



Jean Ping
Chairperson
African Union Commission

Transforming the Commission into the Engine of Africa's Renaissance

Letter From The Chairperson

Change is often not a choice. It is a matter of survival because circumstances are different or because our own demands have evolved, we sometimes need to change our way of doing things

When my colleagues and I took office in April 2008, we knew we had no choice but to engage in an ambitious and predictably difficult reform agenda. The Commission needed a profound transformation in order to fulfil its role of main instrument for conception, implementation and coordination of the Union's decisions and programmes, thereby serving the interests of the African people. Indeed, such was the mandate delivered to us by the Assembly and the Executive Council. Basing ourselves on the report of the High Level Panel of the Audit of the African Union our priorities were clearly identified and we had to deliver in the face of many systemic challenges.

First and foremost, the immediate priority was to accelerate and complete the transformation of the Secretariat of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union Commission (AUC). With the rightful liberation aspirations of the African people achieved and African States decolonized, including bringing the ignominious apartheid to an end, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union committed the new organisation to spearheading the development and integration agenda of the continent while assuring peace and security for its people.

Secondly, as the executive organ of the Union, the Commission had the responsibility of putting in place the systems and structures that would increase synergy between Member States, AU organs and other pan-African organisations, taking into account the principles of complementarity, subsidiary and comparative advantage. Thirdly, the Commission's major task was to ascertain sustainable mobilisation of resources for the proper functioning of the institution.

These goals were clearly spelt out in the AU Strategic Plan 2009-2012 under the Institutional and Capacity Building Programme, with the following 4 objectives:

1. Strengthen the capacity and enhance the operational efficiency and effectiveness of the African Union Commission;
2. Promote synergies, linkages and good working relations with all AU organs;
3. Promote effective cooperation and collaboration with Member States and the Regional Economic Communities;
4. Promote strategic partnerships for leveraging sustainable sources of funding and comparative advantages.

Three and a half years down the road, as the accountable officer of the Commission, I am satisfied that we have made substantial and tangible progress in addressing all of these. Important initiatives have been taken that are contributing to the setting up of an institution such as the Heads of State and Government dreamt of. Every athlete needs to strengthen his muscles before engaging in competition. For those who care to look above the

necessary turmoil and complexity of this huge construction site, the frame of a solid AUC can already be distinguished, more credible, more reliable, more capable of performing its role of engine of the African Renaissance.

In order to accomplish this, our efforts have been concentrated on strengthening the core systems and methods of the Commission:



I. Giving Direction

For the first time in 2009, the Strategic Plan of the African Union was designed to be results oriented and programme based. This single endeavour constituted a major shift in the way the Commission carries out its operations. By adopting these principles, the Commission paved the way for increased interaction between Departments, reduced overlap of activities, improved focus and pertinence on the ground as well as the acceleration of the integration of NEPAD into AU structures and processes.

We insisted on weekly Commission meetings with the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson, the Commissioners and their key staff, every Tuesday, in order to exchange information at the highest level of management and increase inter-departmental coordination. Follow up on cross-cutting programmes and projects is carried out through regular meetings with Directors.

As important, we made it a priority to brief and involve Member States and the Permanent Representatives Committee on our programmes and projects in a consistent manner, believing that only through a systemic integrative approach would we achieve the ambitious, yet necessary, objectives of the AU.

II. Creating Instruments

In order to support Departments in adopting this approach, the Strategic Planning, Policy Monitoring and Evaluation and Resource Mobilization (SPPMERM) Directorate was fortified and training in the logical framework instrument was provided to programme managers, planners and senior staff. The budget programming cycle and calendar is being re-aligned so that funding is received in advance at the beginning of the financial year and implementation can start on time, instead of the 3 to 6 month delay that is currently the norm due to late availability of funds.

In line with the AU Financial Rules and Regulations, the Commission, as we have argued, will adhere to multi-year planning and enhance medium-term expenditure framework as from the next budget cycle. The benefits will include: reduced time devoted to budget development, improved long-range and strategic planning, the development of multi-year projects, a more policy-oriented budget process, strengthened performance management, and reduced costs associated with the budget preparation.

We have already started designing the monitoring and evaluation framework which will allow programme and project managers and their staff to get a clear measure of their results on the ground. This will increase their ability to assess the impact of their activities, giving them the required data to redefine their implementation strategy, if needed, in view of achieving the programme and project objectives.

III. Assuring Resources

In view of the enormous costs of financing Africa's security, development, governance and integration agenda, there is need to mobilise additional resources to support Member States' assessed contributions. We have strived to secure adequate and predictable funding for our operations. We have not got there yet. However, a High Level Panel on Alternative Sources of Financing the African Union has been commissioned under the leadership of H. E. Olesegun Obasanjo, former President of Nigeria. They have undertaken consultations during the year and will submit their report shortly.

In the same vein of increasing predictability of funding, Joint Programming Agreements have been negotiated and signed with partners for three programmes: Peace and Security, Shared Values and the Institution and Capacity Building Programme. These arrangements will increase predictability of funding and transparency as well as reduce transaction costs in reporting and auditing. They are in line with the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action.

IV. Regaining Trust

The greatest challenge that the current Commission faced on assuming duty was linked to delays and gaps in financial reporting between 2003 and 2008, specially relating to Program Budgets financed by partners. As an example, USD 300 million had been spent without being fully and properly accounted for during African Union



Mission in Sudan (AMIS) operations between 2003 and 2007. The Commission faced a severe credibility crisis: partners had issued unilateral recovery orders and were threatening to pull their support out entirely – a decision which would, in effect, have significantly negatively affected the operations of the organisation.

It was not an easy task to find supporting documents for monies that had been spent such a long time before and in the context of conflict. But, I am glad that we did do it and reduce the ineligible expenditures significantly. I would here like to praise the leadership of the Deputy Chairperson and the perseverance of our staff who managed to clear up all pending issues and reduced our level of financial risks to less than USD 3 million, thereby successfully closing the AMIS audits in September 2011. The lessons we learnt in AMIS served us well in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

V. Consolidating Systems

Not only did we tackle the most pressing concerns, but, to enable us to effect zero tolerance in financial risk management and all forms of irregularities and shortcomings, we instituted systems and processes that would prevent such catastrophes from happening again. These include:

- The introduction of the SAP enterprise resource planning system in 2008 and its subsequent extension to AMISOM, which has greatly enhanced flow of information and internal financial controls, making it difficult for human tampering;
- The reorganisation and strengthening of Partner Accounting Unit within the Directorate of Programming, Budgeting, Finance and Accounting as well as that of the Resource Mobilization Unit in SPPMERM;
- The establishment of a special Peace & Security Fund Division;
- The development and introduction of financial and administrative guidelines for peace keeping operations;
- The ongoing implementation of International Public Service Accounting Standards (IPSAS) which details accounting standards for the organisation in view of increasing transparency and accountability;
- The recruitment of Finance Officers for AU Liaison and Representational Offices;
- The upgrading of internal audit functions and systems and the implementation of over 90% of previously pending audit recommendations from 2006;
- The introduction of a lean management through the Kaizen methodology, leading to waste reduction and confirmed improvement of methods, systems and processes of the Commission;
- The elevation of our procurement practice and operations to international standards, including the adoption of a Procurement Manual with clear and transparent guidelines;
- The strengthening of the planning, monitoring and evaluation function through the transformation of the African Monitoring and Evaluation Tool (AMERT) from an activity-based tool into a results-based computerised platform.

Moreover, in the case of irregularities detected, such as in the Congo-Kinshasa office and in Mali, the Commission acted promptly. In one case, we even managed to recover the embezzled funds, while INTERPOL is pursuing the other culprit on our request.

VI. Managing Human Resources

Our staff is our most important asset and we have made consistent efforts to improve employee motivation and satisfaction as well as talent management. After twenty years of status quo, new Staff Rules and Regulations have been adopted, which will facilitate employer – employee relations, even though, due to budgetary implications, their implementation will be rolled out gradually. Terms and conditions of service were reviewed and improved in 2009.

Recently, a comprehensive study of the current human resources management system was undertaken and the Commission is considering for adoption, six administrative policies that will clearly define rules, guidelines and responsibilities in the areas of: Performance Management and Accountability, Recruitment and Personnel Selection, Mission Travel, Medical Assistance Plan, Education Allowance and Benefits, Staff Leave and Holiday.

In order to build capacity by attracting the best candidates, recruitment procedures and processes have been streamlined. Working along side the human resources unit, Departments are now called to participate in the selection process so that they can choose the best suited candidate to their needs in terms of qualification, experience and professionalism.

This new approach to recruitment, including the regular meetings of the Appointments and Promotion Board (APROB), made it possible for us to meet and even exceed recruitment targets for the first time in the history of the AUC. In 2008, 50 recruitments were planned and achieved as in 2009; in 2010, as targeted, 48 people were recruited and in 2011, we have achieved the target of 55 recruitments. Moreover, responding to the needs of

Departments, the organisational structure has been reviewed and an additional 123 positions adopted by the policy organs.

The Disciplinary Board has been resuscitated and now meets on a weekly basis to consider pending cases. At the same time, the quality of medical services has been upgraded and the range of services increased.



VII. Leveraging Technology

The focus on ICT development has continued to be on empowering staff to become more productive in their work, through provision of high quality, innovative, user-centric and cost effective IT products and services, maintaining a reliable network and data center infrastructure to support the Commission's business applications; conducting regular training for both the technical staff and end-users; and providing appropriate content management tools, guidelines and standards.

Very good quality wireless internet connection is a much appreciated feature of our compound. Other key outcomes have included a more reliable and secure network with minimum downtime, a more stable data center, an expanded network that is more accessible to staff and guests, and a reliable e-mail system. Most regional offices are now integrated in the Headquarters network. The use of video conferencing has now become more mainstream as a means of saving time and money, as well as increasing productivity.

More efforts are currently being made to integrate softwares that will facilitate knowledge sharing and document workflow throughout the Commission, with the expected results of increasing collaborative work, sharing critical information on time, thereby highly improving the efficiency of our action on the ground.

VIII. Liaising with Stakeholders

The AUC does not function in a vacuum. Members States, the people of Africa, public and private institutions, media – all have an interest in the activities of the Commission and have a desire to be part of its work.

The Office of the Secretary General to the Commission has been instrumental in increasing inter-Departmental and inter-Directorate coordination and providing support to meetings of the Commission as well as those of the Permanent Representatives Committee and the Executive Council. In addition, the Directorate of Information and Communication has been strengthened in order to increase the level of interaction with stakeholders and increase knowledge of the Commission's activities and raise its visibility.

In order to achieve coherence between the three main pan-African institutions, a Joint Secretariat Support Office has been established together with the UNECA and AfDB, with a view to increasing convergence on some priority projects through harmonisation of programmes, work plans, meetings and other activities.

Conclusion

This is a very brief overview of some of the actions taken and reform initiated during the past three and a half years in order to increase capability and the capacity of the Commission. The result has been a more focused and disciplined organisation, governed by the rule of law. Of course, while a lot has been accomplished, I will be the first, together with the Deputy Chairperson, to admit that there is still room for growth and improvement.

Our ambition is to increase the budget absorption capacity of the Commission so that it can concretely deliver on its mandate. It is good to remember that the annual budget of the AU has grown from USD 40 million to USD 250 million in less than ten years, whereas the internal structures and systems have hardly been reviewed. Our teams are currently working on measures to address his concern. Tackling staff turnover is equally high on our agenda, as the need to recruit, train and integrate new staff represents a hidden cost to our operations. Yet, on the up side, this also shows that the quality of our staff is attractive to other organisations.

I would like here to reaffirm that we are committed to intensifying efforts to sustain the current changes and to deal with the remaining challenges. As all eyes are now converging on Africa, I am confident that the foundations are now in place that will allow the Commission to better play its role on the continental and international arenas in the coming years.

The Letter from the Chairperson

Monthly Publication
Published by: The Directorate of Information
and Communication
Bureau of the Chairperson

African Union Commission
P.O Box 3243
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
E-mail: dinfo@africa-union.org
Web Site: www.au.int