decades of accomplishments. One broad option for EISA to consider while continuing to focus on providing electoral and democracy support is to link its programme activities more explicitly and actively to the revival of the African Renaissance as part of a long-term goal of helping to ensure that this 'best-case' vision for the continent prevails.

The internal dynamic of the African Renaissance should be similar to democratisation nationally. For it, too, is no more than 'an experiment, the sole goal of which, is to keep the experiment going', albeit by innovative diplomacy still to be tested.

The democratic interplay is not among domestic factions competing within an agreed framework intended to keep the process peaceful and progressive. Among still-sovereign members of sub-regional and continental organisations the process is necessarily less structured and less binding, but does take place within agreed norms for which members should hold each other accountable. These include how each government treats its own citizens and manages its internal competition.

Since the AU's launch in 2002 the main ways in which it and the regional economic communities have been able to show they are 'not-indifferent' to each other's domestic affairs has been to take limited collective action, including diplomatic pressure, suspension of AU membership and other political sanctions in situations of unconstitutional regime change and/or escalating civil strife, and, in rare cases, to undertake peace enforcement and peacekeeping operations.

A far less intrusive and now commonplace engagement has been electoral observation and support, which, as noted above, has gained political support and legitimacy as a conflict-prevention measure. AU and RECs continue to hold members to their commitment to hold regular elections and to invite and accept their election observer missions.

There are no signs that the African inter-governmental organisations will consider abandoning this commitment, despite recent signs of resurgent authoritarianism in some African countries. The warning signs of greater trouble ahead, as noted above, include overturning constitutional provisions for presidential term limits, curtailing civil society, limiting the free flow of information in traditional and social media and other steps towards greater authoritarianism and the entrenchment of incumbents.

It is important for EISA to continue making one of its highest priorities assisting AU and REC election observation missions. Although EISA has, thus far, carried out its

efforts to support the inter-governmental EOMs in a low-key fashion appropriate to its role as a provider of technical assistance, it should consider giving the role these organisations are playing greater prominence in its publications and global electoral support network.

The bodies have well-known shortcomings. They are starved for money and many members fail to pay even the minimum fees. They also still tend to accord undue prominence to some of the worst autocrats among their members. The recent and current AU chairs, Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe and Chad's President Idriss Déby are prime examples.

But to call for the AU to be disbanded, as prominent Ghanaian economist and president of the Free Africa Foundation in Washington, DC, Professor George B N Ayittey, did recently in the influential US journal *Foreign Policy*, is wrong (Ayittey 2016). Pegging his argument to the UK's Brexit referendum, he argues that the AU is a poor imitation of the 'brainchild of Libyan strongman Muammar al-Qaddafi', that it coddles other dictators, accomplishes very little and is a waste of money.

He calls instead for a 'looser style of confederacy', which is, in fact, what the AU really is, but ignores both its normative importance and its small but important efforts to promote regional peace and security and the politics of conflict prevention. EISA's record, and a core argument of this booklet, is that the possibility of and potential for an African Renaissance, the best-case scenario described above, requires not the abandonment but the development of the political consensus and pan-African framework of the African Union's Constitutive Act and supplementary instruments.

ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

For EISA, a more limited but also long-term strategic challenge is whether and how to provide electoral and democracy support to countries further along in and still committed to experimenting with constitutional democracy. These are countries that could demonstrate and provide the leadership for the incremental spread and sustainability of democratic governance within a revival of the African Renaissance.

Conducting credible elections regularly and in conformity with national constitutional provisions and international principles and standards is only one ingredient of developing a politically capable state. But it will always be a necessary ingredient.

Today, virtually all adults – perhaps as many as 98% globally – can vote,⁶ whether or not these votes really count and whether the overall electoral process in a country has integrity. Electoral integrity is the topic of a volume of electoral case studies to



be published by EISA that were developed by local teams of country experts in all regions of the continent and vetted by a committee of electoral experts (Zoubir 2016). The concluding chapter includes 14 specific recommendations to the AU and REC electoral offices for practical improvements in the duration, composition, scale and outreach of their EOMs.

EISA staff will circulate these recommendations and discuss them with AU and REC officials to ascertain the likelihood of their being adopted, as well as any reasons for deferment or rejection. This will be an important indication of how far and how quickly the institute and its partners can identify countries that are receptive to improving the transparency and credibility of their electoral processes and eliminating risks of misunderstandings and grievances among political factions.

Since Africa is by far the world's largest and most ethnically diverse continent, improving the prospects and actual progress of sustainable democracy raises the critical issue of momentum.

How much democratic development, in how many countries, would be of sufficient cumulative effect to keep the collective democratic experiment at the core of a revived 'African Renaissance' going? This will require some close analysis by EISA and like-minded NGOs and government/inter-governmental officials committed to the vision of an African Renaissance. Those countries that might be the most successful democracies and examples to others as well the nucleus of the pan-African experiment may not be among the larger countries, the so-called big five: Nigeria, South Africa, Algeria, Egypt and Kenya. In fact, several might be quite small and impoverished.

In recent years attempts have been made to resuscitate the argument that democracy is only viable in countries that have achieved sufficient economic growth to afford any redistributive costs necessary to building viable democratic consensus.

Politically, echoes of the so-called 'Asian model' of authoritarian capitalism can be heard in several African capitals where strongmen have pursued relatively successful economic strategies. But Professor Pippa Norris challenges the view that sustainable democracy is possible only in rich countries (Norris 2016).

Between 1 July 2012 and 31 December 2015 EIP surveyed over 2 000 electoral experts in 139 countries to compile the latest electoral integrity index. In Africa it found that countries like Burundi, Equatorial Guinea and Ethiopia had some of the world's lowest ratings for electoral integrity, while others such as Benin, Mauritius, Lesotho, South Africa and Namibia had high integrity ratings. EIP concluded that there is little evidence that wealth and poverty are correlated with levels of electoral integrity.

Because elections are at the heart of the representative process, and flawed elections so detrimental to peaceful political competition, democratic development and human rights, EIP recommends that donors double their investment in electoral support and, as an example to the rest of the region, do so especially in those African countries that are successfully consolidating democracy. Were this to happen, EISA could work with this more successful experiment even in several of the smallest, least developed, least influential AU members, to enlarge the coalition of democracies at the heart of a revived African Renaissance movement.

Another recent survey focused on African democracies was undertaken by Afrobarometer and is a departure from its usual reporting. Senior adviser Michael Bratton and executive director E Gyimah-Boadi led a project mining 15 years' worth of public opinion data for selected African countries looking for signs and patterns of changing attitudes among the thousands of respondents that might have served as early warning signs of civil unrest and sudden democratic decline (Bratton & Gyimah-Boadi 2015).

Afrobarometer deploys a 'three levels of risk' framework for mining survey data. In ascending order are threats to the incumbent government, the regime and – worst case, risk to the state (Bratton & Gyimah-Boadi 2015).

- **Risk to the government:** Disapprove of the job performance of the incumbent national president over the previous year; disapprove of the job performance of the respondent's parliamentary representative over the previous year; disapprove of the job performance of the respondent's local government representative over the previous year.
- **Risk to the regime:** the proportions of all survey respondents who are dissatisfied with the way democracy works in their country and consider that their country is or is not a democracy with major problems.
- **Risk to the state:** the proportion of all survey respondents who do not agree that the courts have the right to make binding decisions; do not agree that the police always have the right to make people obey the law and do not agree that the tax authorities always have the right to make people pay taxes.

In the case of Mali's internationally admired democratic experiment, Afrobarometer's review of past survey data revealed strong grassroots warning signs long before the



2012 crisis of political disillusionment with the incumbent government and then the regime. In Ghana surveys show a sharp rise in grassroots dissatisfaction with the incumbent authorities which, if not channelled through established constitutional means, could, as in Kenya, erupt in instability that conventional political analysis might not foresee.

The authors note that their findings are preliminary and need to be informed by a lot more research and analysis. Disaffection with ruling parties elsewhere, of course, is commonplace and Pew Research data in the US reveals that just 19% of the American public say they trust the federal government to 'do what is right always, or most of the time' (www.people-press.org/2015/11/23/beyond-distrust-how-americans-view-their-government). African states, of course, have experienced more frequent and larger outbreaks of violence than the US, and Afrobarometer does show promise in this regard and could provide EISA with useful insights into the changing attitudes of citizens in key democratising African nations that will be major tests for the sustainability of democracy.

SELF-DETERMINATION

The APRM offers another way to inform assessments of democratic sustainability, and a multi-year joint project conducted by EISA with the South African Institute of International Affairs has yielded important insights. AU members willing to be reviewed should, in the coming decade, yield useful comparative and trend-line data from the lengthening list of comprehensive self-assessments by governments of their performances and plans, especially in the critical areas of good governance, economic development and regional cooperation.

It will not be easy to sync public survey data with the elaborate and often delayed preparation of APRM analysis and planning across complex national sectors but if EISA could commission such experimental work it might provide lessons for expanded research and analysis of democratic sustainability.

Despite the revival of the APRM, evidence of spreading threats to democratic sustainability must be factored into any strategic reassessment of sustainable democracy in Africa. One such threat is the recent curtailment of civil society activities in as many as 20 countries, a process EISA staff lament complicates and curtails their democracy support work. They believe it was inspired by policies launched by Ethiopia's late President Zenawi against foreign funding for CSO projects and programmes, especially those that deal with what the government regards as human rights or pro-democracy advocacy.

The same governments that are becoming tough on civil liberties are also more willing to disrupt or suspend national internet access and social networking during election campaigns, as EISA experienced when observing the 2016 Ugandan election, and which occurred during the Ethiopian elections.

These restrictions have not, however, discouraged another transnational NGO, Global Financial Integrity, from investigating and reporting on illicit financial flows from Africa, which have now engaged the interest of the UN's Economic Commission for Africa. If successful, this work could generate urgently needed funds that might contribute to democratic sustainability. Thabo Mbeki, who chairs a high-level panel that is studying this problem, has concluded that between \$50 billion and \$80 billion, mostly in hidden corporate profits, removes a huge source of potential tax revenues by the mispricing of exports and imports (ECA 2016).⁷

Illicit financial flows and much of the reporting under the APRM raises familiar concerns in any strategic assessment of whether Africa's democracies can be sustained. What is new is the acceleration and potency of the effects on Africa of global climate change; effects that will severely test the sustainability of democratic governance.

Although EISA lacks the capacity and resources to deal directly with the science of climate change, both its causes and its likely effects, it should consider monitoring and assessing the political effects, at least in those countries where it has an extended field presence. If such monitoring and evaluation were feasible it would certainly be welcomed by the global community of climatologists and their small but vital African contingent.⁸

THE ADDED BURDENS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The 2015 global climate change conference in Paris, COP-21, was heralded as a major step forward in global governance (Bradlow 2015). This was explained not in terms of any formal treaties reached but in the willingness of all the world's governments to commit to 'benchmarks' for reducing greenhouse gases, developing and using clean renewable resources and a host of other measures.

Cynics suggest these benchmarks were little more than expressions of hope. Supporters acknowledge that they are non-binding commitments, but, because the nature of the problems is beyond the capacity of governments alone to solve, the guidelines apply to the private sector – business, labour and finance, civil society, local and provincial communities and citizens whose collective behavioural change will ultimately determine whether the goals are reached. The COP-21 process may well mark a new variety of global governance but within Africa it seems rather similar to



the vision and less formal and more inclusive consensus-building process that produced the African Renaissance and the APRM. Commitments in both are less binding than formal treaties but also include politically difficult domestic targets deemed important in advancing international cooperation.

Governments, both international and pan-African, essentially provide the normative framework for and, in principle, agree to be the main monitors and arbiters of progress, using their public and juridical resources when necessary to ensure that national targets are met. So far, however, there is little indication that many African governments are investing in the research and then the policies for adapting to climate induced changes.

The list of possible climate change effects – especially famine and drought, forced migration, vulnerability to lethal viral epidemics and related deadly conflicts – are much discussed but mostly unaddressed, nationally or regionally. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which produced the essential research and analysis informing the COP-21 deliberations, has issued periodic reports, specifically on the impact climate change has had and may yet have on Africa and IPCC global reports on Human Security include substantial material on risks to sustainable democracy in Africa (Adger, Pulhin, Barnett, Dabelko, Hovelsrud, Levy, Spring & Vogel 2014).

For Africa there is the added urgency that global climate change not only places strains on already scarce arable land and potable water, it also raises new risks of rapidly spreading diseases. And for already hard-pressed governments there are also the dangers of civic unrest and deadly conflict that studies suggest may be linked to global warming's extreme effects in areas of Africa (Burke 2009).

More locally-focused research on Nigeria reinforces this concern and links climate change to the violent clashes that ensue when migrating nomadic herding communities are forced by spreading desert to encroach on more settled farming communities further south (Oguamanam 2016). Nigerian conflict analyst and resolution scholar Chukwuma Onyia (2015) calls for greater government and private sector efforts to address 'challenges posed by global climatic change, as a measure to stemming the tide of youth radicalization and rise of terrorist groups like Boko Haram'.

The drought-plagued and conflict-prone weak states of the Sahel are also experiencing severe effects of climate change, which may affect local prospects for sustainable democracy, peace and development. A broad survey of the Sahel in 2010 found that although there was 'no generaliseable and direct impact of climate change on security', each country was particularly sensitive to climate variability and in need of 'improved water management and more efficient management of food insecurity' (Heinrigs 2010).

The situation in Mali has been of special ongoing concern to EISA. A case study by Adebayo Adegemi and Muhmoud Musa (2014) of the Tuareg communities in Northern Mali deems climate change to be 'a threat multiplier in exacerbating conflict' and, as a recent update concludes, 'the relationship between drought and violence in Mali cannot rely on traditional crisis responses' (Rozen & De Carvalho 2016).

Sustainable democracy in Mali and across the Sahel can only be envisioned with a foundation of political stability and, although climate change is especially challenging there, it also presents many practical problems in other sub-regions, including Southern Africa.

A comprehensive report, *Climate Change: Briefings from Southern Africa* (Scholes, Scholes & Lucas 2015) points out the varied and complex effects of global warming in the area, which is twice as high as the global mean. This will pose especially hard choices for African governments, as yet not well staffed or informed about the policy implications of recent scientific findings about climate change.

New efforts are being made to build African capacity in policy-relevant interdisciplinary science. A coalition of South African universities, in partnership with the world's leading international institute of applied systems analysis, have created the Southern African Systems Analysis Centre (SASAC) (www.iiasa.ac.at/web/home/education/sasac/about.html) and it is expected that more than 150 African PhDs will graduate and career scientists will be offered retraining (<https://www.uwc.ac.za/research/sasac/Pages/default.aspx>). It is hoped that evidence-based research into environmental problems that pose serious risks of creating conflict and straining governance, often across sub-regions, will provide incentives for closer inter-governmental cooperation in the spirit of the African Renaissance.

Successful adaptation to environmental threats and disruptions will also require greater willingness among citizens to change their behaviour and contribute to new collective efforts that will be successful and sustainable within a democratic constitutional framework that enjoys popular legitimacy (Stremlau 2016).

Until now an essential missing link has been connecting such evidence-based research with Africa's political leaders and other important stakeholders, including civil society organisations and the African business community. Africa's RECs are especially important because the effects of global warming disregard state boundaries but typically vary significantly across these sub-regions.

If REC secretariats could have even a few credible scientists, especially with the interdisciplinary skills typical of climatologists, they could provide policy input regionally and



to member national governments. Given the scarcity of indigenous scientific expertise, rationalising talent regionally would be advantageous and, with modern information and communication technologies already available, quite feasible.

Political leaders, even in scientifically advanced countries such as the US, may prefer to deny scientific evidence of climate change to avoid politically difficult and costly changes of policy. Persuading leaders of international organisations and influential civil society groups of the veracity of the evidence can sometimes generate sufficient pressure to move governments.

Perhaps this is an area in which EISA could help. Drawing on the research and analysis of climate scientists to reach sub-regional and continental accords for adapting more effectively to the risks of climate change will require broad public support, not just formal multilateral agreements. The process may prove analogous to the spread of evidence-based and principle-guided electoral observation and assessment that gradually gained pan-African authority and legitimacy. In any event, EISA's work on sustainable democracy should be informed about new forces, especially the effects of climate change, that could significantly alter or even derail the democratic development of African countries.

At present African governments naturally feel it is more urgent to deal with the politics of their next election than with the effects of climate change, but they might not have this freedom for much longer. Consensus has emerged among the world's leading climate scientists that humanity has embarked on a new epoch, the Anthropocene, defined by human domination of earth's physical and natural environment (Castree 2016).

More contentious still is what many earth scientists refer to as the 'Great Acceleration', the period between 1950 and 2050 when the cumulative effects of human behaviour on the natural environment since the start of the industrial revolution have suddenly and rapidly accelerated and are now testing the limits of the planet's geosphere-biosphere (Revkin 2015).

Several years ago the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP) in Stockholm, a consortium of natural scientists, devised a series of 'dashboards' with easily understood empirical graphs showing a dozen accelerating socio-economic trends resulting from the sudden huge rise in global production and population and a dozen earth system trends, including levels of greenhouse gases, surface temperature and ocean acidification (Steffen, Broadgate, Deutsch, Gaffney & Ludwig 2015).

In 2015 the IGBP disbanded and was reconstituted as a 10-year initiative, Future Earth, a wider global network including social scientists that aspires to become more policy relevant as it monitors climate change and develops evidence-based assessments of the accelerating interplay of human and natural environments (www.futureearth.org).

The accuracy and implications of climate monitoring and assessment, not just of warming but of the range of actions and policies affecting climate change and its impact on people, is, and will remain, controversial (Revkin 2015). An analogy with evidence-based election observation and the more complex assessments of electoral integrity does not seem overdrawn. Engaging African governments individually and collectively will, in both cases, be critical, as is the role of civil society, scholarly research, the private sector and citizens.

For EISA the links between electoral processes and experiments in democratic governance will be central. At the same time, keeping abreast of the interplay between African and other experts in relation to climate change and its local effects and governments responsible for dealing with these issues could prove to be as important as sustaining the governance-related project on the APRM.

As Jedediah Purdy concludes about humanity's domination of nature in the critical decades ahead, in *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (2015) '[e]ither the Anthropocene will be democratic or it will be horrible'. Purdy and others draw attention to the increasing danger that authoritarianism and/or a resurgent identity-driven exclusive and militant nationalism will derail democratic experiments in Africa and elsewhere, possibly including the US and European countries.

Driving much of this popular militancy and disillusionment with democracy seems to be extreme economic inequalities within states, rich and poor. Rising conflicts are more evident within states, although Africans share a collective claim against an international economic system that severely disadvantages them.

A global economy in which less than 20% of the world's population in the 20 richest countries generates at least 75% of global gross domestic product, is one of the primary drivers of the global climate change that further and unfairly disadvantages Africans.

How to counter this, collectively, democratically and with informed passion about the extent of injustice to Africa first requires Africans to come together willingly, a process that will be greatly facilitated by a shared vision, values, hard evidence of need and more willingness to accept greater mutual transparency and accountability as the basis for sustainable mutually beneficial regional and international partnerships.



A revival of the vision and founding principles of the African Renaissance has been a theme of this booklet. The promises of democratic principles and processes prevailing locally, nationally and internationally in Africa are still mostly aspirational, but the second section of this reflection on EISA's progress is not only a credit to the institute but has inspired and should inspire others to embark on complementary pursuits.

EISA is and will remain primarily an operating NGO, not a think tank. Yet there has always been an important allocation of staff time and resources to the research and analysis that are so vital for effective operations. As EISA looks to the future it might well consider the feasibility and value of leading a scenario development and drafting exercise on the prospects for sustainable democracy in Africa in the next two or three decades. This could be done in partnership with local and other African universities, opinion research centres such as Afrobarometer, and think tanks, notably the Institute for Security Studies, which already have experience in developing African scenarios.

EISA's leadership would be rooted in its two decades of experience supporting democratic development in Africa. In addition to its extensive electoral assistance, EISA's field offices could provide important reality checks. Other work, notably on the APRM process, could be supplemented by reports providing evidence-based insights into persistent poverty, the effects of climate change and other forces as well as the realities and dangers of severe economic inequalities.

Pan-African research into such threats as rising transnational crime, human and drug trafficking, and terrorism would provide other important insights into the many complex threats facing Africa's leaders and citizens in their efforts to consolidate and sustain democracy.

CONCLUSION

Two decades of democratic experiments in Africa have given rise to hope for a more rights-based future for the continent. EISA's experiences across Africa, and its developing partnerships with several fledgling regional economic communities and the African Union, provide many insights into the opportunities and challenges at local, national and international levels.

EISA's net assessment of Africa's democracies remains positive despite all the qualifications this booklet has tried not to ignore. Periodic assessments of the continent's progress by such foreign observers as the journalists who work for *The Economist* veer from the optimism of *Africa rising*, a 2011 cover story, to the more cautious tone of an August 2016 cover, *Africa's fragile democracies*.

Amid the ebb and flow of current events, this booklet has sought to highlight what the author believes are becoming entrenched pan-African norms conducive to democratic sustainability within and among members of the African Union. In contrast to less democratically inclined regions of the world, the African Union's strategic commitment to democracy is notable and important, along with that of several of the RECs and their member states.

This booklet has also been broadly inspired by the aspirations and attractions of the African Renaissance and the idea that African peoples will be better disposed to learning lessons from one another's democratic experiments in informal and cultural ways than from relying only on inter-state cooperation to advance a greater sense of shared identity and purpose.

Now might be the time to rekindle the African Renaissance. Much will depend on the pending selection of new leadership for the AU, and the revival of national interest in the project, as South Africa, Nigeria and others demonstrated in the formative and early years of the AU. Complementary activism by the new UN Secretary-General next year, in pressing governments to implement the climate commitments agreed to in Paris last year, and the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals, would hold special promise for Africa, including potential synergy with the AU's Agenda 2063, in areas of good governance.

Neither EISA nor anyone else can forecast what specific compromises might be possible or might be derailed in Africa's diverse array of 54 states, or their separate and cumulative effect on the realisation of Agenda 2063's vision for eventual regional cooperation and democratic integration.

Of the five elements cited above as crucial to the success of any democratic experiment it is citizen consent that will remain the most important and ultimate test of whether democracy is sustainable in Africa.

The democratic ideal of 'informed citizen consent' will face some of its toughest tests in Africa. Today, citizens of all countries, however wealthy and technologically advanced, can barely grasp the volume and complexity of information necessary to make informed decisions about contentious issues of climate change, globalisation and a host of other complex concerns. The many signs of popular discontent and disillusionment, and the allure of quick arbitrary solutions, suggest that many citizens in Western democracies appear to have stopped trying. Does this mean citizens in Africa's fledgling democracies will stop trying too?



Citizens facing sudden dislocation have often sought safety in blind loyalty to an ethnic, religious, racial or other reassuring identity, sometimes cloaked in ideology, with the added appeal of a charismatic authoritarian leader. Post-colonial Africa's bad experiences in this regard may help counter new temptations.

In this booklet I have sought to portray the politics of Africa as receptive to a democratic alternative that offers citizens a way to reach decisions about which faction and leader deserves their consent to rule when policies are too complex and obscure for the ordinary person to grasp. Such an alternative is, however, morally challenging. What evidence is there of a candidate's respect for basic constitutional limits, notably the separation of powers and public protections against abuse of the offices?

Understanding the fundamentals of constitutional restraints is an obligation of citizenship that requires judgement made more on principle than politics. This can be facilitated through elementary civic education programmes, as EISA and others have demonstrated, including at times when constitutional reforms are subject to public debate.

Democracy is more demanding than less inclusive regimes as it relies more on the strength of hope than the weakness of fear; a spirit of generosity and empathy rather than spite spurred by the greed and resentment typical of authoritarian alternatives.

Adhering to enduring principles while adjusting to changing times is critical to sustainable democracy and is a hallmark of EISA's programmes throughout Africa. In the decades ahead those African leaders seriously trying to adapt to the uncertain effects of climate change will need more than the consent of their citizens, they will also need their active help and cooperation. If these complexities and shared responsibilities can be handled constitutionally, according to agreed principles and processes citizens understand and support, prospects for sustainable democracy will improve.

EISA has sought to abet sustainable democracy in Africa at a time when it is becoming apparent that the world has entered a new age, the Anthropocene, in which human behaviour predominates over the laws of nature.

If Purdy's prediction is correct, that the Anthropocene 'will be democratic or horrible', sustainable democracy offers the last best promise for the survival of our species. This could be the ultimate democratic experiment in the human adventure that was started by Africans who can and must play a vital role in how it proceeds.

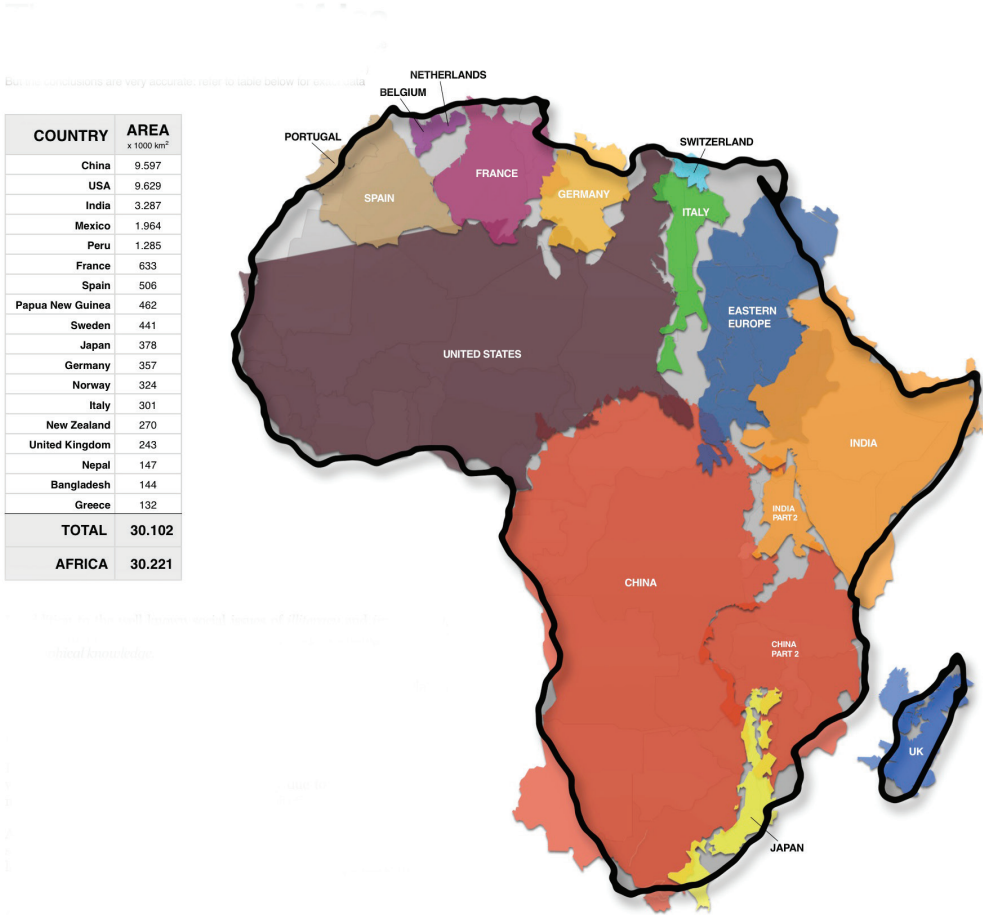
NOTES

- 1 For an eloquent essay on the importance of political mythology inspiring needed political innovation, nationally and globally, see Evans 2016.
- 2 The two lead topics of the July 2016 issue of the *Journal of Democracy*, published in the US by the National Endowment for Democracy, are perhaps indicative: 'The Danger of Deconsolidation', presenting two articles on the decline of democracy in Europe and the US, followed by three articles under the heading 'The Struggle Over Term Limits in Africa'.
- 3 For an important new study on the resurgence of identity politics in the United States, see Achen & Bartels 2016.
- 4 For an earlier and prescient assessment of Africa's future see Hunter-Gault 2006.
- 5 Cilliers & Hedden (2014) rely for their analysis of this issue on the work of the Polity Project of the Center for Systemic Peace in the US, which has for many years gathered data about state durability around the world, delineating trends and comparing a set of weighted variables (www.systemicpeace.org/polityproject.html)
- 6 <https://whoruleswhere.wordpress.com/2015/04/20/most-people-in-the-world-cant-vote-a-refutation>. A reprint of a survey published in *The Guardian*, 20 April 2015 tallying those precluded from voting in a handful of mini-states (Brunei, Qatar, the UAE, the Vatican) plus others still emerging from conflict (eg, South Sudan), women in Saudi Arabia, various prison and felon populations, and some non-residents, for a total of only 80 million adults globally.
- 7 An excellent video summary of how this process works and the role of the Mbeki ECA High-Level Panel on illicit financial flows has been produced by the UN's Economic Commission for Africa, <http://allafrica.com/view/resource/main/main/id/00100811.html>
- 8 African governments, despite their evident vulnerabilities to bio- and geosphere changes affecting the wellbeing of their citizens and stability of their communities, have been unable or unwilling to invest in science and technology, to inform their policies and help solve many consequential problems. Although Africa accounts for 12% of the world's population it generates less than 1% of the world's research output, according to one report (<http://mgafrica.com/article/2015-01-14-17-startling-facts-about-the-state-of-science-and-research-in-africa>)



APPENDIX 1

Africa's Size Relative to that of Other Continents



APPENDIX 2

Africa Demarcated by Ethnic Groups



Source: McGowan & Nel (eds) 2002, p 99.



APPENDIX 3

Africa's Sovereign States



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