

Governing Through Peer Review: Can NEPAD's African Peer Review Mechanism Make a difference?

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Abstract

In 2001, African leaders made a commitment to improving political and economic governance under the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). Among other aims, NEPAD seeks to promote governance reforms on African terms that will advance opportunities for sustainable development in the region. As part of this new commitment, member states of the African Union (AU) instituted a collective self-monitoring mechanism under the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). As part of its structure, mandate, and process, the APRM seeks to subject domestic governance systems in Africa to peer review in the thematic areas of democracy and good governance, economic, corporate governance and socio-economic development. While optimists are hopeful about the ability of this voluntary self-governing framework to propel governance reforms and bolster prospects for democracy, political governance and accountability in Africa, pessimists remain skeptical about the extent to which the APRM can lead to meaningful governance reforms in a continent supposedly riddled with a 'culture of corruption', neo-patrimonial politics and political instability. We argue that in spite of its shortcomings, the APRM constitutes an important normative shift in governance systems in Africa. The APRM engages African states in a strategic long-term common partnership, in which they forgo some of the traditional privileges of sovereign power, open up their domestic polices to scrutiny by their peers, and share many governmental activities with their neighbors. The apparent willingness to confront domestic political and economic issues in the AU-NEPAD-nexus represents a significant change in the norms of African governance, statehood and diplomacy institutionalized in the immediate post-colonial era. Although far from being an unqualified success, the APRM has the potential to promote and reinforce higher governance standards in Africa, and may provide lessons for other Global South states in Asia, and Latin America.

2 Introduction

In 2001, African leaders announced a New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) as a program to provide a "new framework of interaction with the rest of the world...based on an agenda set by African peoples through their own initiatives and on their own volition" (NEPAD 2001; UNECA 2005; Akopari 2004). Among other aims, NEPAD seeks to promote African development on African terms, through political and economic governance reforms to advance opportunities for sustainable development in the region (NEPAD 2001). Through its core principles of good governance, peace, stability and security, sound economic management and effective partnerships, domestic ownership and leadership, NEPAD aims at transforming the political and economic fortunes of the African continent.

To realize these aims and objectives, African leaders have agreed to subject their countries to peer review under an innovative African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Established in 2003, the APRM is a voluntary initiative launched to address governance challenges in Africa including systemic issues such as political rigidity characterized by executive dominance in governance and the lack of accountability and transparency, political exclusion, poor economic governance, and political instability (NEPAD/HGSIC 2003; ECA 2011).

Commonly held as the most unique and innovative aspect of NEPAD, the APRM is said to reflect a renewed commitment by African leaders to improve all aspects of governance on the continent and a recognition that poor governance contributed to the failure of previous development programs on the continent. Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda and Mauritius, were the first five countries to undergo peer review on a pilot basis. Since then, more than 33 other African states have agreed to be peer reviewed under the APRM.

Despite the optimism expressed by some African leaders regarding NEPAD's ability to transform the continent's governance, institutional and development landscape, critics question the extent to which peer review can lead to significant reforms in political and economic governance institutions in Africa. For some analysts, the voluntary nature of the APRM and the unwillingness of all African countries to be part of the peer review process is a notable sign that this idea will not travel far on the governance landscape in Africa. Others doubt the ability of this initiative to make any meaningful impact on governance structures in a continent where 'neo-patrimonial politics', political instability, a 'culture of corruption' and economic mismanagement are supposed to be endemic (Akopari 2004; Nduru 2005; Taylor 2003).

A key question that arises, which this paper attempts to shed light on, is whether governance through peer review can improve the institutional framework for political and economic governance in Africa. We argue that although several weaknesses and shortcomings exist, the APRM constitutes a useful tool for reforming political and economic governance in Africa. The APRM engages African states in a strategic long-term common partnership, in which they forgo some of the traditional privileges of sovereign power, open up their domestic policies to scrutiny by their peers, and share many governmental activities with their neighbors (Busumtwi-Sam 2006). This complements and extends the African Union's (AU) attempts at redefining sovereignty on the continent. Essentially, the apparent willingness to confront domestic political and economic issues in the AU-NEPAD-nexus represents a significant change in the norms of African governance, statehood and diplomacy institutionalized in the immediate post-colonial era. When viewed from this perspective, the APRM has the potential to socialize and influence AU member states to conform to practices that may improve the institutional framework of governance in the region. In addition to being the first of its kind to subject a wide range of political and economic governance systems in Africa to external scrutiny, the APRM adds to domestic measures in member states aimed at improving legitimacy, accountability, and transparency in governance structures. More importantly, through the APRM, African leaders can share knowledge on best practices that could stimulate transformations in the institutional architecture of governance and development in Africa.

Certainly, peer review on its own cannot completely eradicate governance problems and corruption in Africa. As such, rather than seeing the APRM as an instrument that will rid Africa of these problems, the mechanism should be seen as a tool that adds to existing measures for fighting corruption and improving governance systems in the region. With time, as more African states are socialized into the process, the APRM will hold prospects for tracking the institutional gaps in the domestic governance systems in Africa. This has wider implications for rebuilding the institutional framework for governance and sustainable development in Africa.

It is important to stress, however, that because NEPAD's peer review process is still in its infancy, not enough time has elapsed to assess conclusively its impact on African governance systems. Yet, lessons from the APRM mandate, structure and processes can serve as a model for improved governance in other Global South countries in Asia and Latin America.

The paper is structured as follows. Section one provides an overview of governance through peer review in the broader global and regional context. Section two examines the structure, purpose, mandate and processes of the APRM. Next, the paper provides a brief overview of the APRM process in Ghana, Kenya and Mauritius. Here the key focus will be on how the APRM may help in transforming the institutional framework of governance in Africa. Finally, the paper concludes with a review of the APRM process, lessons for the developing world and an agenda for future research.

2.1 Peer Review and Governance in the Global Context

Peer review refers to the systematic examination and assessment of the performance of a state by other states (peers), by designated institutions, or by a combination of states and designated institutions (Pegani 2002; ECA 2002; Godfrey 2002). While not a popular concept in analysis of inter-state relations, peer review has been a prevalent practice among international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), UN Specialized Agencies, the International Monitoring Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). For instance, since its inception, peer review has been a characteristic feature of policy monitoring within the OECD. Through this mechanism, the organization sets standards, criteria and principles to evaluate the performance of member states in substantive issue areas such as trade, economic policy, and development assistance (Pegani 2002).

Within the UN system, for example, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) subjects environmental policies in member states to peer review. The UNDP's Evaluation Office likewise subjects developing country investment policies to peer review. The UN system itself has developed a comprehensive peer review framework by which it professionally peer reviews its functional offices, commissions and specialized agencies. This framework builds on the "Framework for Professional Reviews" developed by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) joint Task Force on Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluative Functions in Multilateral Organizations (UNEG 2011; DAC/UNEG 2007). The overall aim of these peer review processes is to facilitate transparency, credibility and accountability in the operations of key organs, agencies and member states of these international organizations in specific issue areas.

Drawing on these international examples, NEPAD launched the APRM in 2003. However, unlike peer review within multilateral organizations that are limited to specific issue areas, the APRM extends the idea of peer review to a broad range of governance issues in committed member states, including political governance, corporate governance, economic management practices and socio-economic development policies. Prior to the APRM, African leaders made an initial commitment to resolve collectively domestic governance challenges under the AU Constitutive Act, which among other things, contains a commitment to only recognize governments that come to power through constitutional means (African Union 2002). This Act also contains provisions for intervention in member states to restore peace and security in times of war, genocide and crimes against humanity. The APRM thus takes the AU's Constituent Act a step further in confronting political and economic governance challenges that affect development in Africa. The section below provides a comprehensive overview of the structure, mandate and processes of the APRM, while emphasizing its prospects for improving democracy, political accountability and transparency in African governance systems.

2.2 The African Peer Review Mechanism: Mandate, Structure and Processes

Devised to help African countries to improve governance practices through national and continental reviews, the APRM is a mutually agreed upon self-monitoring program, voluntarily adopted by member states of the African Union, to promote and reinforce high standards of governance in Africa. The APRM mandate is to ensure that the policies and practices of participating states conform to accepted political, social, economic and corporate governance codes and standards contained in the "Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance" that was endorsed by the inaugural Summit of the African Union (AU) in Durban, South Africa, in July 2002.

Its primary purpose is to foster the adoption of policies, standards and practices that will lead to political stability, high economic growth, and sustainable development and accelerated sub-regional and continental economic integration by sharing experiences, reinforcing successful best practices, identifying deficiencies, and assessing the needs of capacity building in member states (NEPAD/HSGIC/APRM 2003).

To realize these purposes, participating states commit themselves to appropriate laws, standards and policies, as well as building the necessary human and institutional capacity to translate these into practice. In addition, member states agree to adopt specific standards, criteria and indicators for assessing and monitoring progress in key political and economic governance issue areas. To ensure fairness, transparency and accountability in the review process, the APRM guiding principle stipulates that every review exercise carried out under the authority of the mechanism must be technically competent, credible and free of political manipulation (APRM 2003). The guiding principle also states that participation in the APRM process will be open to all member states of the African Union. However, after the adoption of the Declaration on “Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance” by the African Union, countries wishing to participate in the APRM will have to notify the Chairman of the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee. As well, the entry requirement procedures entail an undertaking by prospective participating states to submit to periodic peer reviews, and to facilitate such reviews under the guidance of agreed parameters for good political, economic and corporate governance (APRM 2003).

Structurally the APRM is comprised of:

- The Committee of Participating Heads of State and Government (APR Forum), which is the highest decision making authority in the APRM;
- The Panel of Eminent Persons (APR Panel), which oversees the review process to ensure integrity, considers reports and makes recommendations to the APR Forum;
- The APRM Secretariat, which provides secretarial, technical, coordinating and administrative support for the APRM; and
- A Country Review Mission Team (CRM Team) that visits member states to review progress and produce an APRM Report on the country (NEPAD-APRM 2003)

2.3 Leadership and Management Structure of the APRM

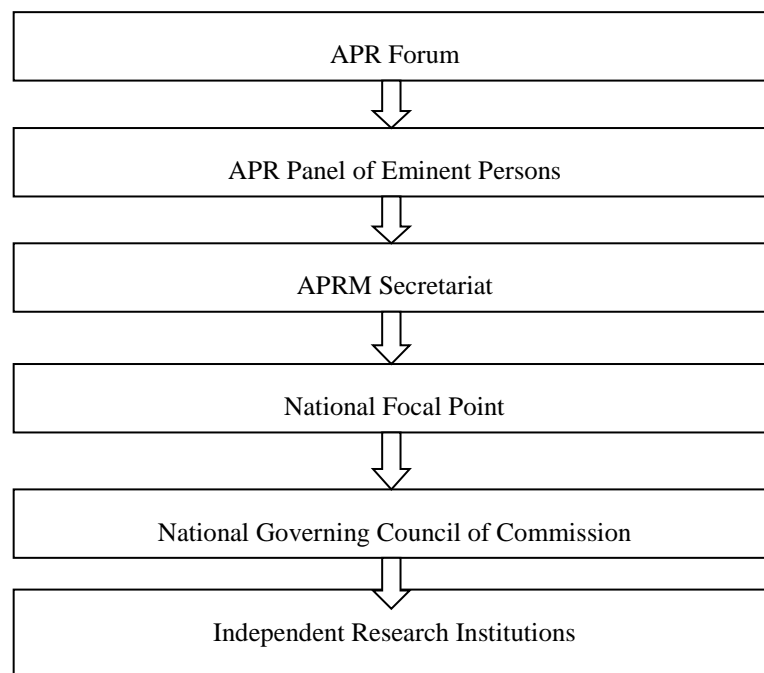
Operations of the APRM are to be directed and managed by an Independent Panel of between 5 and 7 ‘Eminent Persons’. Members of this Panel must be Africans who have distinguished themselves in careers considered relevant to the work of the APRM. In addition, the Panel members must be persons of high ‘moral stature’ who exhibit demonstrated commitments to the ideals of Pan Africanism. Candidates for appointment to the Panel will be nominated by participating countries, shortlisted by a Committee of Ministers and appointed by Heads of State and Government of the participating countries (APRM 2003). In addition to the above criteria, the Heads of State and Government will ensure that the Panel has expertise in the areas of political governance, macro-economic management, public financial management and corporate governance. The composition of the Panel will also reflect broad regional balance, gender equity and cultural diversity. As part of its mandate, the Panel will exercise the oversight function over the review process, in particular to ensure the integrity of the process.

The APRM Secretariat may engage, with the approval of the Panel, the services of African experts and institutions that it considers competent and appropriate to act as its agents in the peer review process (APRM 2003).

Furthermore, the APRM framework defines the frequency or periodicity of the process in member countries. At the point of formally acceding to the peer review process, the APRM requires that each participating state clearly define a time-bound Programme of Action for implementing the 2002 AU “Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance”, including stipulated times for periodic reviews in line with these standards. Specifically, the Panel conducts four sets of reviews, the first completed within eighteen months of a state’s accession to the APRM process, with successive reviews occurring between every two to four years. In addition to these, a state participating for its own reasons may ask for a review that is not part of the periodically mandated reviews. Early signs of impending political or economic crisis in a member country may also be sufficient cause for instituting a review.

Figure 2 below illustrates the key APRM institutions.

Figure 2 APRM Institutions



Source: Authors’ own compilation

2.4 The APRM Process

The peer review process starts with the preparation of a self-assessment report by the participating country, based on questionnaires developed by the APRM Secretariat, in consultation with civil society organizations and other private and public stakeholders. Next, the APRM Country Support Mission, led by eminent persons, visits the country and judges the self-assessment process and submitted National Programs of Action. Subsequently, the peer review Mission holds extensive consultations in the country and prepares a report based on its own self-assessment and findings. The country report is next presented to the APR Forum and Presidents of participating countries for scrutiny and action (NEPAD/HGSIC/APRM 2003).

The process includes periodic reviews of the policies and practices of participating states to ascertain progress towards achieving mutually agreed goals and compliance with agreed political, economic and corporate governance values, codes and standards as outlined in the 2002 AU Declaration.

Upon joining the Mechanism, a state is assessed (the base review) and a timetable (Programme of Action) for effecting progress towards achieving the agreed standards and goals is drawn up by the state in question, taking into account its particular circumstances. Funding for the Mechanism is supposed to come from assessed contributions from participating states, as emphasized at the Thirty-Fifth session of the conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, convened by the UN Economic Council for Africa in Johannesburg in 2002. The framework is however open to external funding partnerships in as much as such funding will not “interfere with African ownership of the ARPRM structure and processes” (NEPAD/HGSIC/APRM 2003, 16).

In practice, the process consists of five stages of review or analysis. Each review, begins with a ‘background analysis’ of the participating state by the APRM Secretariat. At the same time, government and civil society actors in that country work together on a Country Self-Assessment Report (CSAR) and a draft ‘Programme of Action’, which is supposed to contain actions to remedy any governance problems noted in the CSAR. Next, a team of experts visits the country for several weeks and writes a final APRM report.

The Fourth Stage begins when the Team’s report is submitted to the participating Heads of State and Government through the APRM Secretariat. The consideration and adoption of the final report by the participating Heads of State and Government, including their decision in this regard, marks the end of this stage. Finally, reviewed states must report back to the APRM Forum every six months on the progress they have made in implementing the programme of action (NEPAD/APRM 2003).

Six months after the Heads of State and Government of participating member states consider the report, it should be formally and publicly tabled in key regional and sub-regional institutions such as the AU’s Pan-African Parliament, African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, Peace and Security Council and Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC). This constitutes the Fifth and final stage of the process. The entire peer review process lasts for six months. With the above standards, structure, principles and processes, the APRM can facilitate dialogue among African countries through peer influence, public scrutiny, formal and informal recommendations that can add to domestic efforts in reinforcing democracy, transparency, accountability and good governance in Africa. In order to illustrate these arguments empirically, the section below provides an overview of the implementation of the APRM on pilot basis in Ghana, Kenya and Mauritius.

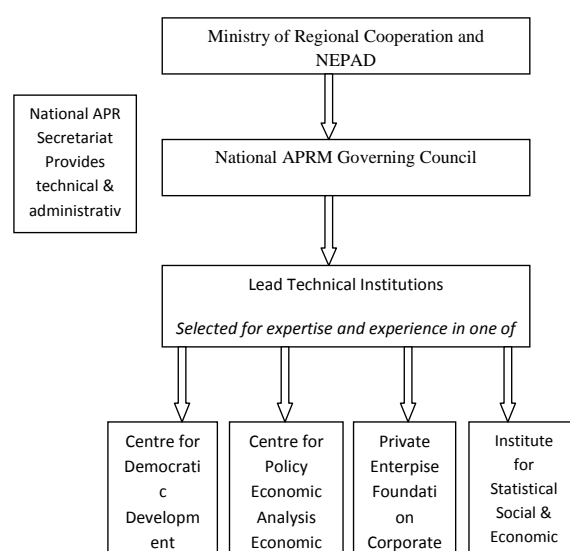
2.5 Case Studies Ghana, Kenya and Mauritius

Being the first to submit their governance systems to the APRM, these three states devised different working national models to facilitate the peer review process at country levels. Ghana was the first country in Africa to consent to the APRM at the sixth summit of HSGIC of NEPAD held in Nigeria in March 2003. In order to facilitate the APRM process, the then President, John Agyekum Kufuor, created the Ministry of Regional Cooperation and NEPAD to oversee the implementation of the peer review process in Ghana. As a first initiative, this Ministry embarked on a nationwide sensitization campaign to launch the APRM initiative in all ten regions of the country.

Next, the country instituted an independent seven member APRM Governing Council, made up of distinguished non-political professionals, to conduct an independent self-assessment of its governance record in the four thematic areas of democracy, political, economic and corporate governance (APRM Country Report 2005).

To ensure the credibility of the review process, the Council engaged the services of four independent research institutions to conduct the country self-assessment review, in consultation with civil society organizations, the media and other private sector organizations. Together, this team of experts presented the country self-assessment reports to the President of Ghana, on February 2005, with recommendations and a program of action to improve transparency and accountability in democracy and governance in Ghana (APRM Country Report 2005). Led by Dr. Chris Stals, the first APR country support Review Mission was conducted in Ghana from 4th-6th April 2005. The Review Team was made up of experts from the APR Secretariat, Strategic Partner Institutions such as the UN Economic Commission for Africa, UNDP and consultants from 12 African countries. Like the National Governing Council, the APR country review mission also extensively consulted with a variety of stakeholders, including government officials, representatives of civil society organizations, the media, academia, trade unions, political parties and policy think tanks in conducting the country assessment in the four main areas of governance. Following its reports and recommendations in 2006, the country has consistently been implementing the national program of action and submitting annual program reports to the APRM secretariat (National Governing Council-Ghana 2008). Figure 2 provides a summary of the APRM structure in Ghana.

Figure 2.1 Ghana's National APRM Structure



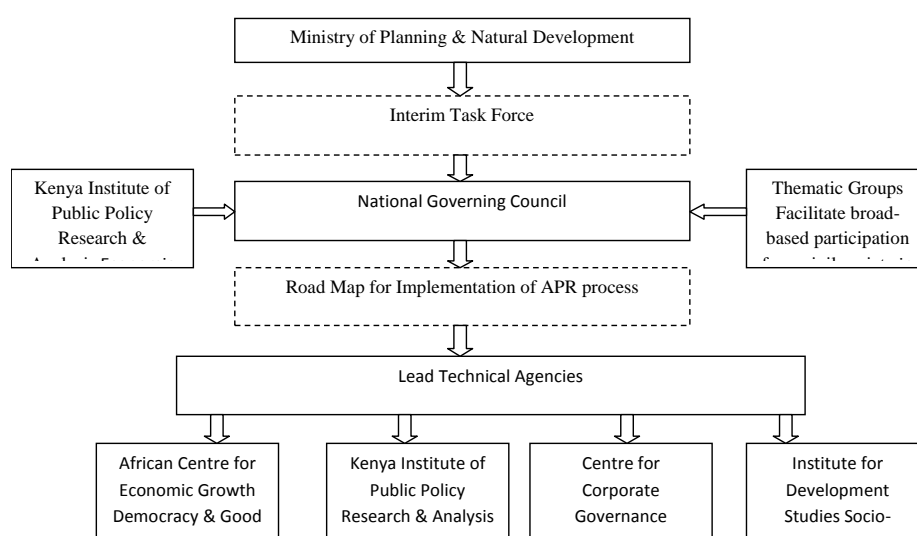
Source: UN Economic Commission for Africa (2005)

2.6 The APRM process in Kenya & Mauritius

Like Ghana, Kenya acceded to the APRM process in March 2003. At the national level, the Kenyan government entrusted the peer review process under the authority of the Ministry of Planning and National Development. Next, a 33 member independent National APRM Governing Council was created to oversee the APR implementation process at sub national levels.

Together with representatives of civil society organizations, this council engaged the services of prominent research institutions in conducting the country's self-assessment review. The Council submitted its draft national action program and self-assessment report in August 2005. Unlike the national implementation structure in Ghana, the Kenyan model placed particular emphasis on the strong participation of civil society in the APRM structures (APRM Kenya Report 2006; Akoth 2007; Masterson 2005). A two-stage approach was adopted in conducting the Country Review Mission. The first review was conducted from 26th to 27th July 2004. However, the second review was postponed until July 18, 2011, due to the 2007/08-post election violence in the country. Since then, Kenya has been implementing the proposed National Plan of Action and progress reports to the APRM Secretariat. Unlike in Ghana and Kenya, the APR process in Mauritius did not benefit from a newly created or clearly defined structure. In an attempt to facilitate the process, the government made use of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) in coordinating the APR process. This Council established a National Secretariat and its National Coordinating Structure (NCS) and Steering committee for the APR process. Together with representatives from CSOs, NGOs and research institutions, NESC launched the country self-assessment process in 2004. However, due to lack of a tangible organizational structure among the various stakeholders engaged in the process, the review process was delayed until 2009 before Mauritius submitted its country self-assessment report and program of action to the APR secretariat. Subsequently, the APR Country review process was commenced and completed in July 2010 (APRM Country Report 2010, 1; Eisa 2005). Figure 3 illustrates the APRM process in Kenya.

Figure 2.2 Kenya's National APRM Structure



Since its pioneering experiences in Ghana and Kenya, seventeen other African countries completed the peer review process in 2014. The remaining sets of participating countries are at various stages of the process, with pioneering states far leading new entrants in the peer review process. Based on first hand experiences from the implementation of the APRM process in leading countries, the next section outlines the challenges and prospects of the APRM process in promoting good governance in Africa.

2.7 Implementation Challenges: Experiences from Leading Countries

Experiences from the implementation of the APRM process in pioneering countries has, so far, shown that the completion of the self assessment and country review processes come with a number of challenges. These include delays in the conduct of country assessment reviews; inadequate and inappropriate implementation guidelines; questions about the composition, credibility and independence of governing panel members at national and regional levels; autonomy of national program of action implementation bodies and the non-binding nature of policy recommendations in national assessment and country review reports (Ross & Gruzd 2009, 10-25).

Also, with five different stages, multiple participants, an initial self-assessment by participating states, assessment by external actors, lengthy questionnaires and assessment indicators, the APRM process appears to be a hefty task to undertake. Due to these complexities, the review process in participating countries has been slower than expected. In effect, although the process envisaged that acceding member states would begin the peer review within the first 18 months of joining the APRM, experiences from pioneering states indicates that the process takes very long to get underway in member countries. In addition, country experiences also show that the APRM process is not only lengthy and complex to undertake, but also limited in practical guidelines (Kajee 2004; Nnadozie 2008; Mohiddin 2008; Ross & Gruzd 2009; Gruzd 2014).

At the national levels, participating countries struggle to establish national governing bodies. For instance, both Ghana and Kenya adopted different national strategies to the country self-assessment process. Also, while Ghana adopted a much more centralized approach to the peer review process with strong government hands at all levels of the review process, the Kenyan government limited its role in the design and structure of the National structures, giving greater responsibility to civil society organizations in the peer review process (Masterson 2005, 11; APRM Kenyan Report 2005; Reitmaier 2011). Aside from the challenges of designing a broadly representative national governing body, these countries also faced the challenge of how much civil society participation should be included in the process and how to manage this participation in an all-inclusive manner (Ross & Gruzd 2009, 11-16).

Additionally, due to the complex and lengthy nature of the APRM process, the final country reports were not presented in a timely manner. Moreover, although final country reports propose a program of action based on the findings from the country review reports, the implementation of these programs of action are at the mercy of participating states (Masterson 2005; Gruzd 2014). However, as noted by the UNDP report on the implementation of the APRM, “none of these practical challenges confronting the APRM should be considered as more important than ensuring that the APRM implementation process at the country level is conducted in a transparent, inclusive, and democratic manner for it to remain credible and inspire the confidence of the people it is intended to serve” (UNDP/APRM Secretariat 2006).

Indeed, the operative challenges of the APRM process in participating countries should not be allowed to overshadow the continental governance ambitions embedded in this framework. Through policy dialogues, peer learning and capacity building, the APRM can act as a stimulus to domestic measures in changing the governance landscape in Africa. In particular, the open and participatory nature of the peer review process enables governments to engage in information exchange on policy instruments that can lead to governance reforms in Africa. This would allow for knowledge sharing on best practices that can enhance enduring prospects for democratic governance in Africa.

In 2011, for instance, the APRM Secretariat published a manual on identified best practices from thirteen (13) Country Review Reports that are worthy of emulation by other African countries in the APRM process. The report identified 107 good governance practices that can be shared among African countries, including 42 best practices in democracy and political governance; 25 best practices in economic governance and management; 15 practices in corporate governance; and 25 best practices in socio-economic development (APRM Secretariat 2011; Ndanglza 2013; Gruzd 2014).

In addition to being a common forum for knowledge sharing, participating countries also have the chance to present and clarify national rules and adopted practices before the final APRM reports are presented at the African Governance Forum. The APRM process, thus, inparts a greater degree of transparency and accountability into governance practices of participating member states. Above all, the public nature of APRM reports and its recommendations allow for public scrutiny of governance codes and conduct in a more transparent and inclusive manner. To ensure that recommendations from the APRM process are incorporated into governance practices, the APRM Secretariat conducts periodic reviews to assess progress towards the attainment of mutually agreed goals in participating member states. Also, the APRM mandate requires participating states to submit annual progress reports on the implementation of national programs of action. Unfortunately, the soft nature of APRM recommendations and monitoring systems are often cited as the mechanism's main weakness in instituting reforms in African governance systems. However, it should be noted that the final recommendations of the APR process couldn't be made binding on participating states due to the self-monitoring nature of the APRM process. Nonetheless, in the absence of binding mechanisms, the APRM structure and processes should be seen as operating under a "soft law" system whose effectiveness will derive from the mutual trust, legitimacy, credibility and representativeness and the political commitment of African leaders and citizens to the APRM process. In other words, self-monitoring is central to compliance with the APRM mandates. Notwithstanding the diversity among African countries in terms of political and socio-economic development, the APRM process can produce similar governance reforms in different country contexts. However, the domestic institutional contexts of the peer review process will determine the extent to which APRM recommendations will translate into actual practice in participating states.

At the continental level, APRM process should be heralded as a new political commitment on the part of AU, NEPAD and African leaders to confront the governance challenges that hinder sustainable development in the region.

Through its structure, mandate and principles, the mechanism provides a common forum for African leaders to engage with civil society organizations, public and private sector institutions in promoting democratic practices, transparency and accountability in political and economic governance in the region. In addition, the appointment of an Independent Panel of Eminent Persons (IPEP) to conduct the country review processes is designed to ensure that the review process is credible and legitimate before citizens and governments of participating countries.

The independent composition of the Panel of Eminent Persons is a boost to the integrity of the APRM process. When taken seriously by governments of participating states, APRM process can inspire underperforming African countries to embrace reforms in democracy and political governance, corporate governance, and socio-economic development. In the long-run, these could have positive multiplier effects on Africa's development performance (Kempe 2005, 1)

Compared to previous governance practices, the APRM has come as a significant change in the normative framework of governance in Africa. As a result, the framework needs to be celebrated in spite of its practical challenges. Precisely, the APRM needs commendation for introducing the idea of “collective self-governance” in the political discourse in Africa. With more than thirty-three African countries voluntarily submitting to be peer reviewed under the APRM, the mechanism is gradually changing governance practices in Africa. By taking a more revolutionary stance on governance issues that were formerly considered exclusively domestic amidst sovereignty concerns, the AU-NEPAD Nexus appears to have gone much further than any other international or regional organization in challenging traditional notions of sovereignty and non-intervention (Busumtwi-Sam 2006; Kajee 2004).

This represents an affirmation of the determination of African leaders to forge a new partnership with all stakeholders in promoting good governance and sustainable development in the region. However, the extent to which this idea will translate into governance reforms in Africa depends on the political commitments of African leaders and the multiple stakeholders engaged in the APRM process.

2.8 Conclusion Lessons for Developing Countries in Asia and Latin America

As part of the African Union and NEPAD’s renewed commitment to good governance and sustainable development in Africa, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) was introduced in 2003 to help in transforming the institutional framework of governance in Africa. Through set standards, codes, principles and criteria, the APRM aims to improve governance practices in Africa in four thematic areas, including democracy and political governance, economic governance and management, corporate governance and socio-economic development. Since its inception, more than 33 African states have agreed to be peer reviewed under the APRM. Yet, despite the optimism of committed African leaders that the APRM will help in building the necessary institutional apparatus for political governance and sustainable development on the continent, critics are less hopeful about the ability of this new initiative to make meaningful impacts on governance structures in a continent supposedly noted for its widespread corruption and neo-patrimonial politics. Using case studies of Ghana, Kenya and Mauritius, this paper examined the extent to which the APRM can help in transforming the institutional framework of governance in Africa. Future research is clearly needed on the actual impact of the APRM on governance structures in Africa at both national and regional levels. We argue that in spite its operative challenges, the APRM can be conceived as a novel tool for political and economic governance reforms in Africa through policy dialogues, peer learning, knowledge sharing and capacity building. In addition, we argue that the APRM constitutes a significant change in the normative framework of governance in Africa. By opening governance practices in member states to external and internal public scrutiny, the APRM conveys collective self-governance values and practices that transcend beyond traditional notions of sovereignty in the international system.

Above all, it provides a forum that seeks to speak with an “African voice to Africans” in promoting democracy, political governance and sustainable development in the region (UNECA 2005). In all, this may exemplify the commitment of African leaders to adopt “African solutions to African problems” through collective governance mechanisms. Although far from being an unqualified success, the APRM model of governance can serve as a pacesetter for “collective self-governance” in both Global South and North countries. In particular, Global South countries in Asia and Latin America can incorporate ideas from the APRM model into their regional governance institutions, as an additional mechanism to facilitate transparency and accountability in their domestic governance systems.

While formal structures of accountability remain relevant in all countries, governance through peer review should be embraced as an additional structure to enhance participatory democracy, transparency, and accountability. This will provide an open space for state governments, civil society organizations and external actors to come together in strengthening the institutional framework for political and economic governance at national and regional levels.

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