The state of political finance regulations in Africa

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1. Introduction

This Discussion Paper reviews the state of affairs of money in politics in Africa, and in particular how money is raised and spent by political parties and election campaigns. It describes changes that have occurred since the chapter about political finance in Africa for International IDEA's *Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns: A Handbook on Political Finance* (Falguera et al. 2014) was written in 2013. Just as with the original chapter, this paper covers the entire African continent, including North Africa.

Economic growth in Africa over the past several years has been impressive, although it slowed down in 2015 (World Bank 2016). Extreme poverty has fallen from 56 per cent of the African population in 1990 to an estimated 35 per cent in 2015, although this is still much higher than the estimated 10 per cent worldwide (World Bank 2015). Politically, the situation is mixed, and overall unimpressive. Although the Freedom House index scores for political and social freedom in countries such as Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Nigeria have improved, the share of (sub-Saharan) Africans who live in countries designated as 'not free' increased from 35 per cent in 2013 to 39 per cent in 2015, with the share living in 'free' countries remaining constant at 12 per cent (Freedom House 2014: 3, 2016: 11).

In short, the nature or importance of money in African political processes has not changed drastically since 2013. There is still very little information about how money is raised and spent by political parties and election campaigns, the relationship between politicians and voters is often based on clientelistic ties, and there is little oversight and enforcement of formal regulations. While there is little hard evidence that the amounts spent in election campaigns are increasing, there is also little to suggest that these amounts—or the importance of money in determining who gets to govern African countries—have decreased since 2013.

The main problems with African political finance outlined in the original *Handbook* chapter remain in place, namely:

- access to funds for all relevant actors, in particular the uneven playing field between the government party and all other political parties;
- abuse of state resources, whereby the incumbent political party uses resources belonging to the public sector to strengthen their grip on power and increase the chances of re-election;
- presence of clientelism, a complicated structure of inter-relationships between leaders and followers (see van de Walle 2007);
- evidence of vote buying, whereby goods or services are traded for votes (largely a part of the overall clientelistic system);

- evidence of illicit funding, including funding from the drugs trade, illegal extractive industry activities and organized crime;
- a dependency on foreign funds, from within and outside of Africa; and
- the cash-based nature of African economies, with a banking penetration lower than in most regions.

Only the last of these, the cash-based nature of African economies, can be said to be changing gradually, with increasing mobile banking penetration in many African countries (Moody's 2016). The reduced reliance on cash transactions can help to increase transparency and facilitate monitoring. However, many opportunities remain for African politicians wishing to hide their financial sources and spending, and not all forms of non-cash transactions are easily traceable. The impact of these problems is compounded by the overall opaqueness in the funding of political parties and election campaigns, and a lack of enforcement with political finance regulations.

Having reviewed some of the admittedly very limited recent research available about political finance in Africa, this paper addresses some of the issues in African political finance today, in particular vote buying, abuse of state resources, unknown sources of income and a lack of oversight and enforcement. It argues that many of the political finance challenges faced by African countries just a few years ago remain unresolved.

2. Changes to the landscape since 2013

Money, Politics and Transparency indicators on political finance in African countries

One of the problems in analysing political finance is a lack of concrete information beyond formal regulations, and this is no less challenging in Africa than elsewhere. In this regard, the dataset developed by the Money, Politics and Transparency (MPT) project is a welcome addition to what we know about political finance in individual countries, especially because Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda and South Africa are included (unfortunately there is no north African country in the current MPT index).[1]

As the information for this dataset was first collected in 2014, it cannot be compared with the previous situation in these countries, but it can be used to illustrate the current state of affairs of money in politics. The dataset includes a political finance index with scores between 0 and 100 in different categories, with 0 being the 'worst score' (Money, Politics and Transparency 2015: 6).

The MPT data (see Table 2.1) shows that the way political finance is regulated formally in the selected country is much better than the actual situation (which is perhaps not surprising). In some cases, such as in Kenya, the discrepancy between law and practice is particularly glaring, which highlights the limits of what can be achieved through legislation alone. Financial reporting and third-party involvement are given low scores; these issues are addressed in the following sections.

Lack of reform of regulatory frameworks combined with low levels of compliance

As noted in the 2014 *Handbook*, Africa had the lowest share of countries with a high level of political finance regulation of any region, with most African countries falling into the 'medium' category (Ohman 2014a: 3).[2] There have been few changes to the regulatory framework in most African countries in recent years. This is in contrast to Europe, where many countries have changed their rules in the past five years, partly as

1 The Money, Politics and Transparency project is a joint initiative of Global Integrity, the Electoral Integrity Project and the Sunlight Foundation. See <http://moneypoliticstransparency.org/>.

2 For an illustration of the level of regulation in different countries, based on the data from the International IDEA Political Finance Database, see <https://sites.google.com/site/electoralintegrityproject4/projects/money-politics-and-transparency/MPT-new-comparative-evidence>.

Table 2.1. Political finance scores for selected African countries in the MPT dataset

	Composite score	In law/ practice	Direct and indirect public funding	Contribution and expenditure restrictions	Reporting and public disclosure	Third-party actors	Monitoring and enforcement
Botswana	18	23/13	18	30	8	0	35
Ghana	26	36/22	21	23	28	0	58
Kenya	42	67/18	43	72	31	16	46
Malawi	5	6/2	25	0	0	0	0
Nigeria	29	45/17	31	43	28	0	42
Rwanda	30	28/41	59	5	24	0	65
South Africa	36	36/47	81	0	17	0	82

Notes: The MPT index suffers from many of the challenges faced by other indices on similar issues. For example, a country automatically gets a higher score in the 'direct and indirect public funding' category (and consequently also in the composite score) if there are provisions for public funding in legislation. However, there is no global or African consensus that public funding is necessarily desirable, and the same goes for issues such as contribution and expenditure restrictions. This is illustrated by the South African case, which highlights how a country can get a decent composite and 'in law/practice' score because of provisions for public funding, in spite of severe shortcomings in key areas like restrictions on contribution and expenditure, third-party actors, reporting and public disclosure. There are also some technical issues. For example, Ghana has been given a score of 21 regarding public funding even though no public funding is provided in the country, and a score of 50 for how public funds are provided in practice, even though it is noted in the dataset that 'this indicator is not applicable'. Ghana also receives a score of 58 regarding monitoring and enforcement, mainly since the oversight body (the Electoral Commission) is credible and independent. However, it is admitted in the dataset that the Commission exercises 'very little control' over political finance. See <https://data.moneypoliticstransparency.org/countries/GH/>.

Source: Money, Politics and Transparency dataset, <https://data.moneypoliticstransparency.org/>, accessed 12 July 2016.

a result of the country reviews and recommendations provided by the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).[3]

The reasons for the lack of progress in Africa are likely to be many and complex. The lack of democratic improvements in many countries highlighted in the introduction is likely to be a major factor. In some countries, concerted efforts to change the regulatory system have been ongoing for years, but have met with little success. In South Africa, civil society groups have used advocacy and even court cases to push for increased transparency in a context where political parties are not required to reveal their income from private sources. However, as Calland pointed out recently, after the immediate

3 GRECO was established by the Council of Europe in 1999. On the impact of the GRECO evaluations on political finance regulations in Europe see Piccio (2016).

Table 2.2. Information in the MPT dataset about compliance with political finance regulations

Country	Comment on compliance with reporting requirements
Botswana	'…in practice, no [financial] reporting occurs, as the IEC also declines to enforce these provisions'
Ghana	'…in practice, it is not uncommon for [political parties] to fail to meet [the reporting] requirements. Of the information that is submitted, it often fails to include a full list of contributors. Financial reports are not made accessible to the public in a timely fashion.'
Kenya	'Submitted reports typically lack detailed information on contributors. Financial data is available to the public, though at a cost.'
Malawi	'No other legislation exists [other than a ban on the abuse of state resources in elections], and enforcement, as a result, is absent'
Nigeria	'In practice, parties regularly fail to file the required reports: only 2 of 23 parties filed annual reports in 2011. Only summary data in pdf formats is available to the public.'
Rwanda	'…no reporting during campaigns is necessary, and candidates do not have to report at all. This means that, in practice, very little meaningful political finance data is reported, and even less is easily available to the public, which can only access submitted reports by request'
South Africa	'…No information on private contributions, or the use of those contributions, is mandated by law. This means, in practice, very limited information on the spending of political parties is available to the public'

Notes: The statement on Nigeria is supported by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) summary audit report. See INEC Nigeria, 'Executive summary reports for all political parties account for the year 2011', [n.d.], <http://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/EXECUTIVE-SUMMARY-REPORTS-FOR-ALL-POLITICAL-PARTIES-ACCOUNT-FOR-THE-YEAR-2011.pdf>, accessed 12 July 2016.

Source: Money, Politics and Transparency dataset, <https://data.moneypoliticstransparency.org/>, accessed 12 July 2016.

post-apartheid period of legal reform and increased public accountability in the 1990s had passed, 'so too had the moment for regulating private donations' (Calland 2016: 142). Concerted efforts are required to ensure that such a moment for political finance regulatory reform arises in different African countries.

Formal regulations can only have a significant impact on behaviour if they are complied with, and there are many indications that compliance is low or very low in many African countries. Election observation reports often note that legal reporting requirements exist in different countries; however, with rare exceptions, observers fail to indicate whether reports are actually being submitted (or, if submitted, whether they include the required information).

In this regard, the information regarding compliance with reporting requirements in Table 2.2, which is drawn from the MPT dataset, is both enlightening and disturbing. The MPT dataset gives support to the argument in the *Handbook* chapter on Africa that 'unsanctioned refusals to submit financial reports' are rife across the continent (Ohman 2014b: 60). It is difficult to conceive how transparency can be achieved in African political parties as long as political parties fail to submit financial reports at all.

There are various reasons for this low level of compliance. In some cases, opposition parties may fear that revealing their sources of income would lead to a loss of income as well as reprisals against their donors, while in other cases political parties simply do not have the administrative capacity to effectively track their finances (Ohman 2014b: 59). A main cause of non-compliance is the fact that political parties and candidates can ignore the rules without fear of consequences, either through public condemnation or through formal sanctions. This issue is discussed below.

Vote buying

Vote buying remains a major concern in African elections, and there are few indications that this problem is abating. One study of vote buying in sub-Saharan Africa indicated that poor voters are more likely to be targeted with vote-buying efforts, and that this is even more apparent in highly competitive elections (Jensen, Sandholt and Justesen 2014). This means that in some of the 'healthier' African electoral processes the risk for vote buying among poor voters may be higher than in countries where the electoral outcome is a foregone conclusion. Since most African voters are poor, it also means that if electoral processes in Africa become gradually more competitive the problem of vote buying may become increasingly worse.

Some observers seem to implicitly accept vote buying as part of African election processes. For example, the final report of the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) from the 2014 elections in Guinea Bissau noted that vote buying 'has been a common practice in all elections held in the country and it was no exception this time' (EU EOM 2014: 28). Concerted measures are needed if vote buying is to be effectively counteracted in African elections. Guaranteeing the secrecy of the vote is one part of preventing vote buying, but it is far from sufficient, as many vote-buying practices in African elections take the form of communal displays of largesse on behalf of candidates and political parties, rather than direct agreements with individual voters that they will vote in a certain way.

High levels of vote buying are likely to especially disadvantage certain groups of candidates. For example, research into Kenyan election process has indicated that 'access to funding is essential in electoral processes in which vote buying is rife, and it is more difficult for candidates with less financial access (including women) to compensate for this by campaigning via other means.' (Ohman and Lintari 2015: 17).

If voters simply receive money or gifts from candidates but still vote according to their own political judgements, is vote buying necessarily detrimental to the democratic process? Some level of entertainment during campaign rallies and the handing out of the odd t-shirt probably does not corrupt the political process. However, African vote buying (and vote selling) should be seen in the larger context of clientelism. While this phenomenon did not originate in the democratization process—and has not necessarily been made worse by more competitive elections—it still remains highly problematic from the perspectives of enhancing democracy and combating corruption in Africa.

Abuse of state resources

It is logical that the more the resources in a country that are centred on the state, the more these resources can be abused for political reasons. The relative size of the state in African countries varies significantly, with Libya probably having the highest level of public employment: 82 per cent of all employed Libyans (or 55 per cent of the total workforce, including the unemployed) work for public or publically owned institutions (Abuhadra and Ajaali, 2014: 7). However, in African countries with a relatively small state apparatus, the risk of public resources being abused in elections is also significant.

There is little to indicate that abuse of state resources has declined in recent years. In the 2015 Nigerian elections, EU observers reported

> cases of abuse of federal and state government resources, biased policing as well as breaches of campaign regulations such as inducement of voters. Allegations were made of civil service salaries, sometimes unpaid for several months, being syphoned off for party campaign activities. Following the election, misappropriation of large sums of campaign money by party supporters caused further controversy (EU EOM 2015: 21f).

The abuse of state resources entails waste that few African economies can easily afford. In addition, it carries the risk of undermining the democratic process by giving the incumbent an undue advantage. Even so, the impact of abuse of state resources on the probability of change through elections should not be exaggerated. The following observation was made 12 years ago:

> It is not uncommon to find arguments that the access to the State coffer makes government turnover in African countries next to unthinkable, and that it gives the government party next to unlimited power. This is likely to be true in certain countries, but the electoral problems faced by the government party in recent elections in Benin, Cap Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, and Zambia show that incumbency is no guarantee for a continued hold of power (Ohman 2004: 70f).

The observation remains true today. If access to state funds guaranteed the incumbent continued electoral success, we would not have seen subsequent changes of power through elections in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Senegal and Zambia (among the countries mentioned in the quote above), and Goodluck Jonathan would not have lost the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria. Elections to look out for in particular in this regard include the presidential and parliamentary elections in Zambia in August 2016 and in Ghana in November 2016.

This fact should not be taken as an indication that the abuse of state resources is not a major problem in Africa. Concerted efforts are needed to counteract this challenge. There are few indications that legislative provisions against abuse of state resources—such as requirements for civil servants to be neutral or bans on public resources being used for campaign purposes—are particularly effective in this regard. Sustained activities by stakeholders throughout society such as civil society groups and media outlets (including new media) are needed.

Sources of private income

One issue that remains important in most African countries is the low level of transparency regarding where political parties and candidates raise funds for ongoing party activities and, more relevantly, for election campaigns. In South Africa, the aforementioned lack of transparency regarding private party income seems to be an increasing problem, as South African parties rely less and less on public funding. Estimates by Calland show that while nearly half of party income in 1994 came from public funding, less than 15 per cent did so in 2009 (Calland 2016: 151).

The 2014 *Handbook* chapter argued that electoral candidates in Africa are normally responsible for funding their own election campaigns, without much assistance from the political party that they represent (Ohman 2014). Since the chapter was written, there has been no change in this regard, which increases the importance of access to money (one's own or that of others) for anyone wishing to run for elected office. This fact has a negative impact on many marginalized groups, as the author found in researching the link between political finance and gender equality in elections in Kenya in 2015. An important finding from that research was that 'respondents who had participated in primary elections stated that they spent more money during this process than during the election' (Ohman and Lintari 2015: 24). Spending ahead of formal election campaigns can include fees paid to a political party to participate in its selection process, or the buying of party support for an individual to be made the party's candidate. This situation, a logical consequence of party dominance over electoral contests with a large share of party stronghold constituencies, also presents a particular challenge to political finance transparency, as almost no African country has regulations that cover finances during the candidate nomination phase.

Another issue yet to be addressed in almost all African countries is third-party involvement in election campaigns—that is, situations in which an organization or person spends money in favour of (or against) an election campaign, for example by printing posters, instead of giving the money directly to the political party or candidate in question. In the MPT dataset, only Kenya scores above zero in relation to third-party involvement, and this only because it has some legal provisions that have not been implemented in practice.

This is not just a hypothetical question, as has been seen in several African elections in recent years. In Nigeria, for example, a number of billboards in favour of presidential candidate Goodluck Jonathan in the 2011 elections claimed to have been paid for by organizations such as 'Nigerians for Clean Air'. Sometimes the third-party structures are highly advanced, as in South Africa where the United States Securities and Exchange Commission has accused the wealthy Chancellor House Holdings of being a 'front company' (Bloomberg 2015) for the ruling African National Congress (ANC). If African legislators in the future pass stricter regulations on political finance transparency, and public oversight bodies implement such rules more actively, the risk is significant that funds will be moved into the hands of third parties to avoid breaking laws and undue publicity around income from undesirable sources.

This does not mean that money is flowing in all African election campaigns. In relation to the Guinea Bissau elections in 2014, the EU EOM noted that 'as in past elections, the incapacity of most political parties to run a national campaign (only four have candidates in all constituencies) ended up benefiting those parties with more financial resources and countrywide structure . . . Campaign in the region was intense in some places but mostly unenthusiastic, and candidates tended to resort often to door-to-door (or *tabanca*-to-*tabanca*) activities' (EU EOM 2014: 6).

Weak oversight and enforcement of rules

As in many other regions of the world (see Ohman and Ritchie 2016), the main shortcoming in ensuring transparent political financing in Africa lies not so much in the legal frameworks but more in the implementation of existing provisions. Sometimes there is no oversight system at all. For example, at the time of the 2014 elections in Malawi there were no provisions for financial reporting or review of the finances of political parties and election campaigns (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa 2014: 12). In Rwanda, according to the MPT dataset, 'breaking the law is nigh on impossible', since there are so few provisions regarding campaign finance in that country.

However, it is significantly more commonplace that, while African countries have regulations on political finance, no single public institution effectively oversees these regulations.[4] The causes of this lack of oversight vary from unclear legal mandates to lacking resources or access to the judicial system for the imposition of sanctions. Underlying these challenges is an unwillingness of political leaders to subject themselves to outside scrutiny, and a lack of independence and political will among public institutions (International Foundation for Electoral Systems 2013: 31–37). Table 2.3 provides some examples of the lack of oversight and enforcement in African countries.

Table 2.3. Information on reporting compliance in the Money, Politics and Transparency dataset

Country	Comment on enforcement
Botswana	'The IEC is weak, and plays little role in the enforcement of political finance laws'.
Ghana	'the Electoral Commission exercises very little control of political finance. It has not investigated or audited party accounts within the study period due to a lack of capacity, nor has it sanctioned any party for violating the law (despite the fact that several violations have occurred)'.
Kenya	'In practice, very little enforcement occurs, and no sanctions were imposed during the 2013 elections.'
Malawi	'No other legislation exists [other than a ban on the abuse of state resources in elections], and enforcement, as a result, is absent'.

4 For a global overview of political finance regulations see International IDEA's Political Finance Database, <http://www.idea.int/political-finance>.

Nigeria	'In practice, the INEC [Independent National Election Commission] suffers from capacity constraints, and has largely eschewed any active oversight of political finance. It conducted no investigations in 2011, and imposed no sanctions on violators, despite ample evidence that violations had occurred. Enforcement, therefore, is weak.'
Rwanda	'the [Office of the Ombudsman] carried out at least 16 investigations into political finance during the 2010 and 2013 elections, though it released no information on the results of those audits. It has limited power to impose sanctions, but its edicts are complied with when they are issued. In general, Rwanda's political finance regulatory framework is very weak. Few laws address the issue, and despite the power of the Ombudsman, little practical enforcement occurs.'
South Africa	'The IEC is well funded and well staffed, and conducts some investigations, in practice. Sanctions take the form of frozen disbursements of public funding, and are sometimes effective'.

Source: Money, Politics and Transparency dataset, <https://data.moneypoliticstransparency.org/>, accessed 12 July 2016.

Of the countries mentioned in Table 2.3, Rwanda and South Africa stand out as the only countries where the public oversight body has showed at least some level of activity. These two countries are also the only African countries in the MPT dataset for which the score for 'in practice' is higher than 'in law' (see Table 2.1). Given the lack of legislation in the field in Rwanda, this may be one case where a change in legislation could actually have a real impact on practical implementation. The same could be said for South Africa, although the ANC has taken a very long time to act on its earlier promises to introduce legislation on private income disclosure (Calland 2016).

In many African countries, key decisions on issues such as reporting requirements, prohibited sources of income and spending limits are often taken (and announced) at late or inopportune times. For example, the High National Election Commission (HNEC) in Libya announced campaign spending limits only two days before the start of the 2012 election campaign (Carter Center 2012). While the HNEC has shown some interest in addressing political finance more forcefully in future elections, the turbulent political situation makes the future in the country highly uncertain.

Furthermore, political parties' financial reports are often submitted late if at all, and those reports which are submitted may not be made available to the public. The EU EOM to the Nigerian elections in 2015 noted that 'it remains to be seen if any reports are submitted within the six-month post-election deadline and if they are then duly published' (EU EOM 2015: 22). Although nearly half a year has now gone by since that deadline, no financial reports are available on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) website. Aluaigba has pointed to the many problems facing INEC in this area, noting a 'lack of funds coupled with other factors such as the dependence of the INEC on the executive' as being part of the problem (2015: 14).

This lack of compliance and enforcement significantly reduces the role of formal regulations in ensuring transparent funding of politics in African countries. Only when political parties and candidates can no longer ignore the rules with impunity will legal political finance provisions be relevant in supporting democratic political and electoral processes. To achieve this, public oversight bodies must be equipped with a clear oversight mandate and sufficient capacity to oversee existing regulations. Their independence must be jealously guarded by leaders exercising political will to go against also incumbent political leaders, with support from stakeholders such as the media and civil society.

Tunisia: a test case for implementation

Tunisia is often seen as the birthplace of the so-called Arab Spring, and many regard the country as ‘a beacon of hope for democracy’ in the region (Electoral Integrity Project 2014: 21). In line with this, Tunisia’s experience of seeking to control political finance should be considered carefully by other African countries.

The 2011 elections for the National Constituent Assembly were held under strict political finance regulations, including a total ban on private donations, with political parties and lists required to rely exclusively on public funding and ‘own sources’ (Jouan 2012). The implementers, the Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE) and the Court of Accounts (CoA), took an active role, and at one stage the ISIE decided that a number of candidates were to lose their seats due to campaign violations (Tunisialive 2011). Several regulations and decisions were announced to clarify key aspects of the political finance regulations.

However, both the regulatory framework and the implementation partially focused on sanctions may have moved too fast for a country undergoing democratization after decades of dictatorship. The decision to annul election results due to campaign finance violations led to public protests and was eventually rejected by the Administrative Tribunal (Sta Ali 2011), and the Carter Center reported that some parties complained that restrictive campaign finance and media regulations limited their ability to conduct effective election campaigns (Carter Center 2011: 13).

Ahead of the 2014 elections, the campaign finance legislation was changed, for example by allowing for private donations. The spending limit was adjusted, with the level varying between the different governorates and depending on the size of the electorate. According to the Carter Center, the 2014 electoral law ‘provides clear and precise campaign finance relations and expanded the powers of the Court of Auditors’ (Carter Center 2014: 37). Again, the ISIE and the CoA on several occasions clarified issues in relation to the new regulations.

If the regulations and enforcement may have erred on the restrictive side in the 2011 elections, the situation may have been the reverse in relation to the 2014 elections. The Tunisian civil society organization I WATCH, with assistance from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), monitored campaign spending in the elections, and concluded that the two major parties had exceeded the spending limit in a number of governorates (National Democratic Institute 2014: 40). While these findings were reported to the authorities, and there were indications of other violations, few sanctions have been imposed at the time of writing. The expert analysis of the 2014 elections by the Electoral Integrity Project revealed that ‘in both [the presidential and parliamentary elections], finance was pointed out as a problem to analyse’ (2014: 22). Even so, the very fact that there were efforts by the government authorities and by civil society to monitor the use of money in the elections shows how political finance is an issue firmly on the political agenda in Tunisia.

The reform process in Tunisia continues, both with regards to legal reform and, more importantly, the implementation by the ISIE and CoA. Perhaps in the next elections the oversight process will reach a position of effective enforcement that is understood and accepted by all stakeholders. Current discussions about legal change in the campaign finance area in Tunisia indicate that candidate lists will have to publish their campaign accounts in newspapers, or risk being deprived of campaign spending reimbursement from the state as the system moves from pre-election state funding to a reimbursement system. The financial sanctions are also being reduced to make them more realistic in the context of Tunisia's economy (Kaczorowski 2016).

3. Conclusions and recommendations

The many political finance challenges African countries faced at the time when the 2014 *Handbook* chapter was written persist today. Vote buying, abuse of state resources, failure by political parties and candidates to comply with regulations (often with impunity) and a lack of effective enforcement stand out as the major problems. While legal reform is needed in many African countries, the main problem, and hence the main focus for effective solutions, lies less on the legislative side and more on practical activities by stakeholders such as political actors, public oversight bodies and civil society groups.

Most of the problems mentioned above can only be solved on a country-by-country basis, but regional and subregional entities can take important steps to put the issue firmly on the agenda. The African Union (AU) should consider passing a resolution on joint standards in political finance. This could take inspiration from the approach taken in the Council of Europe (COE) Recommendation 2003(4) on common rules against corruption in the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns (COE 2003). However, this is not to suggest that African standards should follow those in Europe—any new standards must be suitable to an African context, and much attention must be paid to the possibilities for implementing individual regulations. The situation in African countries will not improve if the standards for a system of regulation and control do not work in practice.

As a support to control the implementation of African standards, the AU should also introduce a peer review system of political finance systems in Africa, taking inspiration from the GRECO experience. This could be exceptionally valuable in providing detailed insights on how oversight works in African countries, and on what can be done to improve the current situation. The aim should be to improve the regulatory process but also, perhaps more importantly, to increase awareness and push for the implementation of existing regulations.

It is possible that the AU, with its 54 member states, is too unwieldy to effectively address these issues, and also that the contextual variation—for example, from Morocco to Swaziland—is too great. In this case, standards and peer-review mechanisms could be developed at a subnational level, for example by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the League of Arab States or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Political finance oversight bodies (which in Africa normally means electoral management bodies) and their subregional associations should work actively to discuss and review the approach taken, in order to oversee compliance with political finance regulations. The election observation methodologies of institutions such as the AU, ECOWAS and SADC should also more explicitly include political finance issues.

In addressing political finance in Africa, international actors must actively aim to support progress, while trying to avoid doing harm. It is worth repeating one argument from the original *Handbook* chapter:

> International donors may worsen [the problem of abuse of state resources] by providing large amounts of funding for 'non-political activities' during pre-election periods, which allows the incumbent regime to cite new projects as evidence of its development efforts […] This is not to say that donor-assisted programmes always have a negative impact; increasing political parties' capacity to communicate with voters—and indeed helping stakeholders oversee and raise awareness about political finance—can help level the electoral playing field (Ohman 2014b: 55).

This is not to say that international entities cannot play an important role. For instance, International IDEA has conducted regional and national stakeholder dialogues to raise awareness about political finance regulation, including the interplay between political finance and gender. IFES has supported legal reform efforts in Libya, and aided public oversight bodies in Kenya, Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as and civil society oversight in Nigeria and Tunisia. Transparency International has, through its various anti-corruption programmes, highlighted the crucial relationship between political corruption and poverty reduction and service delivery. Such international pressure can play an important role in achieving sustainable regional progress.

The solution to the problems regarding the role of money in African politics lies ultimately with African political parties, politicians, civil society groups and voters. While avoiding naïve expectations about what can be achieved in the short term, concerted efforts focusing on long-term changes in behaviour is essential for sustainable progress. As Richard Calland has pointed out (regarding South Africa), 'a strong, vivid political narrative backed by a well-organized, mobilizing campaign is required' (Calland 2016: 158).

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