



# A Good Governance Driver: Is the African Peer Review Mechanism Up to It?

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### RECOMMENDATIONS

- For the APRM to serve as a driver of Agenda 2063, it needs to be viewed as an ongoing, long-term process. To this end, revitalising the APRM and re-establishing its momentum are imperative. It must demonstrate greater political will and determination.
- The proposed knowledge hub must be established. Possible partners – in academia, civil society, international organisations and business – should be engaged to offer support.
- The APRM's incorporation into the AU must respect the former's autonomy.
- Administrative reforms at the APRM secretariat must be completed, and a permanent CEO and the necessary staff engaged.
- The funding system must be reviewed. It needs to bring in more funds and do so more predictably. Failure to pay subscriptions cannot be allowed. This process will create the opportunity to re-engage with development partners as sources of support.
- NPoA implementation must be prioritised as the ultimate goal of the APRM.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The introduction of the AU's Agenda 2063 means that yet another governance initiative has entered the African political landscape. This policy briefing examines the place of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) within Agenda 2063, as well as the African Governance Architecture (AGA). It argues that the APRM could effectively exist alongside them. However, at 12 years old, the APRM must first be reinvigorated, given its relative decline and the inadequate political will behind it.

### INTRODUCTION

'Africa will be a continent where democratic values, practices, universal principles of human rights, justice and the rule of law are entrenched and capable institutions and transformative leadership in place at all levels.'<sup>2</sup> So reads one of the principal commitments of the AU's emerging governance vision, Agenda 2063. A bold aspiration for what the continent should look like five decades from now, it recognises that Africa's developmental challenges cannot be tackled unless its governance deficiencies are corrected. Agenda 2063 aspires to a united and integrated continent that boasts a strong commitment to democracy and human rights, promotes sustainable development, displays a strong cultural identity, maximises the potential of its youth and women, is peaceful and secure, and is seen as an influential global player and partner.<sup>3</sup> These ideals give Agenda 2063 a strong complementarity with the APRM. Indeed, Agenda 2063 accords the APRM an important role in turning this vision into action.

## THE APRM: UNFULFILLED POTENTIAL AT NATIONAL AND CONTINENTAL LEVELS

Since its founding in 2003, the APRM has chalked up several successes. Of the AU's 54 member states, 35 have thus far acceded to the APRM – accounting for 80% of the continent's people. It has established an institutional structure to perform its reviews. Most importantly, through the breadth and extent of its inquiries, the APRM has offered Africa a crucial and unique platform for citizens to engage with officials on governance issues, thereby facilitating public debate. The opportunity for citizens to express themselves on these matters constitutes a paradigm shift for much of Africa, where policy debate has largely been the province of the elite. Such dialogue would not ordinarily have been possible in all APRM countries. So far, the APRM has reviewed 17 countries, producing a comprehensive and highly regarded Country Review Report (CRR) on each.

The structures of the AU's governance system are being consolidated in the emerging AGA to streamline them, remove duplication and ultimately make them more efficient. This is fundamental for the success of Agenda 2063. The APRM is well placed to fit into the AGA by performing its diagnostic work on governance in Africa's countries. Specifically, its value-add lies in the scope of its inquiries, which are unmatched and take a standards-based view of governance, seeking input from across society.

Yet there are concerns about whether the APRM is capable of playing this role. In recent years, the APRM has lost momentum. This has been attributed to the failure of participating states to demonstrate proper commitment to it (many are in arrears in their financial contributions), a decline in donor interest and failings in the APRM bureaucracy.

The APRM's institutions have been dogged by three hindrances. Firstly, there are allegations of instability, poor management and a shortage of resources. Since 2008 the continental secretariat has lacked a permanently appointed chief executive officer (CEO) – and for around two years in this period, it had no CEO at all, but merely an official designated 'officer in charge'. In January 2015

a permanent CEO was appointed, although the candidate subsequently declined to assume office. This has made it very difficult for the secretariat, and the APRM system as a whole, to take binding long-term decisions. In addition, media reports over this period suggested an atmosphere of insecurity and trepidation among staff.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, a lack of funding has been a long-standing concern. Many countries fail to pay their annual subscriptions of \$100,000, and contributions from foreign and multilateral sources have largely stopped. According to its 2013 annual report, which provides the latest available figures, only nine of the (then) 33 participating states had made any contributions at all in that year. Three countries had made no contributions at all since acceding. These included Liberia, whose president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, served as the chair of the APRM Forum of Heads of State and Government (the highest decision-making authority in the system)<sup>5</sup> from May 2013 to June 2015. Total collections were \$2.7 million in 2013, which is just a third of the budgeted expenditure of \$7 million, leaving a significant deficit.<sup>6</sup>

Thirdly, the APRM appears to have become embroiled in political conflict – something that has always been a danger, given the intrinsically political nature of its work. Several APRM watchers have remarked that the candour and thoroughness with which the APRM has undertaken its work have alienated some participating governments – they had not expected this level of scrutiny. In this respect, controversy has attended the Committee of Focal Points (CFP) – a body comprising representatives of the various governments, created in 2012. Tasked to oversee the administration of the system, the CFP removed some of the authority of the Panel of Eminent Persons. The panel had placed a stamp of independence, gravitas and integrity on the APRM, and its partial displacement by the CFP has been interpreted in some quarters as an attempt to tame the mechanism. The panel is now largely confined to overseeing country reviews (although none has been produced since 2013).

The most glaring outcome of these problems is that no CRRs have been produced since early 2013. And although the APRM has noted numerous governance shortcomings in certain countries, it is

less clear that it is instigating necessary reforms. Concerns are regularly voiced that the National Programmes of Action (NPOAs), produced in response to the problems identified in the CRRs, are not being implemented, and this undermines a major aspect of the APRM's design.

Together, these issues point to a system under stress. But they also have implications for the AU as a whole. For example, the APRM has not engaged well in the discussions around the emerging AGA initiative because of its internal difficulties, not least the lack of a permanent CEO. And it is unclear how the APRM could contribute more to the AU's activities with its uncertain resource envelope. It should be noted that these problems are not limited to the APRM, but affect other African institutions too. As one development expert remarked, 'We simply don't know how to build institutions on this continent.'

If the AGA and Agenda 2063 are to succeed, priority must be given to mending the internal deficiencies of its component parts. Africa must attend to its existing institutions before creating new ones.

## THE APRM: REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

Despite its problems, the APRM retains some critical assets. As its place in the AGA and Agenda 2063 demonstrates, the APRM is a respected brand. There is widespread consensus on the role it can play in underwriting democracy and good governance in Africa. This recognition protects its continued existence from those who feel threatened by it.

The APRM's priority must be to reintroduce momentum in its core business, which is to conduct reviews. This process must involve reviewing those countries that have not yet been reviewed and, perhaps more importantly, conducting 'second-generation' reviews of those countries that have undergone their first reviews. If it is to sustain itself, the APRM urgently needs to start conducting periodic reviews systematically (as was originally conceived).

It has also committed itself to establishing a 'knowledge hub'. This will be a forum for researchers and policymakers to draw on the body of data and research that the APRM has assembled. The potential

of this project to contribute to the sharing of best practices and to inform innovative, evidence-based policymaking on the continent is inestimable.

The APRM system acknowledges the problems it faces. To deal with its practical and logistical difficulties, the APRM has introduced a new administrative structure and undertaken the recruitment of staff – although it has not yet succeeded in recruiting a new CEO. Admitting that administrative challenges existed in the past, staff at the APRM secretariat are now more confident of the future. The administrative problems, in their view, have been identified and solutions devised. Implementing those solutions is what remains to be completed.

Financially, the APRM needs both a larger and more predictable income. The CFP was intended to ensure that participating countries met their financial obligations – to little avail thus far. But the APRM's financial problems go beyond a failure to collect annual subscriptions. Even if all countries paid their annual dues – at the current minimum amount – the income would cover only around half the APRM's anticipated expenditure.

In the past, special contributions, particularly from South Africa, buoyed the APRM's finances. But these are discretionary and in a tough economic environment there is no guarantee that they will continue. Under these circumstances, accurate planning is near impossible.

The APRM therefore needs to revisit both its funding formula and its collection systems. It might introduce a differentiated subscription structure, perhaps one that is calculated on a combination of overall gross domestic product (GDP) and GDP per capita. The goal would be to increase the APRM's income, remove the unpredictability of relying on special contributions (or development partners) and recognise that some participating countries can afford more than others.

This process must be accompanied by a determination to collect subscriptions. Although writing off arrears (partial or total) may be advisable, it is imperative that countries uphold their obligations conscientiously. The prevailing situation, which does not appear to sanction those that fail to pay, is not feasible. It erodes the APRM's credibility.

Once the APRM secretariat has implemented its new operating procedures, appointed a new

CEO and started conducting country reviews again, some confidence in the system will be restored. This will enable renewed engagement with multilateral and bilateral partners. Although the APRM was conceived as African-owned and African-run, the dearth of resources makes the involvement of development partners a pragmatic imperative. Support of this nature will depend on how these changes improve the system and on the political commitment of the continent's leaders. As a development partner recently commented, 'The low visibility and commitment from states raises questions – highlighted by the low participation at the head-of-state level at the last APRM Forum – of whether there remains political backing.'

Co-operation with non-governmental bodies, business interests, technical experts and development partners on the design and implementation of the NPoA must be a particular imperative. The APRM's inclusive design is one of its strengths, whereas the NPoA is currently one of its weaknesses. The NPoAs are often financially unrealistic and represent wish lists rather than implementable proposals. It is imperative therefore that they be compiled with a hard-nosed understanding of the potential for resource mobilisation. Working in conjunction with these actors could ensure NPoAs are realistic and implementable, and that funding is secured during the design phase.

Finally, all of this requires renewed political will. The APRM was intended to resolve problems, not merely to identify them. To shift to a posture geared to resolution, participating states need to be more aggressive in holding one another to account and need to provide support for NPoA implementation, as was envisaged when the APRM was launched. This is a daunting prospect and one that will require a robust infusion of political will if it is to be achieved.

## CONCLUSION

The APRM has an important contribution to make to Africa's future, provided it can overcome the obstacles that have become apparent. Although well-designed institutions and adequate resources are vital, they will not be enough to revitalise the APRM. Rather, there is a need to demonstrate that the APRM's continental leaders, as well as those in the various national structures, are serious about their roles. So far, although there has been evidence of peer pressure and peer support, these have been discreet. Such actions must be done openly to underline participating countries' commitment to the values that the APRM seeks to uphold. In so doing, it will help make Agenda 2063 a reality.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Terence Corrigan is a research fellow with SAIIA's Governance and APRM Programme. Yarik Turianskyi is the programme manager. This policy briefing is based on a review of the APRM's achievements and challenges over the first 12 years of its existence. The interviewees quoted here were interviewed under condition of anonymity and are not identified.
- 2 AU Commission, *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* (draft document). Addis Ababa: AU Commission, May 2014, p. 16.
- 3 UN Economic Commission for Africa, [http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploads/zero\\_draft\\_agenda\\_2063\\_document\\_19.03.2014\\_rev1.pdf](http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploads/zero_draft_agenda_2063_document_19.03.2014_rev1.pdf).
- 4 See, for example, Soré R, 'The saboteurs of good governance', *ZAM Magazine*, 30 January 2014, <https://www.zammagazine.com/chronicle/chronicle-7/72-the-saboteurs-of-good-governance>.
- 5 APRM (African Peer Review Mechanism), <http://aprm-au.org/apr-forum>, accessed 10 April 2015.
- 6 APRM Secretariat, *APRM Annual Report 2013*. Midrand: APRM Secretariat, 2013, pp. 72–73.

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