

**ASSESSMENT OF THE AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM (APRM)
AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE,
2003-2015**

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Abstract

This study examined the African Peer Review Mechanism and good governance in Africa. The research is premised on the background that the goals of African Peer Review Mechanism are democracy and good governance as pre-conditions for development. Three research questions that transcend to three hypotheses were formulated to act as a guide in realizing the objectives of the study. How has African Peer Review Mechanism fared in improving good governance in Nigeria, what factors impede the effective implementation of good governance in Nigeria and what measures can be adopted to improve good governance in Nigeria? The research was anchored on institutional theory. The data for the research were sourced mainly from documented works. The findings of the study revealed that development can only thrive through inclusive governance, which can be achieved with strong political will and basically, how to decentralize and domesticate the entire African Peer Review Mechanism process in spite of existing lack of capacity to mainstream the national programme of action. The study recommended among others things that; there must be adequate political buy-in at all levels of government to ensure the vital political will to drive and sustain the process.

Keywords: Peer Review Mechanism; Good Governance; Assessment; Democracy; Africa, NEPAD

INTRODUCTION

African leaders have learned from their own experiences that peace, security, democracy, good governance, human rights and sound economic management are conditions for sustainable development. They are making a pledge to work, both individually and collectively, to promote these principles in their countries and sub-regions and in the continent (Nmehielle, 2004). African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is an off-shoot of New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). It is different from the previous African initiatives which were motivated and designed based on Pan-African ideology and aspiration. It generally accepted the partnership and cooperation between African countries and developed countries to accelerate the development of Africa.

APRM is a massive, bold and ambitious project aimed at both the enhancement of governance practices and the economic reconstruction and development of the continent. Unlike the previous initiatives of OAU and NEPAD, APRM is seen as progressive which took governance and democracy as key issues to bring development to the continent. In October, 2001, the 1st meeting of the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee (HSGIC) that took place in Abuja, Nigeria, reflected that: "African leaders should set up parameters for good governance to guide their activities at both the political and economic levels. In this regard, NEPAD decided that, it would consider and adopt an appropriate Peer Review Mechanism and a code of conduct" (Reitmaier, 2011:42).

APRM is a voluntary assessment tool instituted by African heads of state in 2003, within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), to promote good governance and sustainable development on the continent. It focuses on four thematic areas: democracy and political governance; economic governance and management; corporate governance; and socio-economic development. It seeks to entrench good governance practices in participating states by deepening the principles of democracy, transparency, accountability, integrity, respect for human rights, and promotion of the rule of law (Shedrack, 2011:22). The unique feature of the APRM is that it was developed and is being implemented by Africans, distinguishing it from externally imposed assessments.

Nigeria was peer reviewed by fellow heads of state in 2008, thus becoming the eighth country to undergo the process (Omotoso, 2011). A major component of the review exercise is that each country puts forward a National Programme of Action (NPoA), which must be implemented and reported upon annually to the APR Forum. The Nigerian NPoA has been the most ambitious in the APRM process so far (even with its sizable population, estimated at 177 million people in 2014). Its NPoA is also one of the most complex in terms of responsibilities and implementation timelines.

Statement of the Problem

APRM suffers from limited manpower and technical capacity, especially given the scale of implementation in Nigeria across all 36 states of the federation. APRM Nigeria lacks the necessary communication tools to identify and monitor the activities of implementing agencies. The former Director of the APRM in an interview acknowledged that the department's abilities were 'limited by resources' (Omotoso, 2011). In addition, a significant hindrance to the APRM's implementation lies in the status of NEPAD Nigeria, which needs an enabling law to make it a commission. In March 2013, a second bill went to Parliament for approval, but has not been passed to date (Daily Times, 2013). APRM therefore has no legal standing, which also affects how the federal government assigns and disburses funding to it (Mahmud, 2010).

The second category of problems relates to underlying (and in certain cases less obvious) influences, some peculiar to the Nigerian case. These include the lack of buy-in from political leaders or reform champions, the mistrust between the government and civil society, and other internal political crises, which shift the focus of political will away from national development. For instance, the death of President Yar'Adua in May 2010 led to internal strife within the ruling party regarding his successor. The APRM process had begun during the tenure of Obasanjo, who was a key player in the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), NEPAD and the APRM. Since he left power in 2007, his successors have not had the same level of interest and influence in regional and continental affairs. In general, the APRM process in Nigeria elicits a mixture of optimism and cynicism from civil society members and government officials who have participated in the review.

It is against this backdrop, that this study poses the following research questions; how has APRM fared in improving good governance in Nigeria? what factors impede the effective implementation of good governance by APRM in Nigeria? what measures can be adopted by APRM to improve the implementation of good governance in Nigeria?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this paper are; to determine how APRM has contributed to good governance in Nigeria, to find out the factors that impeded the effective implementation of good governance by APRM in Nigeria and to suggest measures that can be adopted by APRM to improve the implementation of good governance in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

- **Peer Review Mechanism**

Peer Review Mechanism is a mutually agreed instrument voluntarily acceded to by the member states of the African Union (AU) as a self-monitoring mechanism. The concept of "peer review" is complex and assumes different meanings in different contexts. In recent years, the term has been employed in various occasion. As a result, there are a number of conceptual problems observed. The application of peer review had been widely stated in the academic area in the 18th century to review medical sciences research and experiments. Those days, peer review was referring to a process of evaluating the research findings for competence, significance and originality by qualified experts. It became an instructional part of the scholarly process across all subject domains only in the latter half of the 20th century, in response to the growth of scholarly research and greater subject specialization (Revill, 2013).

Apart from being widely used in the academic area, the recent trends showed that peer review had been applied in international and regional organization to evaluate and assess the states performance in political, economic and environmental activities. While literature on the subject matter may be scanty, scholars have over the years come up with a number of universally accepted definitions. According to Pagani (2002:4), peer review can be defined as the systematic examination and assessment of the performance or practice of a state by other states, with the ultimate goal of helping the reviewed State improve its policy making, adopt best practices, and comply with established standards and principles. He stated that peer review is used to examine and monitor the implementation of state policy or action in accordance with agreed standard. In the process, both the reviewed and the participant can expose themselves for policy dialogue in which best practices are shared among them. Furthermore, Pagani (2002:4) described that peer review is different from judicial procedures because the peer review is not conducted to make binding decision and fact finding. Therefore, peer review is a simple reporting and data collection on particularly agreed areas.

- **Good Governance**

According to Eaton and Michael (2016), good governance is an indeterminate term used in the international development literature to describe how public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources. Governance is "the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)". The term *governance* can apply to corporate, international, national, local governance or to the interactions between other sectors of society.

The concept of "good governance" often emerges as a model to compare ineffective economies or political bodies with viable economies and political bodies (Rotberg, 2014). The concept centers on the responsibility of governments and governing bodies to meet the needs of the masses as opposed to select groups in society (Abdul, 2003:2). Because countries often described as "most successful" are Western liberal democratic states, concentrated in Europe and the Americas, good governance standards often measure other state institutions against these states. Aid organizations and the authorities of developed countries often will focus the meaning of "good governance" to a set of requirements that conform to the organization's agenda, making "good governance" imply many different things in many different contexts (Fukuyama, 2013:21).

The Origin of African Peer Review Mechanism in Africa

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is a mutually agreed instrument voluntarily acceded to by the member states of the African Union (AU) as a self-monitoring mechanism. It was founded in 2003. The mandate of the APRM is to encourage conformity in regard to political, economic and corporate governance values, codes and standards, among African countries and the objectives in socio-economic development within the New Partnership for Africa's Development. The 37th Summit of the Organisation of African Unity held in July 2001 in Lusaka, Zambia, adopted a document setting out a new vision for the revival and development of Africa which was to become known as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD, 2008).

In July 2002, the Durban AU summit supplemented NEPAD with a Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance. According to the Declaration, states participating in NEPAD 'believe in just, honest, transparent, accountable and participatory government and probity in public life'. Accordingly, they 'undertake to work with renewed determination to enforce', among other things, the rule of law; the equality of all citizens before the law; individual and collective freedoms; the right to participate in

free, credible and democratic political processes; and adherence to the separation of powers, including protection for the independence of the judiciary and the effectiveness of parliaments (Bathandwa, 2008).

The Mandate of African Peer Review Mechanism

The mandate of the APRM is to ensure that policies and practices of participating Member States conform to the agreed political, economic and corporate governance values, codes and standards contained in the African Union Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance. As a voluntary self-monitoring instrument, APRM fosters the adoption of policies, standards and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated regional and continental economic integration through sharing of experiences and best practices, including identifying deficiencies and assessing the needs for capacity building (George, 2008).

The Rationale for African Peer Review Mechanism and Good Governance in Africa

The vast majority of Africans are confused and disappointed by the outcome of self-rule, find little around them to encourage the confidence that as a people, they can manage their own recovery.

Some scholars put the persistence of mismanagement down to a lack of capacity for good governance which African countries tried to achieve through the African Peer Review. One result of this view is the explosion of capacity building programmes initiated by donor and multilateral agencies (Moti, 2006).

The aim of the scheme is to help African countries to put in place structures and reforms (APRM) that will strengthen the rule of law, support democracy and promote greater accountability and transparency. Underlying many of these programmes is the notion that poor governance is due largely to incompetence, ignorance and inadequate infrastructure. In effect, the aim is to do now what many feel should have been done by the colonizers before they relinquished power. That is, teach Africans how to govern themselves (Mamah, 2011).

The Challenges of African Peer Review Mechanism

African leaders lack the political will and commitment needed to not only follow the APRM's principles, but also to overcome the challenges of funding and other difficulties at both the national and regional levels. Funding constraints, in particular, make it difficult for the Mechanism to function effectively and for

member states to complete the process of assessing and implementing their NPoAs (Mangu, 2007:384; Bing-Pappoe, 2010:22; Landsberg, 2012:144).

Monitoring and evaluation issues are also challenging. It has been established that "countries undergo the review process, compile and submit their reports and NPoAs, but there is a missing link, a problem in terms of follow-up to know how far the government in question has taken action to implement the suggestions that came as a result of the review process. So, countries have joined the APRM just to look good because what eventually happens is that the reports come back to them and it ends there. Nothing trickles down. No serious change can be really evaluated". Despite these challenges, however, some other scholars and observers consider that the APRM is a good initiative; that its objectives may have been well conceived despite some weaknesses in the area of implementation.

Principles of Good Governance

Good governance, according to Andre (2012), is a prerequisite for achieving the goals of sustainable and people-centered development, prosperity, and peace. Rule of law, effective state institutions, transparency and accountability in the management of public affairs, respect for human rights, and meaningful participation of all citizens, particularly women, in political processes and decisions that affect their lives are all characteristics of good governance (Jagdish, 2000). It is a process in which people are given the power and the flexibility to define their own development priorities, taking into consideration their unique socioeconomic and cultural situations (Minocha, 1994). As a result, excellent governance may play a critical role in guaranteeing people-centered development in Africa, as it requires all residents and groups to express their needs, wants, and concerns.

Gap in Literature

APRM Nigeria lacks the necessary communication tools to identify and monitor the activities of implementing agencies. Moreso, the scholars in the literature under review, could not establish punitive actions to be taken by APRM against non-compliance to its principles and resolutions by member states. It is against this backdrop that this research work is set to achieve, to strengthen the structure and mechanism of African Peer Review in order to achieve its mandate in Africa and by extension Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on institutional theory. Institutional theory was introduced in the late 1970s by John Meyer and Brian Rowan as a means to explore further how organizations fit with, are related to, and were shaped by their societal, state, national, and global environments. Guy (2000) sees institution as a formal or informal, structural, societal or political phenomenon that transcends the individual level that is based on more or less common values has a certain degree of stability and influences behaviour. The theory focuses on the deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure. It considers the processes by which the structures, including schemes, rules, norms, and routines become established as an authoritative guideline for social behaviour. The tenets of the theory include the following; institutions are embodiments of rules, norms, schemes; the norms, schemes, structures, traditions are translated into rules and regulations as can be seen in the constitution, financial memoranda, public service rules; these rules and regulations determine and regulate the behaviour of members of the institution and society; a good and strong institution is one that regulates the behaviour of members of the institution and society (Izueke, 2014).

Application of the theory to the study

APRM as an institution has its norms, values, traditions and structures written down as rules and regulations. They are meant to constrain behaviours of people in the institution, and also model their preferences. In other words, these rules and regulations regulate the behaviour of participants of member states. This framework is applied to the assessment of the APRM process across the member countries.

Hypotheses

The study is guided by the following hypotheses

1. APRM has fared in improving good governance in Nigeria.
2. Lack of Monitoring and Evaluation Process impedes the effective implementation of good governance by APRM in Nigeria.
3. Strong political will and adequate funding by APRM can improve the implementation of good governance in Nigeria.

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FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

- **DISCUSSIONS**

Hypotheses One: APRM has fared well in improving good governance in Nigeria.

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) developed from the necessity to address Nigeria's sluggish democratic transitions, as well as Africa's stagnation in general. The noble goal of the institution, which was created to stimulate discourse, was to contribute to the establishment of a democratic climate. The APRM, which is a democratic organization in its own right, attempts to establish 'public truth' through debates among professional communities, administrative agencies, the general public, and others who vie for attention and support.

One interviewee said; 'The APRM has succeeded in leading the continent closer to a common articulation of what is expected in terms of good governance ... it's an important step to have a common governance language, given that it was not there ten years ago.' The interviewee posits that APRM would help to strengthen the rule of law, support democracy and promote greater accountability and transparency among member states. It has also contributed to standardisation in conducting governance assessments. Citizens are beginning to use standards and codes - and the practices of sister countries - to hold leaders to account" (Busia, 2010:56).

According to Steven (2010), the APRM encourages and facilitates interaction between the state and society in order to discover developmental solutions within local communities. The APRM has been able to expand the democratic space and encourage state and non-state actors to engage meaningfully on a wide range of issues across the thematic areas, including poverty and the MDGs, the role of the private and informal sectors, access to information, and macroeconomic policies, often in cases where capacity for and extent of engagement had previously been limited. APRM, according to Busia (2010), has provided a forum for debating policy alternatives, raising awareness, and sharing information that might otherwise be disregarded or repressed. As a good governance tool, APRM highlighted several best practices by recognizing major policy initiatives taken by Nigeria in enacting national legislation to improve transparency in the oil and gas industries. The preceding supports the idea that 'APRM has done a decent job of enhancing Nigerian government.'

Hypotheses Two: Lack of Monitoring and Evaluation Process impedes the effective implementation of good governance by APRM in Nigeria.

Monitoring and evaluation, according to Abed (2001), is crucial for achieving a developmental stride and improving the implementation of good governance in Nigeria. The collecting of relevant data is a crucial precondition for every monitoring system. As a result, the ability of government entities to collect the data needed to analyze the NPoA's success is critical. Every country has a network of institutions tasked with overseeing projects and programs, most of which had expertise with national projects. As a result, the National Governance Commission/National Governing Council (NGC) needed to build a capability to monitor governance, both in terms of governance indicators and targets, as well as public views of governance challenges. One of the APRM's significant legacies could be the expansion of the capacity for collecting strategic development data. Rather than stretching APRM's limited staff and resources to try to co-implement the NPoA, it would be better to focus on effective reporting through a well-designed monitoring and evaluation system (Khalil, 2013).

The tasks of the national ministries, departments, and agencies charged with implementing the NPoA are unclear, particularly in terms of reporting and monitoring the process. APRM Nigeria wanted to be in charge of implementing the NPoA at first, but the former (NEPAD) objected, therefore APRM Nigeria was limited to an oversight role in most objectives. APRM Nigeria lacks the requisite communication tools to track and identify implementing agencies' efforts. It will be hard to determine the impact of APRM in any country without rigorous and systematic monitoring and evaluation of NPoA implementation.

Hypotheses Three: Strong political will and adequate funding by APRM can improve the implementation of good governance in Nigeria.

The lack of political will and competence to decentralize and mainstream the National Programme of Action (NPoA) at the state and local government levels clearly hampered NEPAD Nigeria's effort and commitment to the APRM process. This is most likely due to Nigeria's federal system, which means that state governments are not obligated to approve every idea coming from the center. In Nigeria, an enabling statute is required to support the APRM Process (Daily Times, 2013).

Internal political crises, such as a lack of buy-in from political leaders or reform champions, mistrust between the government and civil society, and other internal political crises, divert political attention away from national progress

(Khalil, 2013). For example, President Yar'Adua's death in May 2010 sparked a power struggle within the ruling party over his successor. During Obasanjo's presidency, the APRM process began, and he was a significant figure in the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), NEPAD, and the APRM. His successors have not shown the same level of interest or impact in regional and continental matters after he left power in 2007.

Due to a dearth of donor agencies and political will to mainstream the mechanism's vision and objectives, APRM Nigeria was undoubtedly underfunded. Some countries' funding constraints reflect weaknesses in national budgeting systems, where data on which to base predictions is sometimes missing, making forecasting problematic. Another flaw is that traditional African government budgets frequently fail to link monies to the proper route and activity. Budget breakdowns rarely connect all of these issues, and while this provides for flexibility, the ultimate result is a total reallocation of cash as the situation demands, resulting in unavoidable shortages (Jinadu, 2010).

What is most crucial for African countries, particularly Nigeria, to consider is that those entrusted with managing public funds must be trustworthy, wise, visionary, and committed. The operations and programs of the various bodies in the country's APRM coordinating structure are funded by the Federal Government through the presidency's annual budget. While this shows the government's support for the APR process, it can be troublesome at times due to inter-ministerial bickering over the amount of money to be granted to the APR process. There's also the issue of funding delays caused by bureaucratic politics and red tape in the federal civil service's budget release, accounting, and auditing processes.

- **FINDINGS**

Based on the outcome of our study, the following findings were observed:

- In our findings, it can be deduced that good governance can only thrive when there is adequate political buy-in at all levels of government (elected, appointed and career levels). This will help ensure the vital political will to drive and sustain the peer review process.
- We also discovered that lack of funding from government and donor organisations for monitoring the APRM has contributed to their loss of interest.
- The study revealed that conformity to codes and standards of APRM by member states would encourage and build responsible leadership through a self-assessment process and constructive peer-dialogue, to foster the

adoption of policies, standards, and practices that will lead to political stability, high economic growth and sustainable development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made to deepen and broaden democracy and good political governance in Africa.

1. As a good governance tool, APRM should be enhanced by the government to meet the international best practices by recognizing major policy initiatives taken by Nigeria in enacting national legislation to improve transparency in the oil and gas industries
2. Monitoring and evaluation is crucial in achieving a developmental stride and improving the implementation of good governance in Nigeria. It will be hard to determine the impact of APRM in any country without rigorous and systematic monitoring and evaluation of NPoA implementation.
3. There must be adequate political buy-in at all levels of government (elected, appointed and career levels). This will help ensure the vital political will to drive and sustain the process, and that it receives the required funds.
4. The instruments of APRM are weak and very soft to implement the recommendations. Therefore, incorporating strong measures like sanction will make the APRM more effective and binding so as to avoid undemocratic governments not to hide themselves through inviting external reviewers of Heads of States and Government (HSG) who are rare to criticize their follow in international forum.
5. Civil society organizations should continuously engage government to ensure accountability, transparency and adherence to the rule of law and democratic ideals and good political governance.

Conclusion

The paper assesses African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and good governance, in relation to Nigerian experience, from 2003 to 2015. In this study, the researcher strongly argued that the issue of peer review should be looked at primarily from needs of the majority and interest of Nigerians in particular and Africans in general who live below poverty line. As has clearly been stated in the documents of APRM and NEPAD, peace, security, democracy, good governance, human rights and sound economic management are conditions for

sustainable development. Therefore, the APRM should not be seen as a mechanism of interference or control, but as an instrument of cooperation which affords African states (Nigeria) the opportunity to compare policy experiences, exchange ideas on the best practices to adopt in order to improve their governance and achieve development objectives. The analyses and suggestions positioned in this research have illuminated the major impediments to the APRM. These include the voluntary nature of the APRM, and lack of both sufficient funding and strong political commitment to support the peer review.

In addition, the APRM appears not to have effectively addressed the issue of sovereignty of member states as non-compliance to its principles and resolutions do not attract serious penalty measures. A major challenge which constitutes a missing link is that not all member-states of the African Union have joined the APR process. Moreover, member states are not bound to accept the outcomes of the APR process. This challenge has been obvious in some of the countries which have undergone the review process.

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