



Rethinking the idea and original vision of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)

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Publications Section
Economic Commission for Africa
Menelik II Avenue
P.O. Box 3001
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Tel: +251 11 544-9900
Fax: +251 11 551-4416
E-mail: eca-info@un.org
Web: www.uneca.org

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Executive summary

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) Idea refers to a set of core principles on which to frame the architecture of democracy, development, peace, and security in Africa. Within the limitations inherent in analysing the multiple meanings of ideas and their role in guiding human action, this paper approaches APRM as a driver of African political and social consciousness to guide not only the understanding of the existential world, both within and outside Africa, but also the stipulation of conditions for improving or changing existential forms by designing the governance structures, institutions and processes needed to do so. In this sense, the principles defining the APRM Idea also constitute standards for determining whether there are gaps between the workings of governance institutions and processes, on the one hand, and the principles that informed their adoption, on the other.

By looking at trends in how APRM institutions and processes have operated since the Mechanism was established in 2003, the paper identifies gaps that need to be bridged between the APRM Idea and its existential forms. It concludes that those gaps should be bridged not by theorizing or conceiving another APRM Idea, but by revitalizing, reinvigorating and renewing national and continental APRM structures and processes to ensure they remain consistent with the APRM Idea and its core principles.

Section II, on the “APRM Idea and Vision and its roots in the Pan-African Idea”, looks at how the Mechanism and the Idea are rooted in the age-old Pan-African Idea. The purpose of the latter is to raise the cultural, political and socioeconomic consciousness of black and African peoples worldwide so that they take action to oppose the unequal manner in which they and Africa have been incorporated into the world system during various epochs and phases of globalization. Ultimately, the purpose of the Pan-African Idea is to transform their role in that system based on mutuality, reciprocity and recognition. The significance of APRM and the associated national

and continental processes is that they provide sites and platforms so that the African-centred debates that were set in motion by the post-Second World War formulations of the Pan-African Idea can continue in today’s post-cold war world, in the context of the new Scramble for Africa. The debates centre on African-owned solutions to the antinomies and challenges of globalization.

Section III, on “Defining the APRM Idea and Vision”, builds on the APRM Idea’s deep roots in the Pan-African Idea and in the debates that have flowed from it in order to define and analyse the principles and vision of the APRM Idea. In doing so, the section argues that the APRM Idea refers to the governance values, principles and objectives outlined in a number of standards and codes on governance, such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights; the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation; the Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance; and the more recent African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, which was adopted after the establishment of APRM. The section then points out that the APRM Idea envisions an essentially social democratic or developmental State that goes beyond liberalism, recognizing and promoting, through constitutional provisions, positive rights such as cultural, economic and social rights, in addition to customary civil and political rights.

Section IV, entitled “From the APRM Idea to the African Peer Review Mechanism”, looks at how the APRM Idea has assumed and been translated into concrete existential forms as country and continental structures and processes designed to carry out the mandate and objectives of the Mechanism in line with the core principles of the APRM Idea set out in section III. The text argues that, as a voluntary external review mechanism, APRM is fundamentally different from external reviews conducted by development partners and is generally more comprehensive because of its participatory methodology and scope.



Summarizing the notion of peer review and the theoretical and methodological framework for undertaking it, the paper notes that, although the beginnings of APRM were marked by a mixture of euphoria, scepticism and perhaps cynicism, the Mechanism has made steady progress since its establishment and is now on the cusp of a further surge. The section concludes that the surge has laid down a challenge to deepen and expand APRM through a process of restoration, reinvigoration and renewal (known as the “Three Rs strategy”) in line with the decisions of the Twenty-Fifth Summit of the Heads of State and Government Participating in APRM, held in Nairobi in 2016, and the expanded mandate given to APRM by the African Union Assembly decisions adopted in January 2017 and January 2018.

Section V, entitled “APRM: Bridging the gap between ideas and action”, looks at what needs to be done to implement the Three Rs. Doing this will require identifying the nature of the gaps and

proposing measures to bridge them and to bring the Mechanism’s institutions and processes, which are the existential forms of the APRM Idea, in line with the core principles of the Idea. Specifically, the section addresses:

- a) Political manipulation of APRM institutions and processes;
- b) Cultural and social psychological factors;
- c) African ownership;
- d) The continuation of continental integration and integration of APRM into the African Union.

Section VI, entitled “APRM moving ahead: some design and navigational imperatives”, draws on the findings of Section V to outline a recommended action plan to bridge the gaps.



I. Introduction

The questions and the argument

What have we learned about the African Peer Review Mechanism Idea (hereafter the “APRM Idea”) and the workings of APRM country and continental structures and processes since the Mechanism was established in 2003 with a particular focus on Africa’s current governance challenges, including progress towards the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals? Set against this question, how should rethinking the idea and original vision of the Mechanism be understood and approached?

The APRM Idea, like ideas generally, is made up of abstractions or ideal forms for which existential or concrete forms are needed, such as governance structures, institutions and processes anchored on a complex set of theoretical principles derived from the APRM Idea. Within the limitations inherent to analysis of the multiple meanings of ideas and their role in guiding human action, this paper approaches APRM as a driver of African political and social consciousness to guide not only the understanding of the existential world both within and outside Africa, but also the stipulation

of conditions for improving or changing existential forms through the design of the governance structures, institutions and processes needed to do so. In this sense, the principles defining the APRM Idea also constitute standards for determining whether there are gaps between the workings of governance institutions and processes, on the one hand, and the principles that informed their adoption, on the other.

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Section II offers an interpretative analysis of how the APRM Idea is deeply rooted in the Pan-African Idea.

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