



Regional Economic Integration and the Governance Challenge in Africa: Missing Links in the African Peer Review Mechanism

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Abstract

There exists a growing consensus among scholars and observers that critical issues on governance and development in Africa, which have remained unresolved, continue to pose obstacles to Africa's economic integration efforts. Although the continent has witnessed different stages in the evolution of regional economic integration, and notwithstanding that regionalism has continued to occupy a central position in Africa's development agenda, there is a missing link between the efforts of African states and regional organisations towards realising key regional integration objectives. This is especially because of two sets of factors: salient issues such as lack of good governance and democracy, poor leadership and domestic mismanagement; and continuing emphases on absolute sovereignty and the attendant issues around national interests versus regional interests. Thus, Africa has remained the least integrated and developed of the world's major regions. This article examines the regional economic integration problematic in Africa from the angle of governance deficits in African countries. The article adopts a qualitative research methodology and is based on data obtained from literature, primary sources (interviews) and official documents/archival materials. Using a thematic discourse analysis and drawing insights from functionalism/neo-functionalism and neo-realism theories, the article assesses the effectiveness of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) in interrogating issues on regionalism in Africa. It identifies missing links in the APRM process in furthering the African Union/NEPAD integration and development objectives.

Keywords: Regionalism, Regional Cooperation Integration, African Union/NEPAD, APRM, African States, Governance, Development

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Résumé

De plus en plus de chercheurs et d'observateurs s'accordent sur le fait que les questions critiques sur la gouvernance et le développement en Afrique, qui sont restées sans solution, continuent de faire obstacle aux efforts d'intégration économique de l'Afrique. Bien que le continent ait connu des phases différentes dans l'évolution de l'intégration économique régionale et malgré la place centrale que le régionalisme continue d'occuper dans le programme de développement de l'Afrique, il manque un lien entre les efforts des États africains et les organisations régionales pour l'atteinte des objectifs clés en matière d'intégration régionale. Cela s'explique notamment par deux facteurs: les problèmes saillants tels que le manque de bonne gouvernance et de démocratie, le manque de leadership et la mauvaise gestion interne; et l'accent soutenu mis sur la souveraineté absolue et les questions liées à l'opposition entre les intérêts nationaux et les intérêts régionaux. Ainsi, l'Afrique est la région la moins intégrée et développée du monde. Le présent article examine la problématique de l'intégration économique régionale en Afrique sous l'angle des déficits de gouvernance dans les pays africains. Il adopte une méthodologie de recherche qualitative et se fonde sur des données provenant de la littérature, des sources primaires (interviews) et des documents officiels/documents d'archives. A travers une analyse thématique du discours et s'inspirant des théories du fonctionnalisme/ néo-fonctionnalisme et du néo-réalisme, l'article évalue l'efficacité du Mécanisme africain d'évaluation par les pairs (MEAP) pour soulever les questions sur le régionalisme en Afrique. Il identifie les liens manquants dans le processus du MAEP en matière de promotion des objectifs d'intégration et de développement de l'Union africaine/ du NEPAD.

Mots-clés: Régionalisme ; Coopération et intégration régionales ; Union africaine / NEPAD ; MAEP ; États africains ; Gouvernance ; Développement

Introduction

Regional economic integration became an important subject as more African countries began to achieve independence from the late 1950s. There was the seeming realisation that without unity, newly created African states would find it difficult to make progress in an international system dominated by the powerful, rich and industrialised countries of the West. As such, the quest for cooperation and forging technical links among African countries was influenced by pan-African desires for collective self-reliance, solidarity, development, peace and unity. This led to the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and, subsequently, the formation of other sub-regional groupings and regional development initiatives. They include: the OAU's 1980 Lagos Plan of Action; 1991 Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community (AEC); and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) adopted by the African Union. All of them have been underpinned by the ideals of regional integration. However, despite the overwhelming advocacy for regional integration, especially within the

context of global trends of liberalisation and regionalization (despite Brexit and other such centrifugal forces), the story of regionalism in Africa is not one of satisfactory success. The continent has continued to suffer constant setbacks in its political and socio-economic development efforts. This is despite the region's enormous wealth of naturel resources which, if effectively harnessed and developed, with visionary political leadership, could trigger industrialisation, socio-economic transformation and development – making Africa a major actor within the international community. Rather, Africa has remained a weak player whose immense resources continue to be exploited by non-regional actors with little (if any) benefits to the region.

While scholarly debates rage over the better integration strategy – sub-regional versus continental integration (as proposed by the African Union) – the objective reality is that Africa has few successes. Intra-Africa trade remains low as does Africa's trade with countries outside the continent. In fact, several hurdles still prevent the free movement of persons, goods and services in some African sub-regions, which affect the benefits that could be derived from Africans freely moving, residing and establishing business connections within the continent. Other impediments such as infrastructure under development and the ineffective coordination and harmonisation of development policies and programmes by African governments remain crucial challenges even as African governments and their peoples struggle to internalise the norms and values developed to guide Africa's integration processes. The obvious reality is that regional economic integration in Africa is still confronted with a lot of challenges.

This article examines the salient issues in the discourse of African regionalism and examines the regional integration problematic from the dimension of governance challenges facing African countries. Our central argument is that the progress of African economic integration (as envisioned by the African Union and its NEPAD initiative) is tied solidly to effective political leadership within the continent. Beyond showing political will at the top, African governments will also need to demonstrate sincerity and commitment to achieving set regional integration objectives. For instance, they need to address urgently national political and socio-economic challenges which impede sub-regional and regional initiatives and integration. For that, they must put in place: good governance; responsible and accountable leadership; democratic norms and values; and effective state-society relations. With that in mind, this article assesses the instrumental use of the APRM to address governance challenges that will usher in African regional economic integration. However, are African leaders ready to address governance challenges that may betray important weaknesses? What is the likelihood

that the APRM will transform the governance architecture in Africa? Considering Africa's poor regionalism record, will the African Union-led integration project succeed where others failed? Will integration bring economic transformation and development to Africa? The article identifies the missing links in the APR process and offers suggestions on strengthening the mechanism.

Conceptual/Theoretical Contexts of Regional Integration

Regionalism is a concept which often refers to formal cooperation and integration arrangements by neighbouring countries aimed at facilitating or enhancing cooperation (due to a sense of common identity and purpose) through the creation of institutions that shape and drive collective action. In defining the concept, scholars usually differentiate between regional cooperation and integration to clearly explain the form of regional agreements initiated by countries. While regional cooperation may not necessarily involve the commitment to integrate hitherto independent economies – it may simply seek to pull efforts towards achieving specific objectives – regional integration connotes a form of interdependence among nation states (Adetula 2004:3; Lamberte 2004:4). In establishing regional integration arrangements, sovereign states within a geographical space enter into a formal agreement to work together in order to actualise political and socio-economic benefits. More importantly, regional integration requires independent nation states to share their national sovereignty, make political commitments and sacrifices, and forego certain benefits in the interest of the larger body (Adetula 2004).

Functionalism and neo-functionalism consider international organisations better able (than states) to handle problems that affect human collectives. These classical integration theories provide useful insights on the evolutionary nature of regional integration processes; the 'how' and 'why' nations decide on their own to cooperate with each other – in other words, the factors that propel the desire to cooperate (Haas 1971:6). Side-stepping realist focus on state self-interest, functionalists emphasise the importance of common interests and shared needs as critical features underpinning state desire to cooperate toward integration.

Functionalism posits that the integration process occurs freely, that functional institutional units can be serviced effectively with available knowledge and expertise, and that it is in state interest to sustain cooperation. A key feature of neo-functionalism is 'supra-nationalism', which maintains that (in the process of integration) sovereign nation-states are willing to submit to the collective governance architecture of supra-national institutions. The emphasis the functionalism/neo-functionalism on the role and influence

of international organisations and institutions as actors in the international system, and in shaping the foreign policies of nation states, explicitly captures the process of integration in Africa – especially, taking into account the functioning of the different institutions of Africa’s regional economic communities (RECs), the AU, NEPAD and APRM. However, functionalism and neo-functionalism are weak in accounting for salient political-economic issues on regionalism in Africa. Africa’s integration processes are elite/ leadership-driven, which raises questions on the formulation and design of regional policies, programmes and projects. Lack of popular participation in the process of integration is a major challenge attributable to the workings of the African state; the nature of political leadership in Africa; and politics in development processes. Beyond the non-participation of the masses, African economic integration is further hampered by the reluctance of the continent’s leadership to share sovereignty.

Methodology

This article adopts the qualitative research methodology. Research data were obtained from selected interviews (originally for an on-going doctoral study) held at the African Union Commission; NEPAD and APRM Secretariats; Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and a number of CSOs and media houses in Addis Ababa, South Africa and Nigeria. Members of academia who are experts in the field were also interviewed. Data was also obtained from extant literature and documentary sources. The article employs a thematic discourse analysis in order to explore key themes that emerged from the data. The following questions guided the process of data selection and analysis:

1. Is regional economic integration necessary for Africa?
2. Why has regional integration been more successful in other parts of the world than in Africa?
3. Are organizations such as the African Union/NEPAD and APRM effective responses to the regional economic integration and governance challenge in Africa? How?
4. What are the key contributions of the African Peer Review Mechanism to regional integration and governance discourses in Africa?
5. What are the key challenges to the implementation of the African Peer Review Mechanism? How can these challenges be effectively addressed?

Salient Issues in the Discourse on African Economic Integration

Is regional economic integration necessary for Africa? The general response of participants was unanimously affirmative.¹ There was a sense that Africa's economic integration projects are practical and relevant imperatives of our time if Africa is to be competitive in the present international economic dispensation dominated by large regional trading blocs, foreign transnational corporations and western-dominated international regimes and institutions.² Regional integration seeks to correct the present imbalance in the international arena and to promote regional and continental development.³

The above assertions align directly with scholarly conclusions that regional integration is a worthwhile strategy by Africans to: confront collectively the challenges of economic underdevelopment; ease the constraints linked to the limited size of national markets and small economies; and enable African countries to present a common front in international affairs (see Hartzenberg 2011). Indeed, UNECA firmly insists that regional integration will enable African countries to pool their human, material and financial resources towards national and continental development. By merging their economies and pooling their capacities, endowments, and energies, Africa would not only be able to achieve sustainable economic growth and development, but also alleviate poverty, enhance the movements of goods, services, capital, and labour; coordinate and harmonise socio-economic policy; develop infrastructure; and promote peace and security within the continent (ECA 2010:XIX). However, despite these massive potential benefits, one interviewee noted:

Although regional integration is imperative for Africa, it is not at any cost. The costs and benefits of how efficiently regional economic integration can be achieved have to be weighed and the value or lack thereof needs to be continuously appraised.... (Fieldwork interview, 9 October 2013, South Africa).⁴

This cautionary attitude is instructive and may underscore the tepid regional integration approach by many African governments, which has stalled or weakened integration projects on the continent.

Why has regional integration been more successful in other parts of the world than in Africa? Regional integration has not been successful in Africa as in other parts of the world due to several problematic issues. Most African states are weak states (Qobo 2007:3). Also, because many are small both physically and in terms of population, they are not sustainable economically. Equally concerning is that African states are at vastly different levels of development, and many are extremely heterogeneous entities with differing 'languages, cultures, societal norms and natural resources endowment' (Adogamhe 2008:18). Nevertheless, though important, such factors are not fatal features for the continent's sub-regional and regional integration efforts.

This is because the defining issue pertains directly to the seriousness of African leaders in managing the diversities effectively (Adogamhe 2008:18).

Regrettably, however, most post-independence African leaders have been ineffective in managing the affairs of their states. National integration has proven to be a challenge in many African countries in the face of endemic poverty, inequitable distribution of national resources, poor governance, political corruption, ethnic fractionalisation, ethnocentrism, and nepotism – with consequent political-economic implications for national, sub-regional and regional development. The lack of shared political, economic and social interests, norms and values undermine national development and the spill-over effects are felt at the sub-regional, regional and continental levels. As Adedeji (2002:9) asserts, regional integration objectives may not be achievable without shared visions and values among the African populace. It would remain a difficult undertaking where ‘there is no shared social economy in which the welfare of the people and the community is paramount and the transformation process is socially unjust, not politically participatory and culturally vibrant’ (Adedeji 2002:9).

African governments and their peoples have shown much interest in establishing regional integration institutions, and expected too many benefits to accrue from integration, without due consideration of the costs, commitments and sacrifices involved in the process. The perspective of neo-realism on regionalism is that sovereign states agree to cooperate with each other towards regional integration because they expect to derive certain political, economic or social benefits from the process (Gibb 2009:715). Regional cooperation and integration depends on the issues involved (Collard-Wexler 2006:399-406) and may be affected when such issues are in conflict with the national interests of participating states.

That raises the questions about national interests versus regional interests in the discourse on regionalism, especially in Africa. As Adetula (2004:10) observes, many sub-regional integration schemes are still directing their focus singularly to national development, which causes conflicts among participating member countries particularly when it comes to distributing benefits. Added to this is the fact that RECs in Africa fail to fashion their objectives in line with the vision of continental integration, which explains some of the key challenges such as: the problem of overlapping memberships of regional organisations; ineffective coordination; duplication of regional programmes; and competition (Okeke Uzodike 2010: 35-37; Agubuzu 2004:202). Basically, RECs represent the cornerstone on which continental integration could be established in Africa, but there are many challenges at this level. While some RECs have achieved minimal successes, others are still lagging behind considerably. One expert observed grimly:

These structural challenges militating against effective regionalism remain firmly in place, mistrust has continued to characterize intra-state relations in Africa. Regional economies are either dominated by non-African actors or by dominant economies on the continent, while conflicts continue to divert attention from regional integration and regional development. Generally, regional integration in Africa has not gone further than what it was in 1960 when the idea was first mooted. This raises pessimism about the viability of African economic integration in an era of globalization, when the European Union (EU), for instance, prefers to deal with Africa under the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPAs) via a balkanized Africa (Fieldwork interview, 19 March 2014, South Africa).⁵

Perhaps, because of their mutual suspicions and desire for immediate accrual of national benefits, African governments are not fully committed to the issue of regional integration. Although they have signed regional agreements and established regional institutions, the structures and institutions necessary to propel integration are either non-existent or weak at the national level. Beyond these weaknesses, however, the persistent over-reliance by African governments on external developmental assistance and aid – whereas the continent's rich natural resource endowments remain untapped at national, regional and continental levels – are issues yet to be effectively addressed (Murithi 2008:2). Thus, Africa continues to be marginalised in the international arena (Murithi 2008:2).

Clearly, Africa's weak economic integration and development are linked to the workings of post-independence African states and their institutions of governance. In most cases, state weakness and poor leadership, divisive politics, prevalence of weak socio-economic policies, and lack of concern for the needs and welfare of citizens have given rise to intra-state and inter-state conflicts, which impact negatively on sub-regional and regional integration. These issues have often made the search for peace, stability, security and development elusive in Africa.

The African Union/NEPAD, APRM Framework: An Overview

Are organizations such as the African Union/NEPAD and APRM effective responses to the regional economic integration and governance challenges in Africa? How? Since the 1990s, African leaders have made efforts to redesign and redirect development strategies in order to address the political and socio-economic challenges confronting the continent and to meet the changing demands of a globalising economy. Their efforts culminated in the establishment of the African Union whose Constitutive Act was adopted in 2000 at the OAU Summit in Lome, Togo and became effective in 2001 (AfriMAP 2009:4). The period of transformation from the OAU to the African

Union coincided with the formulation of the NEPAD initiative by some of the continent's leaders in promoting the drive for change in Africa. In 2001, the NEPAD initiative was approved for implementation by the African Union Heads of State and Government as Africa's blueprint action plan for development (NEPAD/ECA/OSAA 2012:X).

Together, both institutions were expected to provide the context and mobilisation platform for galvanising states towards overcoming economic, political and socio-cultural challenges as Africa marched to continental integration. To that extent, the discourse on African economic integration is closely intertwined and logically linked to the objectives of the AU and the NEPAD (Fieldwork interview, 12 December 2012, Kenya).⁶

An interviewee noted: 'both initiatives represent the "twin platforms" for Africa's integration and development in the new millennium.'⁷

Initiated in 2002 and established in 2003, the APRM – a product of the Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government at the first Summit of the AU – was integral to the implementation of NEPAD. APRM was designed to foster political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and faster economic integration by encouraging the development of enabling policies, standards and practices across Africa. Thus, for African governments, good governance and socio-economic development are central to the vision of the African Union/NEPAD. The decision was therefore approved to integrate NEPAD into the structures and processes of the African Union and to establish the APRM as the instrumental framework through which the African governance and development reform agenda will be facilitated. The APRM seeks to assess the issue of governance, which has affected Africa's development since independence, and monitor African governments' commitments and compliance with the AU's Declaration to promote good governance. Hence, the APRM is thought to be a home-grown African programme established to bring about a change in Africa's governance processes in the quest for economic integration and socio-economic development. However, considering the critical political issues which the APRM aims to engage with, the African Union/NEPAD initiatives have attracted several debates among scholars and observers. Issues of contention on the AU/NEPAD have become prominent because of the problematic nature of African regionalism.

The Institutional Framework and Approach of the African Peer Review Mechanism

The APRM was established in 2003 to address governance deficits (political, economic, and social) in African countries to facilitate political stability, sustainable development and regional integration. One interviewee noted that:

In creating the Mechanism as part of the NEPAD initiative, African leaders were conscious of the reality that there cannot be peace and security in the continent without socio-economic development and that there cannot be socio-economic development without peace and security...One cannot separate the 'political' from the 'economic'...the two must go hand in hand (Fieldwork interview, 17 June 2013, Addis Ababa Ethiopia).⁸

The mandate of the APRM is to encourage participating states to ensure that their policies and practices 'conform to the agreed political, economic and corporate governance values, codes and standards; and achieve mutually agreed objectives in socio-economic development contained in the AU Declaration' (APRM, MOU paragraph 6).

For member states of the APRM, the mechanism aims to 'encourage and build transformative leadership and constructive national dialogue, through an inclusive and participatory self-assessment process, and develop policies and practices that would lead to the attainment of the NEPAD objectives of political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated sub-regional and continental economic integration' (APRM, Base Document paragraph 3). This envisaged that the principles of openness, transparency and inclusiveness of the APRM would improve the decision-making processes of government, empower national institutions and build trust and confidence between the government and the citizenry to collectively address their socio-economic challenges (Economic Commission for Africa 2008:XIV). The APRM provides an innovative approach for governments and the citizens to work together as partners to build a democratic, progressive and peaceful society, which would also attract foreign investors and development partners (ECA 2008:XIII).

The following APRM foundation documents articulate the principles and guidelines of the APR process and those which govern the activities of participating countries at the national level:

- (1) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the APRM (NEPAD/HSGIC/03-2003/APRM/MOU), the accession document for the APRM;
- (2) Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance (AHG/235(XXXVIII) Annex 1);

- (3) APRM Base Document (AHG/235(XXXVIII) Annex II);
- (4) APRM Organisation and Processes (NEPAD/HSGIC/03.2003/APRM/Guideline/ O&P);
- (5) Objectives, Standards, Criteria and Indicators for the APRM (NEPAD/HSGIC/03-2003/APRM/Guideline/OSCI); and
- (6) Outline of the Memorandum of Understanding on Technical Assessments and the Country Review Visit (NEPAD/HSGIC/03-2003/APRM/Guideline/Outline) (AU/NEPAD 2003, 1).

The APRM continental institutions consist of the:

- (1) Forum of Heads of State and Government;
- (2) Panel of Eminent Persons;
- (3) APRM Continental Secretariat;
- (4) Group of independent experts.

The APRM partner institutions include the:

- (1) United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA);
- (2) African Development Bank (AfDB); and
- (3) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Together, these continental and partner institutions are responsible for the overall implementation of the APRM. In addition, member countries have also established Focal Points, National Governing Councils, Secretariats and Technical Research Institutions in their countries to liaise and work with the Continental Secretariat as stipulated in the APRM Guidelines.

The APRM is open to voluntary accession which indicates that member-states of the AU are under no obligation to participate. Its document also provides that a participating country may withdraw from membership by giving a notice to this effect to the APRM Secretariat (APRM, MOU paragraph 32). The APR process involves the conduct of periodic assessments and reviews of the overall governance structures and processes of participating countries to monitor compliance with those criteria which have been drawn from the NEPAD framework (Uzodike 2010/11:94). Basically, the APRM conducts its reviews on four focus areas: democracy and political governance, economic governance and management, corporate governance, and socio-economic development (see Table 1). By virtue of APRM membership, participating countries submit themselves not only to periodic peer reviews but also to commit necessary resources towards the success of such reviews,

and to undertake to be guided by agreed principles, goals, parameters and standards as articulated in the official documents of the APRM (AU/NEPAD 2003). The five stages marking the APR process consist of both the Country Self-Assessment Review and others by the APRM institutions. It is worth mentioning that the 'African Union and its organs such as the Peace and Security Council (PSC), Pan African Parliament (PAP), and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights are involved in the implementation of this continental mechanism' (Uzodike 2010/11:94).

Having conducted their Country Self-Assessment processes, member countries are expected to draw up a National Programme of Action (NPOA) to provide realistic policy measures and a timeframe to address identified problems emanating from the reviews (ECA 2008). Presently, 35 out of the 54 African Union member states are participating countries while 17 member states have been peer-reviewed. The APRM has been recognised within Africa and internationally as one of the most innovative programmes of NEPAD (ECA 2011c:V).

Africa's Quest for Regional Integration, Good Governance and Socio-economic Development

What are the key contributions of the African Peer Review Mechanism to regional integration and governance discourse in Africa? Based on the founding objectives, the APRM has been strategically positioned to support and assist with the implementation of the African Union/NEPAD objectives. As regional programmes, NEPAD and the APRM aim to build developmental states that will transform the African continent. Indeed, as one interviewee noted: 'for as long as we have divisions in Africa; as long as national integration remains a challenge; as long as Africa is in dire need of accountable and responsible leadership; we need the APRM...' (Fieldwork interview, 1 February 2013, Nigeria).⁹ The APRM monitors how member states abide by the principles underpinning the African integration process as well as the progress made in the implementation of regional and continent-wide programmes. An interviewee underscored the same point:

The African Union as the overall body works at the policy level. The AU has put in place certain elements to guide the process of continental integration. These are shared values. They are supposed to be overarching. NEPAD uses those AU policies to attract investments on a large scale to Africa. And, in order to serve as the 'referee' to make sure that countries are doing the right thing, you have the APRM which plays the role of a referee. The APRM sets standards and benchmarks for countries. So, the point is that, in actual fact, the APRM is separated from the AU because we don't want it to mix up. The APRM is going to play the role of

that referee, to look at the standards, to look at whether the benchmarks are being met; so that when those benchmarks are met you will see that Africa has a best practice which it is prepared to absorb. The APRM sets the tone for the environment. Now, the challenge is whether the APRM is actually performing. Otherwise, the APRM is a very very good idea. For instance, they monitor our elections to see whether they are credible because that is one thing that will settle whether there is peace or not... (Fieldwork interview, 17 June 2013, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia).¹⁰

Corroborating these assertions, another interviewee at the APRM Secretariat also noted:

Governance is our mandate... Africa needed to improve governance and that is the foundation of the mandate of the APRM – the need for common standards. APRM ensures that member states agree on common standards and frameworks. Countries are supposed to agree to the objectives of the APRM and that is how APRM promotes economic integration... We work behind the scenes with the sectors of the civil society. We speak to everyone. Civil societies in one country will speak with those in other counties – facilitating integration at the levels of peers and at the civil society level. There are integration frameworks now on the ground unlike in the past and one of them is the APRM... (Fieldwork interview, 2 July 2013, South Africa).¹¹

The strength of the APRM – though initiated by governments – is that it deals directly with the people, the concerns of the people. People's views about governance in their countries are reflected in the APRM report.¹² One interviewee underscored the point that:

The APRM opens up a conversation across all levels of society, from the President down to the line ministries, civil servants, the corporate sector and the non-state sector. In many countries prior to APRM, these different groupings rarely interacted in any formal manner around governance issues and institutions in their country. The APRM has stimulated more systematic engagement by non-state sectors in the daily business of government than was previously either permitted or possible (Fieldwork interview, 9 October 2013, South Africa).¹³

The APRM has also been successful in bringing to public attention many 'cross-cutting' issues on governance that affect African countries (at varying degrees) such as: corruption, gender inequality, youth unemployment (NEPAD 2011:22), land use, electoral processes, management challenges, and managing diversity (SAIIA 2010:3). Member-states of the APRM develop their National Programmes of Action based on these cross-cutting issues and other challenges identified in their Countries' Review Reports. With the establishment of the APRM, Africa's civil society organisations appear to be getting more

involved in governance and development processes, and governments are becoming more conscious of the need to be accountable not only to their donors and development partners but also to their citizens (NEPAD 2011).

In addition, the APRM Review Process in some countries has served as an ‘early warning system on impending crises – the issue of management of diversity as manifested in election-related violence between ethnic groups in Kenya, and the challenge of xenophobia in South Africa’ (ECA 2011a:17). Although the warnings of the APRM go unheeded sometimes, the APRM National Programmes of Action are often helpful in providing directions for necessary action in the case of conflict within a member state (SAIIA 2010:3). As an interviewee noted:

The APRM is a good idea because what it does is that it reveals the extent of our development. It gives you a kind of guidance of the analysis of development – what have we covered; what do we need to cover. That is the strength of the APRM. And the APRM has made impact in that many countries have now acceded and you have very few countries that have not, so that then gives you really the impression of what it stands for. And many African governments are quite weary of being called out to say, we are not developing in certain areas, you know. Like for instance, one of the challenges that was revealed in the last APRM Review on South Africa was on xenophobia, and as a result of that, the South African government has been very sensitive to that and really has made efforts in ensuring that, say look, there are effective ways of addressing xenophobia and also saying that, let us have a re-look at this, because this is not xenophobia, it’s a form of foreign attacks on foreign individuals which are criminally induced, you know. Let’s look at these and address them properly and give them their proper names, yea. So, the APRM in that process is really really a good thing. Indeed, it is really a good thing (Fieldwork interview, 24 February 2014, South Africa).¹⁴

The peer review process provides a forum for African governments to learn from peers, and share experiences and best practices. The lessons and experiences gained from the peer review processes are also important to other African countries outside the APRM, Africa’s RECs and other stakeholders (NEPAD 2011:22). Therefore, it cannot be over-emphasised that peer learning, experience sharing and best practices shared by governments, and peer influence are necessary ingredients that will increase the pace of Africa’s economic and political integration (Tungwarara 2010:VIII). One interviewee underscored the same points:

The APRM has no direct role to play in integrating African states, however, it does provide a useful framework for understanding the issues which different states have in common. Case in point is the eight cross-cutting issues identified in 2008 based on the first seven APRM reports, which highlighted the common

challenges faced by almost all African nations. It [APRM] also provides a platform within which African states are able to dialogue on these common issues, explore and share unique and novel solutions to common challenges and reflect critically on the role of other states in supporting the governance processes of each member state (Fieldwork interview, 9 October 2013, South Africa).¹⁵

Missing Links in the African Peer Review Process

What are the key challenges to the implementation of the African Peer Review Mechanism? How can these challenges be effectively addressed? Although the APRM has recorded some successes and has been applauded by many as a unique programme that is transforming the governance architecture in Africa, it has also received various criticisms and experienced many challenges. The latter – the challenges – constitute the missing links in the APR process which, if not addressed, may jeopardise the future of the initiative.

- First, there are arguments that the establishment of the NEPAD initiative and its APRM was motivated by the desire by African governments to attract more donor funds and that these programmes are not genuinely about promoting good governance and democracy. One interviewee noted:

NEPAD and APRM are a big joke essentially because they are offshoots and strategies of the highly dysfunctional African Union which, I argue, should leave issues of economic development and integration to the RECs. APRM is a caricature because the African governments are just using it to rub each other's backs to foster the illusion of good governance. NEPAD is cash-strapped, [a] white-elephant and largely donor-driven (Fieldwork interview, 20 June 2013, Kenya).¹⁶

In particular, good governance and democracy are concepts which have attracted various debates and contestations among scholars in Africa.¹⁷

- Secondly, the voluntary nature of participation and withdrawal from the APRM has been questioned and there is a growing consensus on the need for all African Union member states to accede to the APRM.
- Third, the APRM is, perhaps, constrained when it comes to sanctioning non-compliant member states – a pointer to the fact that state sovereignty remains a contentious issue in the APR process (Akokpari 2003:14). Moreover, member states are not bound to accept the outcomes of the APR process. This position has been exemplified in some of the countries which have been peer-reviewed (Akokpari 2010/11:79). As Adedeji (2004:246) asserts, 'peer review is not feasible in Africa, or anywhere else for that matter, where there is a lot of sensitivity about sovereignty and the heads of state tend to herd together like trade union leaders'. In fact, as one interviewee argued:

Currently, I don't think the APRM is really working. Who is evaluating who? We all know how most of them come to power. We know how most of them change the constitutions to stay in power. Who really has the morals and capacity to evaluate his colleague? Especially in West Africa – Gabon, Senegal; we know how the Senegalese President tried to stay in power even at the age of 80. Most of them know each other. So, 'who is evaluating who' is really a big problem... (Fieldwork interview, 21 June 2013, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia).¹⁸

- A general criticism, therefore, is that African governments are very good when it comes to policy formulation but, at the stage of implementation, the willingness and commitments diminish. And regional institutions do not have the power to sanction erring governments. One interviewee observed pessimistically:

African governments are full of rhetoric. There is no other continent that has the level of policy frameworks and programmes in every single sector. There is an anticorruption policy; there is the policy on human rights, elections and democracy; there is a programme on conservation of natural resources and all others. The continent has about 43 treaties touching on each and every aspect of human endeavours and these are supposed to be binding. But, where are they on the ground? (Fieldwork interview, 17 June 2013, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia).¹⁹

Clearly, the APRM experiences this 'gap between rhetoric and reality' (Akokpari 2003:13). Despite these challenges, however, there are other scholars and observers who are of the opinion that the APRM is a good idea, that its objectives may have been well conceived despite some weaknesses in the area of implementation. For instance, an interviewee noted:

APRM is important. APRM is something we need to the extent that it establishes standards that we voluntarily can hold on to on a comparative basis; standards which are difficult to impose from outside but which once we agree to, we can do all in our power, all in our means to try to meet up to... However, as good as it is, the pity of it all, in my own opinion, is that the APRM is not well publicised. I don't know whether to say it is not well adhered to. But, it is as if ever since it came into being with NEPAD, it has, in some countries, not been taken too seriously and I think Nigeria is one of those countries... This says a lot about how seriously on a continental basis, we are taking this APRM initiative. I would have assumed that at least, major indices or major areas of emphasis of the APRM initiative should also be reflected, on an annual basis, either in countries' annual budget or key initiatives such as the Transformation Agenda of this administration and also key policy initiatives of past administrations. I would have expected APRM's key goals and objectives to be reflected in them; but, unfortunately, they are not, and you know, that begs the question what is it all about... (Fieldwork interview, 31 January 2014, Nigeria).²⁰

The assessments and assertions of experts raise key questions about the commitment and sincerity of African governments in ensuring the success of the APRM, and the integration of its policy frameworks into national policy processes. The APRM is also confronted with capacity and operational challenges. The issue of funding the APRM is a principal challenge; some members-states are handicapped with resources to implement NPoAs. It is equally concerning that most APRM member countries are not adhering to the specified timelines for reporting on the progress made in implementing their NPoAs (SAIIA 2010:5-6). These are areas in which civil society organisations are important agencies not only in holding governments accountable to keeping their promises and implementing policies which touch on the lives of citizens but also in monitoring objectives of regional programmes such as the APRM. However, Africa's civil society and their groups are not only constrained by challenges such as funding and lack of proper organisation and capacity, the structures put in place at national and regional levels for engaging with the civil society are weak (Landsberg 2012:10). As Mulikita (2005:9) asserts, 'to date, the principal criticisms directed at the APRM concept have been the lack of ownership by African citizens and the top-down approach, both at the continental level and within individual countries'.

Perhaps the question to ask at this point is: how popular is the APRM among ordinary Africans? How educated and informed are the African people on the objectives of the APRM and how can they exploit the opportunities provided by the AU/NEPAD and APRM? One aspect of the challenge is that:

There is scanty [sic] knowledge of the APRM and there is scanty information of what the APRM is particularly doing. The media is involved in the APRM processes, but the APRM process remains highly 'intellectualised', and to a large extent, has remained the reserve of students, researchers, and scholars. But the farmers, the peasants and the common man on the street do not know about the APRM. Moreover, the APRM processes are not clearly reflected in parliamentary activities of the different governments. (Fieldwork interview, 24 February 2014, South Africa).²¹

There is no doubt that popular participation which is the core principle of the APRM initiative is limited by the lack of adequate information. Beyond that, some African governments have deliberately put in place measures to curtail the participatory activities of civil society groups who they deemed to be meddling in governmental affairs, especially when they focus on issues considered to be the exclusive preserve of the government. These impediments question the participatory and inclusive processes associated with the APRM and the reality that the APRM Review Reports are reflective

of the views of the people. The APRM as an African Union initiative, therefore, is affected by the leadership problems in the continent. As one interviewee argued:

The problem Africa has... is that there's absolutely no leadership of the African continent! We need more leaders, not stronger men but more leaders that have got the good will to deliver on their promises of building stronger institutions that are more powerful than their own egos and their own agendas, and also to be more accountable; to have the courage more or less to follow through on all treaties at the continental level. We have accumulated so many things on paper... theory as to what should make this continent great, but we have failed to act upon them largely because of the lack of leadership... (Fieldwork interview, 4 October 2013, South Africa).²²

Conclusion: APRM and the Future of African Integration

Africa continues to lag behind its target of achieving successful regional integration and development despite several regional integration schemes around the continent. This article identified the salient issues in the discourse on regionalism in Africa and highlighted the governance deficiencies and socio-economic challenges which continue to present obstacles to regional integration and development initiatives in Africa. Highlighting the objectives of the African Union and the NEPAD initiatives, the article examined the institutional framework of the APRM, which was created specifically as an instrument for resolving identified governance challenges in furtherance of the AU/NEPAD integration agenda. The conclusion of this article, which aligns with general scholarly positions, is that despite its weaknesses and challenges, the APRM represents a valuable strategy with great potential to offer effective solutions to the slow pace of integration and development in Africa. However, the APRM will not succeed unless appropriate and realistic measures are put in place to strengthen the APR process. Bearing all that in mind, we proffer the following recommendations.

Recommendations

This article takes the position that, indeed, suitable and sensible measures can be harnessed to strengthen the APR process in terms of both agency (of authoritative units and allies) and policy instruments. Specifically, we offer the following policy recommendations.

- **Role of African governments:** African governments need to show their sincerity and commitment to an effective APRM by committing the necessary financial and other resources towards implementing their APRM NPoAs and fulfilling other APRM obligations.

- **Role of the AU:** The African Union, as the umbrella organisation, needs to do more across national boundaries. Working with other stakeholders, the AU should endeavour to: popularise the APRM; deepen common understanding of the rationale for its establishment; and disseminate information effectively on what the APRM is actually doing, its achievements, and best practices on policies and governance. The APRM Review Reports should also be broadly accessible.
- **Role of the APRM:** African people are growing weary of the non-implementation of national and regional policies by the continent's political leadership. Increasingly across Africa, citizens want to see practical results, and how regional initiatives such as the APRM affect their lives and well-being in society. As such, the APRM needs to enhance its monitoring strategies to ensure that member states comply with agreed resolutions and policies in implementing continent-wide programmes of the African Union/NEPAD as well as their NPoAs. Optimists of the APRM are hopeful on a number of fronts such as that: the initiative would conduct.
- **The APRM should instill confidence and trust in the civil society, and support its quest to assume its position as an agent of change in the continent.** Therefore, the APRM needs to: focus more attention on human capital formation and development; and address human security issues towards empowering the civil society and bridging the gap between the state and society in Africa. There is need for more education and sensitisation of the African people on the opportunities provided by the APRM. This would require the efforts of all stake-holders – especially CSOs – to be effective.
- **Role of APRM Continental Secretariat:** The APRM Continental Secretariat needs to be more innovative in its media strategies to publicise the APRM in the languages understood by citizens. As a people-driven strategy, more conferences, seminars and workshops on the APRM promoted by the CSOs, the media and APRM's strategic partners, would enhance the APR process and reduce the negative perceptions and feelings about the APRM.
- **Role of civil society organisations (CSO):** The contributions made by civil society organisations to Africa's governance and development processes cannot be over-emphasised and such efforts need to be consolidated. The effective mobilisation of Africa's human resources towards enhancing their participation in governance and for development purposes is vital for the region but presents a major challenge for civil society which is a valuable instrument for achieving

the much needed development in Africa. CSOs need to be proactive and be properly organised in engaging with regional institutions such as the APRM. CSOs can form networks and coalitions across the continent to collaborate, share experiences and learn from peers on how to engage more effectively and enhance participation at national, sub-regional and regional levels. Indeed, African CSOs need to develop more interest in APRM issues and be willing to exploit the political spaces created for them to engage with government.

Policy Instruments

- The AU (APRM) can facilitate the participatory interest of CSOs in the APR process by creating or enhancing project-funding opportunities for participating groups.
- African educational sectors should be more directly relevant to the needs of their publics and societies. As such, there is a need to redefine the concept of civil society to include tertiary institutions (and all sectors and groups in society). For instance, one interviewee noted:

Institutions of higher education need to be integrated into the APRM processes. Indeed, they can play major roles particularly in addressing the methods, challenges and opportunities related to the methodology on collecting information and assessing information on the APRM. (Fieldwork interview, 24 February 2014, South Africa).²³

- The APRM should include in its policy agenda, the positions reached at different workshops advocating increased roles for national parliaments of member states in the APRM structures and processes.
- The AU should strengthen the APR process by making accession to the APRM mandatory for all its member states.
- The presence of the African Union (as the mother organisation) and its various organs – such as the Pan African Parliament, the Peace and Security Council (PRC) and the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOC) – should be felt more with respect to giving support to the APR process.
- Finally, more needs to be done in the aspect of coordinating and harmonising the programmes and policies of the African Union, NEPAD and APRM to achieve the overall objectives of a strong, united, peaceful and prosperous African continent.

APRM Thematic Area	Objectives	Defining Goals
Democracy and political governance equality.	To promote democracy and good political governance as essential elements for poverty reduction and sustainable development. Emphasis is placed on popular participation, political rights and equality.	Providing a delineated framework where citizens enjoy the same rights and there is agreement on the constitutional instrument for sovereignty; putting in place mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts and ensuring stability and security; establishing representative and accountable government; a strong private sector capable of playing an important role in a self-sustained development; a strengthened civil society.
Economic governance and management	Promote macroeconomic policies that support sustainable development; implement transparent, predictable and credible government economic policies; promote sound public finance management; fight corruption, drugs and narcotics, and money laundering; accelerate regional integration by participating in the harmonization of monetary, the participating states.	Good economic governance, including transparency in financial management as an essential element for promoting economic growth and eradicating poverty. Promoting market efficiency, controlling waste in public spending, using natural resources efficiently, consolidating democracy and encouraging the flow of capital to the private sector.
Corporate governance	Provide an enabling environment and effective regulatory framework for economic activities; ensure that corporations act as good corporate citizens with regard to human rights, social responsibility and environmental sustainability; promote the adoption of codes of good business ethics in achieving the objectives of the company; ensure that corporations treat all stakeholders (shareholders, employees, communities, suppliers and customers) in a fair and just manner; provide for accountability of corporations, directors and executives.	Good corporate governance characterized by certain distinct features: discipline, transparency, independence, accountability, fairness and social responsibility. These ethical principles, values and practices are in line with broader social and economic goals to benefit all citizens.
Socio-economic development	Promote self-reliance and build capacity for sustainable development; accelerate socio-economic objectives to achieve sustainable development and poverty reduction; strengthen policies, delivery mechanisms and outputs in key social development areas (including education for all, combating of HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases); ensure affordable access to water, energy, finance (including micro-finance), markets and ICTs to all citizens, especially the poor; progress towards gender equality, particularly equal access to education for girls at all levels; encourage broad-based participation in development by all stakeholders at all levels.	Recognize efforts made and progress accomplished in the design of appropriate policies and service delivery mechanisms in the key areas of social development. Acknowledging that poverty can only be effectively tackled through the promotion of democracy, good governance, peace and security as well as the development of human and physical resources.

Source: Compiled from ECA (2008) and NEPAD (2011:20)

Notes

1. 50 interviews were held for the study. Respondents included officials of the African Union, NEPAD and APRM; Pan African Parliament; UNECA; civil society organisations, media houses, academia and doctoral students. Interviews were held between December 2012 and March 2014.
2. Interview with Professor P1, United States International University of Nairobi, Kenya, 20 June 2013.
3. Interview with AUC 1, a senior official at the African Union Commission, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Date: 5 August 2013.
4. Interview with EISA 1, a senior official of the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, EISA, Johannesburg, South Africa. Date: 9 October 2013.
5. Interview with Professor (P2), University of Cape Town, South Africa. Date: 19 March 2014.
6. Interview with Professor (P3), University of Nairobi, Kenya. Date: 12 December 2012.
7. Interview with a senior official at the NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency, Midrand, South Africa. Date: 2 July 2013.
8. Interview with AUC 2, a senior management official at the African Union Commission Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia. Date: 17 June 2013.
9. Interview with APRM 1, a former chairperson of the APRM Panel of Eminent Persons. Date: 1 February 2013.
10. Interview with AUC 3, a senior official at the African Union Commission, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Date: 17 June 2013.
11. The respondent is APRM 2, a senior official at the APRM Secretariat, Midrand, South Africa. Date: 2 July 2013.
12. Interview with APRM 1, 1 February 2013.
13. Interview with EISA 1, 9 October 2013.
14. Interview with ACCORD 1, a senior official at the African Centre for Constructive Resolution of Disputes. Date: 24 February 2014.
15. Interview with EISA 1, 9 October 2013.
16. Interview with P1, United States International University of Nairobi, Kenya. 20 June 2013.
17. Among the questions often asked about these concepts are: Who defines what constitute (s) 'good governance' in Africa? How should the concept of democracy be defined considering the Africa's political-economic realities?
18. Interview with a senior lecturer at the Hawassa University, Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia on 21 June 2013.
19. Interview with AUC 2, 17 June 2013.
20. Interview with a high-level official at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs. Date: 31 January 2014.
21. Interview with ACCORD 1, 24 February, 2014.
22. Interview with a senior official of the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, (OSISA), Johannesburg, South Africa on 4 October 2013.
23. Interview with ACCORD 1, 24 February 2014.

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