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Peer Review Approach to African Economic Development: A Panacea to Africa's Economic Development Problems

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ABSTRACT

The paper took a holistic view on peer review approach to African development to determine if it is a panacea to Africa's economic development problems. The quest for African economic development led to the introduction of the peer review approach by African leaders under the auspices of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). In 2002, the African leaders during the G8 presented their blueprint for African development to international donors for assistance and to meet up with the expectation of these donors gave birth to the peer review approach, which was modeled after the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The paper among others reviewed the five stages involved in the African peer review approach, and the benefits inherent in compliant to include, greater transparency, improved public accountability, sound policy, encourages development partnership, capital flows and strengthened capacity. However, the paper argued that although peer review mechanism or process has the capacity to reposition economy, that it is not a panacea to Africa's economic problems. This is based on the fact that though Africa peer review mechanism has existence for 13yrs, it is only 35 countries out 56 countries have acceded to the peer review and only 17 countries have been peer reviewed. In the same vein, the economy of the peer reviewed countries has not shown any remarkable improvement and this scenario does not show good economic prospect to entice other African countries to be peer reviewed.

Keywords: Peer review, Africa, Economy, Development, Approach

INTRODUCTION

The economy, structures and orientation of Africa in the 21st century remained fairly unchanged after independence, as the continents economy were not internally integrated but externally integrated and oriented towards exporting raw materials to the west. The African continent was economically disintegrated since there was limited economic integration among the African countries. African countries did not invest in each other's economy and there was little or no intra-African relations. Lack of trade amongst Africa countries meant that

African goods were not available in the markets within the continent and this was an inhibiting factor on African economic growth and development. The Europeans that have assisted Africa with aids on the other hands restricted trade with African countries and these developments has led to worsening the economic quagmire in Africa.

Considering this gloomy picture on the state of African economy, African leaders were faced with the challenge on how to get the economy on the right track. In search of answer the leadership of the African Union (AU) formulated an economic organization known as New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), and NEPAD with its ambitious economic development proved ineffective to solving the economic problems in Africa owing to the fact that it has no any in-built mechanism for assessing each country. Failure of NEPAD created the need for an indigenous approach within it known as African Peer Review Approach or Mechanism (APRM). The APRM is an indigenous peer review approach to Africans Economic and socio-political problem solving. Pegani has described peer review as, "*the systematic examination and assessment of the performance 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.*"[1] Peer reviews are mechanism of mutual assessment. Peers simply means different actors considered being equals, interacting at a horizontal level of power. This peer mechanism approach adopted by some African countries within the AU is lauded by all and sundry as a good one to help countries monitored by their peers towards finding solution to economic and developmental challenges facing Africa

The thesis statement of this paper is to ascertain if peer review approach to African Economic development is a panacea to Africa's economic development problems. In response to this thesis statement, the paper examined the origin and purpose of the African Peer Review approach; gave an over of APRM, highlighted the stages of APRM; identified the benefits of APRM and argued that peer review approach is not a panacea to Africa's economic development. Conclusion was made at the end of the subject matter.

Origin and Purpose of African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)

Peer reviews exist within the EU, UNEP, IMF and the West African Economic and Monetary Union. The best-known example of state peer reviews is the country review mechanism of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) founded in 1961. The practice of peer review has a long history within the OECD Peer reviews focused on several different aspect, they do not take the form of full country reviews with everything from governance to socio-economic development. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) peer reviews are special feature of the OECD, its goal include development cooperation, harmonizing donor practices and increasing aid effectiveness. Reviews within the OECD are theme based focusing on economic and social issues from macroeconomics, to trade, education, development and science and innovation. Five countries are usually choosen and examined every four year, every OECD member country is reviewed under the same criteria. Once a review has been completed, presented and discussed, the focused shits towards implementation of the recommendation [2]

OECD peer reviews does not sanction its members, however if the results of a review is less than satisfactory or the recommended changes are not implemented, the effect of peer pressure, publication of results could force the government concerned about its standing among the peers and these could trigger action for reform. Other methods of extracting compliance include, comparison, ranking and publication of the result of a country's position.[3] It could be plausible to say that the idea of peer review adopted by NEPAD through APRAM, filtered through OECD's DAC.

The origin of APRAM lies with the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). NEPAD was adopted by the African Union(AU) Heads of States and Government summit held in Lusaka, Zambia, in July,2001. NEPAD as a strategic Framework for African development aims to eradicate poverty and to place African countries on the path of sustainable development and at the same time to actively participate in the world economy and politics. The five core principles of NEPAD are good governance, peace, stability and security, sound economic policy, effective leadership and domestic ownership. Despite its laudable or ambitious programme, NEPAD suffered from several crucial shortcomings. The most critical is a basic conceptual problem that afflicts how it is organized continentally and whether it will be effectively implemented and promoted at the national level.[4]

In 2002, NEPAD presented its specific plans at G8 summit (held in Canada) and aid donors asked African leaders at that summit a question that eventually gave birth to APRM in 2002, which became operational in 2004. The question was: which should be first, great aid or governance reform? This question forced

African Leaders to come up with a proactive idea known as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). APRM is a self-monitoring tool voluntarily acceded to by member states of the AU with the objective of fostering the adoption of policies, standards and practices that will lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development, accelerated regional and economic integration.[3] It is believed in different quarters that the APRM provides a platform for Africans to monitor each other for the purpose of development and a voice for African problems, that if implemented effectively, the APRM has the potential to unleash Africa's economic and other developmental energies. For this reason APRM that was established in 2003, is recognized as the most innovative aspect and widely heralded as the jewel of the NEPAD crown.[4]

The founding idea of the APRM is to mutually evaluate the quality of governance on a voluntary basis in four areas:

(i) democratic and political governace,
(ii) economic governance and management,
(iii) corporate governance, and
(iv) socio-economic development.[5]

The scope of the APRM is too broad, for instance, specific peer reviews conducted in the framework of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development(OECD) in areas of education or development cooperation. The African peer review mechanism, like any peer mechanism is intended to foster peer learning and if necessary, create political peer pressure between African heads of state and government and also provide an opportunity for civil society to have a say and monitor what concerns them. It is note worthy that the G8 stated that acceding to the peer review process was a pre-condition for preferred partnerships. Preferred partners, would benefit from enhanced development support, intense political exchange, additional debt relief and other relevant international assistance.[6] This reason did not only underline the importance of APRM but also the motivating factor.

The African Peer Review: An Overview

The APRM was approved by African leaders at the AU Summit in July 2002, but its operation started in 2004. It is the most innovative aspect of the NEPAD and has received international approval. In fact, one of the most viable achievements of the NEPAD is the development and application of the APRM. It represents a bold approach to reform by African leaders for building capable states with enduring good governance and sustainable development. According to the United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Panel on NEPAD, "Nothing better illustrates Africa's commitment to a new approach to governance than the establishment of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) under the aegis of NEPAD" [7].

The APRM is designed to monitor and assess the progress made by African Countries in meeting their commitment towards achieving good governance, social reforms and sustainable development. It also provides a platform for countries to share experience with a view to fostering good governance and democratic process. The mandate of the APRM is to ensure that the policies and practices of participating states conform to the agreed international recognized political, economic, and corporate governance and management codes and standards. The APRM is mutually agreed instrument for self-monitoring by the participating member states. It is voluntarily acceded to by member states of the AU. One of its principle elements is to identify capacity deficits and assess the needs for capacity development mechanism for mutual learning, sharing of experiences and identifying remedial measures to address real weaknesses. The process is guided by the principles of transparency, accountability, technical competence, credibility, and freedom from manipulation by any party.[8] APRM involves five important stages discussed below.

Stages of APRM Process

There are stages to the implementation of the APRM Process. Stage one is the preparatory state. It comprises the establishment of national development structures, the sending out of the questionnaire by the APRM, the development of the country's self-assessment and preliminary programme of action, and the submission of these to the APR secretariat. In addition to the Country Self-Assessment Report (CSAR), countries have to come up with clear time-bound commitment in the form of a National Programme of Action (NPoA). The primary purpose of the NPoA is to guide and mobilize the country's effort in implementing the necessary changes to improve its state of governance and socio-economic development. The NPoA is the key input delivered by the country into the peer review. It serves to present and clarify the country's priorities. As the country prepares its CSAR AND NPoA, the APR secretariat prepares a comprehensive background document on the country.[9]

Stage two involves the Country Review Mission(CRM) visit to the country to interact with stakeholders. The CRM must carry out the broadest possible consultations with all stakeholders; the Government, Judiciary, Political Parties, National Assembly, Civil Society Organisations(CSOs), the Media, Women, Youth, People with Disabilities, Trade Unions, Religious bodies, professional bodies, Corporate Entities and Organizations, Academia and Research Institutions. The main objectives of the CRM are: to learn about the different stakeholder's perspective on governance in the country, and to clarify the issues raised in the paper and to build a consensus on how any outstanding problems should be tackled. Stage three involves the drafting of the report by the CRM. The country review report is informed principally by the CSAR and NPoA submitted by the country. In addition, the country review report reflects information made available to the CRM through the background paper and issue papers as well as the views gathered in the wide-ranging consultations with stakeholders in the course of the country review visit [10].

Consequently, Stage four is the submission of the CRM's report to the APR secretariat and the APR Panel. The panel considers the report and makes any additional recommendations therein. The panel discusses the report with the government concerned to verify the accuracy of the information. The reviewed government is given the opportunity to respond to the report findings and put forward its own views on how the shortcomings could be rectified. This stage also involves the submission by the panel of the country review report to the APR forum for peer review and subsequently, for implementation according to the APR forum mandate. If the country shows or demonstrates the willingness to rectify identified shortcomings, it becomes incumbent on participating governments to provide assistance as far as they can and to urge development partners and agencies to come to the assistance of that country. The last stage of the APRM which is stage five, involves the formal publication of the country review reports after it has been considered by the APR Forum. They regional and sub-regional structures such as social and cultural Council (ECOSOC) of the AU should have the report tabled before them.[11]

Benefits of the APRM

Given the international experience with peer reviews, the APRM as a mechanism for measuring and monitoring progress toward good governance and sustainable development in Africa, has the potential to provide a number of benefits to those African countries that subject themselves to it and, through multiplier effects, to the continent as a whole. Peer reviews have been demonstrated to have a number of beneficial effects as applied across the world. Below are six areas identified where peer reviews will add value and enhance the prospects for African states to achieve good governance and economic development.

1. *Greater Transparency:* Transparency is taken here to mean that reliable, relevant, and timely information about the activities of government is available to the public. Associated with transparency is the concept of openness whereby the public contributes in shaping and implementing government policies. Transparency, therefore, complements and reinforces predictability, reduces uncertainty, and inhibits and reduces the scope of corrupt among public officials. The peer review will be particularly applied to democracy and political governance issues and economic and corporate governance issues. In both cases, transparency looms large. The openness of the political space is critical barometer of the nature of democracy in a given country. Similarly, in the economic sphere, the extent of fiscal transparency provides a very solid indication of the manner in which budgets are crafted, reconciled, and implemented. Determining the nature of transparency in government operations and functioning and any deliberate secrecy or misreporting of government operations. In a nutshell, is expected to bring transparency in African governments' operations.[12]
2. *Improved Public Accountability:* Transparency is also vital for accountability. In fact, a system of government that is transparent is also likely to be accountable. Accountability means that systems are in place and are facilitated by public institutions to hold public officials to account for their behavior, actions, and decisions. Public accountability is needed to guarantee political as well as economic and financial, freedom. Where governments or corporations are corrupt, resources will be misallocated. Peer review is expected to expose any deficiencies in accountability by public officials in Africa countries. It will also determine where public accountability is

faulty and what should be done to improve it. Peer reviews will result in greater public debate on many issues of governance, including public accountability. Public scrutiny and peer pressure will then provide the impetus for conscious effort at improving public accountability.[13]

3. *Sound Policy:* Africa has a history of policy development and policy implementation that have not favoured growth and development. By submitting to peer review, African countries will have their policies decisions and their application scrutinized and in so doing arrive at sound economic policy. Consequently, peer review can tip the domestic political scales in favour of progressive, outward-looking policy and against retrograde choices. Peer review will therefore stimulate better or sound policy choices and lead to policy change. When such occurs, relationships at various levels and among stakeholders are shifted. With better policy choices, society wins and the prospects for achieving good governance and sustainable development are improved.[14]
4. *Encourages Development Partnership:* The need for partnership is most obvious in the daunting challenge of achieving sustainable development. Among other things, partnerships in international development efforts; provides a means of developing strategic coordination and implementation; create access to crucial resources and rationalize their use; engender stability and potential government stability; provide technological advantages and cost savings; bring about goodwill within the citizenry upon whose support both external development partners and government rely; and promote deeper and wider public participation and representation in the decision making for development outcomes. Therefore, partnership not only enhance development outcomes, whether qualitative or quantitative, but also produce synergies, where those outcomes as a whole is greater than the sum of what individual partners contribute. As a matter of fact, these

partnerships and cooperative arrangements have now become a significant aspect of the emerging system of global governance, providing collective capacity to identify and solve problems on global scale.[15]

Through the peer review assessment, African countries have agreed to fight corruption, strengthen their institutions, adopt market-oriented policies, respect human rights and spend more on the needs of the poor. By so doing, they also expect to get the support of the rich countries with trade, aid, investment, and dept relief. Furthermore, peer review process will be used by the G8 countries to inform their considerations of eligibility for enhanced partnership. It is also expected that it will attract other economic and development international partnership.[16]

5. *Capital flows:* private capital flows are widely recognized as a powerful motor and major catalyst for sustainable development. Through peer review African countries will be able to benefit from specific and well targeted investments that would provide the foundation for self-sustained growth. Private capital flows have to be won. The disappointing performance of Africa with respect to attracting private capital flow can be placed squarely on the general international perception that most countries in Africa are risky places for investment. Peer review exists to demonstrate that enabling environment exists, as private capital is highly mobile and will go where business can be conducted safely and where it can make the best return.[17]
6. *Strengthened capacity:* Capacity is the competency of individuals, public sector institutions, private sector entities, civil society organizations, and local communities to engage in activities in a sustainable manner that permit the achievement of beneficial goals. It is worthy to note that capacity in Africa is weak. With such weak capacity, both the public and private sectors on the continent lack the requisite ability to develop and implement the appropriate policies for development. The necessity for capacity development in Africa had been recognized by the world

Bank in the 1980s, and that institution launched the African Capacity Building Initiative in 1989, which then resulted in the creation of the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) in 1991, this institution has contributed to a number of projects and programmes designed to strengthen Africa's capacity for development. However, more in this direction need to be done in a focus manner and that is where peer review comes in. Through the peer review process, capacity constraints will be identified and recommendations offered on how to develop indigenous capacity to sustain development and improve governance.[18]

Why Peer Review Approach is not a Panacea to African Economic Problems

Irrespective of all theses aforementioned benefits the peer review approach lacks the capacity to be a panacea to African economic problems. Using Nigeria as a case study among the peer reviewed countries, the economic realities shows that those benefits are still a mirage in Nigeria. Nigeria was peer reviewed in 2006, and from then onward much has not been achieved on the area of economic growth. The issue of accountability and transparency has remained a mirage. Furthermore, Nigeria for the past years till present is still in the doldrums of economic recession. It could be rightly argued that it is not the peer review that cause Nigeria's economic quagmire rather the government that refuse to implement the recommendation of the peer review. This argument also strengthens the fact that peer review is not a panacea as one of the reasons of failure to implement the recommendations is encapsulated in the reasons addressed below.

Peer review takes a holistic view of governance, focusing on politics, economic, corporate and development matters. It does not prioritize one thematic area over another this makes it an overly complex and technical academic review or exercise with member states seemingly lacking the political will to implement proposed changes. As expected, this lack of thematic priority makes the peer review effort to be described best as jack of all trade and master of none. Although Steven argued, *"While economic growth is important, effective political governance is necessary to ensure that it gains are not lost to corruption and maladministration*".[19] True as this assertion seems but nevertheless the truth still stands that the holistic posture of the present peer review will rob it any effectiveness.

A recent continental meeting to discuss governance matters did not inspire confidence for peer review as panacea to African development. It is interesting to note that only 3 out of 35 presidents attended the meeting of the African APRM forum on the 29th January, 2015 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This was in spite of the announcement and endorsement of key decisions to be taken at the meeting which have the potential to revive and strengthen the APRM. This low turn-out has been a disturbing trend in the meetings of the African Peer Review Forum, the mechanism highest decision-making body composed of the participating heads of state and government.[20] This foot-dragging nature or cold responses by member states and couple with the fact that out of the 54 members of the AU only 35 are members of the peer review, and only 17 countries report have been published in its 14 years of existence. Robert Kappel observed that even with the 17 countries that have subjected themselves to peer review that not much has been achieved.[21] The scenario described, does not show that peer review has the capacity to solve all African economic problems.

The peer review approach is too complex and ambitious. The country review reports typically run to over 450 pages. In attempting to be comprehensive, the APRM reports are too complex and the reports are rarely read and also important information are buried under the volume of information generated. There is also tendency for National Programme of Action to reharse existing programmes rather than innovate. At the end of the day the report is filled with so much wish lists of projects that needs funding from donor agencies and developed countries.[22] To this end, the peer review approach operates as to demonstrate to the donor agencies that they have complied with their requirement of peer review and that they should send the fund to implement the shortcomings identified, and when the fund is not forth coming it discourages the reviewed country. One would be right to argue that other countries that have not joined the African peer review Mechanism have not seen any motivation to do so as lots of the reviewed countries have not significantly changed. If it is a panacea to African economic problems no country in Africa will choose not to be peer reviewed.

Its nature of time and resource consuming makes it not alluring. The introduction of a time consuming and resource sapping peer review process into countries struggling to deal with the various projects puts a strain on both the capacities and the willingness to engage in such effort. As earlier identified, the peer review process takes a lot of time because of too much scope that it set out to review, thus making it a waste of time and effort in a continent that has no patience for what will not bring cash in a couple of months.[23]

It is not coercive. As a voluntary venture there are no sanctions if a member country reviewed does not implement the recommendations, the goal being rather that of peer review. It has been argued that the peer review will never be stringent and penetrating enough to bring forth such improvements where they are opposed to the interests of ruling elites. In the same vein, the coercive force within peer review is the concept of peer pressure. The peer review process can give rise to peer pressure, that is the persuasive exercise by the peers for example, a mix of formal recommendations and informal consultation by peer countries, public scrutiny, comparisons and ranking among countries and the impact of the forgoing on public opinion, policy makers, and other stakeholders. The lessons of peer review conducted in developed countries suggest that the greatest impact is derived when the outcomes of peer review are put in the public domain. It is that public scrutiny that is most likely to influence change and bring about corrective action.[24] The analysis of the above proves that pressure in developed country could result to a change of behavior by policy makers or governments.

The motivating factor of APRM is premised on promise that through the peer review assessments, African countries have agreed to fight corruption, strengthen their institution, adopt market-oriented policies, respect human rights and rule of law. By so doing, they also expect to get the support of the rich countries with trade, aid, investment, and debt relief. African countries using peer review to get international economic consideration does not make the peer review approach a panacea to Africa's economic problems as the programme still tends to survive on international benevolence.[25] Experiences have shown that whatever the international community does in Africa is not for altruism sake rather to advance their economic ambitions. It is plausible to say that peer review could assist in repositioning Africa towards economic development if only all the recommendations of the peers are implemented. However, its 13 years of existence has shown that such is not attainable and to posit that it could solve all the economic problems is a wishful thinking. Furthermore, there are other conditions necessary for economic developments not a single approach that is based on recommendations open for Country's volition to implement or not. To this end it is plausible to aver that since there is no one single drug that possesses the capacity to cure all problem of the heart, the same thing also applies to African economic development. Peer review approach is a welcome development and a right step in the right direction but it is not an African economic panacea.

CONCLUSION

The peer review approach constitutes a bold attempt by African leaders to eradicate poverty, bad governance and economically improve status of African countries. It is designed to be a strategy or means for openly and honestly assessing strengths and weaknesses; for monitoring progress towards building capable states, with strong institutions, for sustainable development and improved governance structures; for peer learning; and for sharing of best practices. As demonstrated in this paper, peer review will confer many benefits on African countries and the continent as a whole. However, the paper posits that though peer review could assist in pointing economic fault lines for African states, it is not a panacea to African economic problems owing to some factors. For Instance, the implementation of its recommendation for instance largely depends on the benevolence of international donors without which it will be still-born. On the other hand, based on the economic realities among the peer reviewed states their success story is not encouraging as they are still struggling economically. Consequently, every country in Africa wants a panacea to its economic challenges but for about 19 countries in Africa to refuse the peer review approach shows that it lacks the capacity to be an economic panacea.

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