

AFRICA POLICY INFORMATION CENTER

*A NEW RESOURCE FOR
POLICY DIALOGUE AND INFORMATION EXCHANGE*

1992 Annual Report

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The Genesis of the Africa Policy Information Center

The Africa Policy Information Center (APIC) -- formerly the Washington Office on Africa Educational Fund -- is located in Washington, DC and affiliated with the Washington Office on Africa. APIC's goals are to:

- identify critical policy issues in U.S./African relations;
- bring in diverse perspectives from African and North American grassroots groups and scholars as well as governmental and non-governmental participants in the policy process; and
- make information and analysis accessible to a broad range of U.S. public constituencies.

The Africa Policy Information Center has emerged from discussions among the board and staff of the Washington Office on Africa Educational Fund, a 501(c)(3) affiliate of the Washington Office on Africa.

The Washington Office on Africa (WOA), a lobbying organization, was founded in 1972 by a coalition of religious denominations and trade unions. The Washington Office on Africa Educational Fund (WOAEF) was approved as a 501(c)(3) organization in 1978. The mandate of both organizations was to support the movement for freedom from white-minority rule in southern Africa, and to serve as a resource for the broader anti-apartheid network, including churches, unions, other anti-apartheid groups and a wide variety of other non-governmental organizations.

The distinctive role that WOA and WOAEF played within the anti-apartheid movement has been to provide information and action resources addressed to policy in Washington, and particularly within the congressional arena. WOA/WOAEF have provided timely information on the legislative process, facilitated joint campaigns and lobbying efforts, and enhanced coordination and exchange of information among groups working together in the anti-apartheid movement. WOA has helped coordinate the regular meetings and strategy sessions of the Southern Africa Working Group of non-governmental organizations. WOAEF has concentrated on producing accessible public education materials, which have been widely used by WOA's sponsoring organizations and throughout the anti-apartheid movement.

Beginning in late 1990, WOA/WOAEF undertook an internal study of their organizational missions and future directions, involving the staff, members of both boards and outside consultants. In late 1991, the board of directors of the Washington Office on Africa Educational Fund decided to initiate plans for the Africa Policy Information Center. At the beginning of 1992, the Washington Office on Africa board of directors approved a new mission statement expanding WOA's scope of work beyond southern Africa to issues affecting grassroots African

interests throughout the continent. In 1992, the WOAEF board approved "Africa Policy Information Center" as the new name for WOAEF.

Continuing a Twenty-Year History

The Washington Office on Africa and Africa Policy Information Center have particular strengths to contribute to the tasks of building up the network of Africa-advocacy individuals and groups, and of facilitating linkages to the Washington policy arena for grassroots Americans and Africans. WOA/WOAEF have a wide variety of contacts with grassroots groups in southern Africa, with Africanist academics and grassroots activists in the United States, with Congress, and with a wide range of national groups having some concern with African issues. The organizational sponsors of WOA -- principally religious denominations and trade unions -- represent important constituencies in the United States, with their own networks of grassroots contacts in Africa. APIC and its board open up contacts with a wide spectrum of networks, including the African Studies Association, the Association of Concerned Africa Scholars, and over 130 groups that are members of Interaction.

WOA also has a tradition of functioning as a resource to wider organizational networks, and of a collaborative, coalition-building style of work. WOA has consistently provided timely information on legislation relating to southern Africa and congressional positions to grassroots delegations from churches and anti-apartheid groups, as well as to other Washington groups working on the issues. WOAEF has a history of combining careful research with an emphasis on publications which are suitable for grassroots constituencies. And WOA/WOAEF have maintained a consistent commitment to multiracial diversity in their staff, board and constituency-building.

Africa Policy Information Center: Towards a Greater Grassroots Voice for Africa

In February 1990, people around the world applauded as Nelson Mandela walked out of prison. Although the white minority regime in South Africa still holds power more than two years later, the political reality there has been dramatically transformed. Political apartheid is close to its end. Namibia is now independent, and a cease-fire is in place in Angola. The long-term prospects are promising for a stable democratic post-apartheid order in South Africa and the region. But there are many perils ahead in this transition period, and dealing with the legacy of inequality and violence will take decades, if not generations.

Throughout the continent, a new generation of Africans is demanding democracy and grassroots development, and taking African initiatives to resolve long-festered conflicts. But the economic crisis besetting the continent shows no sign of letting up, and the debt burden threatens to suffocate new solutions. Just when Africans are themselves most active in proposing constructive solutions to their problems, the outside world seems ready to write off Africa's

peoples as not of strategic interest. Having supported dictators and wars which have devastated much of the continent, outside powers claiming donor fatigue seem ready to walk away from the task of reconstruction.

The people of southern Africa and the rest of the continent need and deserve solidarity from the rest of the world, for both moral and practical reasons. African demands for full democracy should be as compelling as those of people in Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union. And their quest for a just share of the world economy's surplus, if thwarted, will produce recurrent crises that an interdependent world will not be able to shove aside forever.

New Challenges in U.S./African Relations

Sustaining informed public interest in Africa in the United States has never been easy. Only the vivid injustice of the apartheid system and, occasionally, famine, have aroused high-profile media attention. With the spotlight turning to the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia, and the belief by many that apartheid is already a non-issue, building a constituency for Africa faces even more obstacles than before.

Yet there are also new resources which, if linked together, could build more solid and sustained involvement by many Americans. Over the last generation, there has emerged a critical mass of African professionals and grassroots organizers, whose energies are now visible in new pro-democracy, human rights, and development groups and in new initiatives by churches and trade unions. The mass democratic movement in South Africa is particularly well-developed, but similar networks are emerging in almost every country. There are voices ready to speak, if Americans are ready to listen.

Within the United States, the anti-apartheid movement drew in people and groups throughout society, in local groups and a host of organizations in addition to the few national groups that specialized in southern African issues. Many would be willing to continue their involvement, if they were given channels for an ongoing flow of information and personal contact. There are also many Americans with direct experience with Africa, in the Peace Corps or in other programs, and large numbers of African Americans with the desire to match personal identification with more concrete connections.

The Africa-focused groups that exist, such as TransAfrica, African American Institute, American Committee on Africa, Washington Office on Africa, Africare, Africa Watch, Africa Faith and Justice Network, and others, together tap only a small fraction of the potential. The number of Africa-focused staff in other organizations, such as the churches, the non-governmental organizations in Interaction, Bread for the World, Global Exchange, and similar groups, is also small. There are millions of Americans with some connection to Africa, whether through Afrocentric and multicultural education, through church links or through personal history. But only rarely is this interest fostered and educated in a consistent way.

Much of the energy of the larger groups goes into communication on Africa issues with policy elites, a necessary and important task. But enhancing the effectiveness of the Africa-advocacy community as a whole depends on building links between Americans and Africans at the grassroots level. That, in turn, implies maximizing the impact of the diverse efforts that already exist. An organizational uniformity is neither possible nor desirable. But better communication and coordination among individuals and groups concerned with Africa is essential.

Building a Grassroots Constituency for Africa

There is no magic formula for building and activating a wider constituency on Africa. At one level, the response must come from many different institutional locations.

In order to inform and motivate a grassroots constituency for Africa, more sustained educational efforts within the school system, at all levels, are needed. Another important priority is more people-to-people exchanges, by educational institutions, churches and other sectors of civil society. The dialogue at the leadership level -- by the African American Institute and other groups -- is of continuing importance. Activist groups concerned with specific African countries or regions need to increase their effectiveness, and specialized groups concerned with human rights, the environment or other issues need to systematically incorporate an African dimension. Media efforts such as those by Africa News must continue and expand.

But all these efforts suffer from a lack of sufficient critical information and analysis, easily available in accessible form to their constituencies. While much of this can and will be supplied by individual groups, scarce resources argue strongly for greater collaboration, joint publications, and shared use of informational materials.

The Role of the Africa Policy Information Center

The rationale for APIC is to widen the policy debate in the United States around Africa issues and the U.S. role vis-a-vis African priorities. APIC will seek to be informed by and on behalf of grassroots initiatives and analysis in Africa. In turn, APIC will seek to expand the U.S. constituency concerned with African issues, by making resources for understanding African issues accessible to the diverse array of social justice, student, church, labor and other groups in the United States.

There is a need for an organization with this as its primary focus. Neither new perspectives reflecting recent developments in African civil society, nor the information and analyses by existing Africa-focused groups and scholars, are yet reaching more than a fraction of the potentially receptive public. While each group cultivates its own constituency, few have the resources to produce or distribute material which communicates to wider audiences, translating African voices and specialized analyses into accessible language. Many excellent publications reach only the most interested; word-of-mouth networks for sharing new information and perspectives often extend only to those who are already most involved and best informed.

APIC will not substitute its efforts for existing programs, but rather will focus on increasing the density of communication networks among existing groups doing Africa-focused work and on providing critical information and analysis needed by groups and individual citizens to become more effectively involved in the policy process. By maintaining a systematic inventory of available resources, APIC will be able to refer people to relevant groups and resource materials, as well as to identify gaps that need to be filled. APIC therefore regards collaboration with other groups and institutions as indispensable, and expects this feature of its work to produce a multiplier effect for the efforts of other groups as well as for its own programs.

Initial Programs of the Africa Policy Information Center

APIC's three program areas will each be designed to promote dialogue and information exchange involving both Africans and Americans, and including grassroots groups and scholars, as well as official and non-official participants in the policy process.

- 1. Opportunities for Dialogue and Consultation.** The pilot projects in APIC's policy dialogue program will be a consultative seminar on "U.S. Policies and Africa's Health," and a conference on "Africa's Crises, African Initiatives and U.S. Responses." Both meetings will be co-sponsored with other organizations in order to ensure wide and diverse participation.
- 2. Accessible Information and Analysis.** APIC will begin production of short publications (2 to 6 pages), including "Backgrounders" with basic factual data, "Briefing Papers" on current policy issues, and "Resource Guides" listing publications, organizations and experts available for additional information and analysis. APIC will also initiate medium-length "Policy Studies" (24 to 36 pages) in coordination with the Association of Concerned Africa Scholars, Africa World Press, or other groups interested in co-sponsorship of a particular study. APIC will work with outreach programs at African Studies Centers, as well as other organizations, to build an extensive network for distribution and reproduction of these publications.
- 3. Africa On-Line.** APIC will build a publicly-available computerized database of sources of information on current Africa issues, including individual experts, organizations with relevant expertise, and current publications. In the initial stages, information from the database will be available by telephone consultation. It will also be uploaded for electronic retrieval to existing services such as Peacenet and the African Studies BBS at the University of Wisconsin, and used as a source for short, printed "Resource Guides." Eventually, the information will also be retrievable by fax/voicemail systems.

1992: The Planning Phase

To realize its program plans for the next three years, the Africa Policy Information Center undertook a one-year planning period. The board and staff of APIC will engage in a number of meetings to outline the full scope of work to be completed. Consultations were held with experts with appropriate experience in the fields of computer databases and electronic bulletin boards, marketing, and development (fundraising).

As a result, APIC developed a concise "business plan" to serve as a guide in establishing a strong foundation for the organization. An important component of the plan is strategies for developing a diversified mix of funding sources, including foundation and corporate grants, donations from individuals, publication sales, as well as fee-for-service income. Other issues include staffing, office space, and budgetary requirements.

In addition to planning the overall course of action for the first few years of APIC, the board and staff laid plans for the initial seminars and conference:

- During 1993, APIC will initiate its "Opportunities for Dialogue and Consultation" program with one or two seminars. These meetings will be unique in featuring grassroots individuals from Africa who will help participants understand what needs to be done in this country to make a positive difference on the local level in Africa. It is expected that the first seminar will focus on "U.S. Policies and Africa's Health."
- The first major conference, "Africa's Crises, African Initiatives and U.S. Responses," will be held during 1994. This conference will be planned with a goal of attracting 300 people to attend its two and a half days of plenary sessions and workshops. A committee composed of board members, staff, and other experts will meet during the planning period to determine workshop sessions, identify and approach appropriate speakers, and develop a plan to ensure widespread participation.

APIC's plans for its publications were also developed, including the number of each type of publication to produce during each of APIC's first three years as well as specific topics to be addressed. In addition, formats best suited for each type of publication were designed and templates developed. For example, Backgrounders will be printed on three-hole punched paper to allow readers to easily update their binders. Such strategies will maximize the impact and usefulness of our publications.

Building Support

Networking, collaboration, and cooperation will be vital to fill existing information gaps, help maximize resources within the community of Africa-related organizations, and avoid duplicating the efforts of other groups. Thus, during the planning period, APIC held a series of meetings with other Africa-related organizations to share our plans, begin building an inventory of other organizations' programs, and explore the potential for collaboration. These meetings will enable APIC to avoid conflict with other organizations as well as determine its own unique niche.

In addition, APIC held several informal workshops with experts in various Africa-related fields to help determine the issue areas into which APIC should expand (e.g., the environment, AIDS, health, etc.). APIC also began making contacts with two additional groups vital to our long-term success: (1) African professionals and grassroots organizers who will eventually participate in APIC programs, and (2) program officers at foundations and corporations who can provide invaluable ideas and support.

Providing Accessible Information and Analysis

In addition to this essential strategic planning, APIC also released its first policy paper released in September 1992, *Africa's Problems...African Initiatives*. Three important documents written by and for Africans have been excerpted to form this readable and compelling book:

- "African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programs for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation (AAF-SAF)" by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa;
- "African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation" adopted by a coalition of African people's organizations, governments, and United Nations agencies; and
- "The Kampala Document: Towards a Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa" by the Africa Leadership Forum.

Taken together, these documents present a critical analysis of the causes of Africa's plight and outline viable strategies for turning things around. *Africa's Problems...African Initiatives* promises to become "required reading" for anyone interested in Africa's development.

In 1992, APIC also published its first Backgrounder, "Africa: Dispelling the Myths." APIC Backgrounders are brief summaries of essential background data. "Dispelling the Myths" is a two-page document which provides a map of Africa and basic demographic information, an overview of the continent's political systems and economies, and introductions to the following issues: militarism and famine, the U.S. and aid to Africa, the environment, and jobs and justice. APIC strongly believes that short, basic publications such as "Africa: Dispelling the Myths" are critical to informing the American public and ultimately involving them in policy discussions.

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