



RECOMMENDATIONS

- The media could educate citizens about the APRM process; act as a watchdog to ensure that APRM commitments are implemented; and be a forum for public debate on governance progress achieved.
- The APRM Focal Point needs to ensure public ownership of the APRM. *Izimbizo* (public gatherings where officials meet community members), academic forums and frequent reporting on progress to the public would ensure more sustained interest and increased public participation.
- The APRM National Governing Council needs to play a role in popularising the process through public meetings and the media, and monitoring NPoA implementation.
- Civil society groups working on governance issues need to engage the Focal Point to collaborate on implementing and monitoring the NPoA.
- The government needs to ensure that the mechanism is used to improve governance, as originally intended. This could be accomplished through integrating the NPoA into the NDP.

South Africa's Implementation of the APRM: Making a Difference or Going Through the Motions?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

South Africa's 2007 African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) Country Review Report (CRR) identified numerous governance challenges. The country committed itself to eradicating these challenges through implementing a National Programme of Action (NPoA). However, seven years later, these challenges persist and the APRM has fallen off the public radar. In January 2014, South Africa launched its third APRM NPoA implementation report, to show what progress has been achieved since the last implementation report in 2011. This policy briefing critically analyses the latest report and comes to the conclusion that, while reporting on APRM matters has improved significantly since the first two efforts, it is still unclear what value the APRM brings to enhancing governance in South Africa. Specifically, failures to link the NPoA to domestic policies and incorporate it in the National Development Plan (NDP) indicate that the APRM is largely being used in a foreign policy context by the government.

LAUNCH OF THE THIRD APRM NPOA IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

On 29 January 2014, South Africa launched its third APRM NPoA implementation report, referred to hereafter as SAIR3. It was clearly seen as an important foreign relations exercise for the country, as demonstrated by the presence of high-profile government figures at the APR Forum in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. South Africa's President Jacob Zuma, Lindiwe Sisulu, the then Minister of Public Service and Administration and the

APRM Focal Point, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, the Minister of International Relations and Co-operation, and Baleka Mbete, the country's representative on the APRM Panel of Eminent Persons, were in attendance. SAIR3 marks a clear improvement in quality and honesty of reporting over its predecessors, launched in January 2009 and January 2011 respectively. However, questions remain about the extent to which the APRM NPoA (which is now some seven years old) informs the country's domestic policies and planning. In spite of the improved reporting, the APRM seems to be used as a foreign policy tool by South Africa and has little, if any, impact domestically.

BACKGROUND

Launched in March 2003, the APRM is a voluntary African governance assessment and improvement tool, currently boasting 34 member states, 17 of which have undergone their first review. It consists of a combination of internal and external assessments, culminating in the adoption of an NPoA to address identified governance deficiencies and shortcomings. The review is carried out across four thematic areas: democracy and political governance; economic governance and management; corporate governance; and socio-economic development.

South Africa's APRM process started in 2005, culminating in a peer review by the APRM Committee of Participating Heads of State and Government (the APR Forum – the mechanism's highest decision-making body) in January 2007 and the public release of the final CRR in September the same year.

Since then, the APRM in South Africa has largely disappeared from the public's radar, particularly following the departure from office of one of its architects, namely former President Thabo Mbeki. The country's Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) is the driver of the mechanism, but it has been under four different ministers in the past three years and has suffered from a loss of institutional memory and staff shortages. The APRM is rarely covered by the media or mentioned by politicians (or civil society organisations).

SAIR3, analysed in this policy briefing, covers the period from October 2010 to January 2013. However, the report also states that it includes input from provincial consultations that took place throughout 2013. While it is clear that reporting has improved since the publication of the first and second APRM NPoA implementation reports, the impact of the process is not evident. The problems identified in the original report persist, there is seemingly no link between the NPoA and government policies, and the public is only involved sporadically, usually during reporting periods.

SAIR3 STRENGTHS

Consultative reporting process

SAIR3 is not just the government's own assessment of its progress. Whereas the first two reports were written solely by the government, this time the DPSA organised a number of consultations in various provinces, including Mpumalanga, North West and Limpopo. These covered a wide range of governance topics, such as service delivery, crime, corruption and xenophobia. Sisulu stressed that every effort was made to obtain viewpoints from different stakeholders, including 'non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations, youth, disabled and the business sector amongst others to hear their inputs on how government has done in addressing the issues raised in our country review'.² According to Sisulu, as a result '[t]his report is ... not a reflection of elites, but a product of engagements by South Africans talking about their own experiences'.³

Frankness

The latest report is very honest in its assessment of South Africa's current governance problems. In the foreword Zuma says: 'Our government wants to acknowledge the service delivery challenges, instances of xenophobia and violence against women and children. These are challenges which have persisted over the three reporting periods and our government has developed robust mechanisms to root them out.'⁴ In contrast, the two previous implementation reports played

down the issue of xenophobia and generally presented a very one-sided view of the country's performance, often over-stating achievements and under-playing difficulties.

Quality

SAIR3 is also superior to the first two reports from a technical viewpoint. It is well written and well researched. SAIR1 and SAIR2 made sweeping statements about the country's achievements that were not backed up by data. Furthermore, they frequently described the establishment of policies as successes, without discussing their implementation and effectiveness. SAIR3, on the other hand, uses statistics and tables to show improvement and demonstrate progress, such as instances of utilisation of public participation forums and satisfaction with service delivery in local municipalities.

SAIR3 WEAKNESSES

Disconnect from policy

The latest report, like its predecessors, fails to establish a direct link to the 2007 APRM CRR, its recommendations and South Africa's specific NPoA commitments. Judging from its findings, it does not seem as though the country has a coherent and centralised strategy to implement the NPoA. Instead, progress achieved through other initiatives is reported on for issues that were also flagged during the APRM review. SAIR3 states that the NDP is a master plan for the country and enjoys widespread support.⁵ However, despite the NDP's focus on certain key issues that duplicate or mirror cross-cutting issues identified in the CRR, such as unemployment, service delivery, health and corruption, there is no discernible link between the two. This represents a missed opportunity to boost the APRM.

Lack of public and civil society inputs in final report

Although involving the public in the writing of the report through provincial consultations is commendable, people's voices do not come through clearly enough in the final report. More effort should have been expended on incorporating

the inputs of members of the public who attended these gatherings. For instance, there are no quotes from these meetings, details of how many people attended, or case studies on the most pressing concerns in each province. This makes it difficult to determine to what extent these meetings influenced the final product. Furthermore, while SAIR3 uses quotes and data from independent reports, its writers did not include the views of the main civil society organisations working on the APRM in South Africa.

Persistent problems

Based on the findings of SAIR3, it is clear that South Africa knows what its problems are. However, these problems remain serious seven years after the APRM review was completed. The 2007 APRM CRR consisted of mostly solid and practical recommendations made by the APR Panel of Eminent Persons. Despite this, there have been no visible efforts to systematically implement these or incorporate them into other initiatives or plans, such as the NDP.

ANALYSIS

SAIIA's analysis of the 2009 APRM NPoA implementation report stated, 'If South Africa wants to remain at the forefront of the governance agenda in Africa and exemplify democracy, it needs to put effort into implementing its APRM NPoA and reporting more accurately and sincerely.'⁶ Reporting on South Africa's APRM progress has certainly improved since 2009. However, whether the actual implementation of the NPoA has improved is a different question entirely. There is currently no evidence to suggest that the NPoA informs the government's planning processes, including the NDP or Vision 2030, which is mentioned frequently in SAIR3. While some of the cross-cutting issues identified in the CRR, such as corruption and unemployment, are included, others are not. Although it is clear that the country has moved on since the 2007 review and that new issues have emerged, as exemplified in the NDP's focus on economic challenges, problems such as crime, HIV/AIDS and violence against women and children have not gone away.

Considering that a framework to deal with these has been developed (the NPoA), along with relevant indicators and targets, it is puzzling that the government does not utilise it. It seems as though the APRM is kept in its own little box and only dusted off at reporting time, and is poorly integrated with other policy processes.

Although a more significant effort was made to popularise the latest Implementation Report domestically than had been the case with the previous two, the South African APRM process still seems to be primarily a foreign policy exercise. Seeing that SAIR3 notes that 'concerted efforts [were made] to also incorporate UN MDGs [Millennium Development Goals] in government's work through various avenues of the national programme implementation, such as the Cluster System and individual departments and agencies',⁷ one wonders why similar efforts have not been undertaken with regard to the APRM.

CONCLUSION

In her preface to SAIR3, Sisulu states that she 'wish[es] to confirm that the APRM programme is as vibrant in the country now as it was at the time we acceded ... in 2003'.⁸ However, the public profile of the mechanism in South Africa tells a different story. After 11 years, the APRM remains largely unknown inside and outside civil society, academia and government circles, not only in South Africa but also on the continent as a whole. This is unfortunate, as the APRM has the potential to improve governance, encourage peer learning and establish a culture of openness, transparency and accountability across its member states. Sisulu suggests a way forward by stating, 'It is going to be very important ... to strengthen the institutionalisation of the APRM in all spheres of government and to monitor and strengthen

relations with civil society organisations'.⁹ It is important that this commitment is translated into practice.

The necessary measures must be taken to ensure that the third progress report does not suffer the fate of the first two, which were ignored by the media and society at large. The country's 20th anniversary of the advent of democracy and the publication of the latest Implementation Report provide South Africa with an excellent opportunity to reinvigorate the process and generate discussions around the APRM and the critical governance questions facing the nation.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Yarik Turianskyi is a programme manager at the Governance and APRM Programme of the South African Institute of International Affairs. His Master's dissertation is on 'The APRM as a standard for good governance'.
- 2 South Africa Government Online, 'Minister Lindiwe Sisulu calls on South Africans to make their voices heard', 3 February 2013, <http://www.gov.za/events/view.php?sid=34027>.
- 3 APRM (African Peer Review Mechanism) Focal Point, *Third Report on the Implementation of South Africa's African Peer Review Mechanism Programme of Action*. Pretoria: APRM Focal Point, Ministry of Public Service and Administration, January 2014, p. 17.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- 6 Turianskyi Y, 'Off Track? Findings from South Africa's First APRM Implementation Report', Occasional Paper 53. Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs, January 2010, p. 34.
- 7 APRM Focal Point, *op. cit.*, p. 105.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 9 *Ibid.*

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