

The APRM Report: Old wine in new wine skin

by Jonathan Adabre

There is nothing new about the findings of the African Peer Review Mechanism. But as usual, the Politicians are at it again. They are unmeritoriously pointing accusing fingers at each other over what has long been known. The country's leading opposition party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) has found the report as an enough missile to fire at the government. The Report's reservations about the country's anti-corruption measures, weak institutional capacity, gender inequality and ineffective decentralization policies, have become fertile grounds for government's critics to launch attacks.

The Research Director of the NDC, Mr. Kwamena Ahwoi, was quoted by an Accra based FM station of having stated that the APRM's findings were an indictment on the Kufuor's administration and not about the nation as a whole. To him, a peer review "is peer review. Unless my understanding of the word 'peer' is wrong. If not, then the APRM's findings cannot be findings on Ghana as a nation. It is about Kufuor's performance, period" he was quoted as having stated.

The government is also on the other hand trying hard to attribute the 'positives' to its achievements as a transparent administration.

The APRM findings

But what about the APRM's findings, is about President Kufuor and not about the whole concept of politics and economic governance in Ghana. Is it the report's position on Ghana's democracy and good governance that should be placed squarely on the shoulders of the New Patriotic Party administration or its exposition on the country's economic governance that should be the rue of President Kufuor? Or should it be the report's rehash about the country's bureaucratic corporate governance that should be attributed as the failings of President Kufuor's administration?

Democracy and Good Governance

On Democracy and political Governance, Ghana scores high marks on her ability to have held three successful post transition elections resulting in the transfer of power from one party to another and from one President to another. It also lauds the People's Assembly and the Economic Dialogue concepts as pluses for good governance. The report also recognizes Ghana's contributions to sub regional and international peace by her active involvement in United Nation's peacekeeping programmes and the key role she played in the establishment of ECOMOG.

But the report says though the country is currently enjoying political stability, there remain several fertile grounds for internal conflict. It cites disputes over land, chieftaincy and election results as potential sources of political instability.

It slights Ghana on the lack of power separation between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. The large size of government with over 88 ministers also came under scathing attack. The report also finds the creation of the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs as duplication of roles and an act that further blurs the call for power separation between the three arms of government.

On gender equality, the report says though the affirmative action policy of 1998 called for a 40% representation of women at all levels of government, only a “few hold key decision making posts.”

It finds Ghana’s decentralization system ineffective as political and administrative power still remains locked up in the ‘centre’. In effect, the report says the country’s decentralization concept has not resulted in the devolution of power.

Corruption, the report says, is still high, virtually rubbishing government’s claim of success in the fight against the canker. It is also instructive that the report places corruption and the poor delivery of public services side by side. It thus lends credence to the argument that the country’s inability to adequately and effectively provide public services is not just about the lack of resources, but has more to do with corruption.

The weak capacity of anti-corruption institutions such as the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) and the Electoral Commission (EC) was also highlighted.

This is in all, the APRM’s findings on Ghana’s democracy and political governance. So, which of these has not been known?

The NPP in 2000, when it was in opposition, had high on its agenda, the promise of making the position of the District Chief Executive (DCE) elective. This was as a result of the party’s recognition that leaving the position of the DCE to the appointing discretion of the President defeats the need for the devolution of power under the decentralization concept.

Many other bodies, including the Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) had also made similar calls. But five years following its assumption of power, the NPP is yet to make good that promise.

And now, when the APRM recommends what has been a long over due call, it becomes a new finding. The same can be said of the APRM’s recommendation on providing adequate resources to the SFO, CHRAJ and the EC. The APRM’s call for the enactment of the Whistle Blowers Act and the Access to Information Bill as well as its call on government to reduce the number of Ministers and review the creation of the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs are also nothing new.

Economic Governance

Ghana took home nothing on the economy except on the score that she has made significant strides towards regional integration by establishing a Ministry for the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and regional integration. The Ghanaian economy, the report says, is still weak and externally exposed, vulnerable to external shocks and with heavy dependence on the benevolence of the developed economies.

It says further that Ghana does not have the internal capacity to formulate its own economic policies and that government’s spending is not properly decentralized. Corruption was again, high in the APRM’s assessment of Ghana’s economic governance. As a remedy, the APRM recommends that the government should keep the breaks on the gains on the macroeconomic indicators as a means to achieving sustainable development. It recommends further that the economy should be diversified and the infrastructure developed.

The report also calls for the use of the Diaspora Ghanaians as a means to strengthening the analytical capacity of government. This call comes as though Ghanaians around do

not have analytical capacity on economic issues. The APRM's findings on the matter could be as a result of the politics of exclusion and the "Winner takes it all syndrome." A valid recommendation would have rather been the discouragement of exclusivity than the use of the Diaspora.

It is also strange that while the report is calling on government to boost domestic production and private sector development, it finds it prudent to recommend further liberalization of the economy, which to many, has been the cause of deindustrialization in developing nations.

But be that as it may, the findings as well as the recommendations are again, nothing new.

Socio-Economic Development

On Socio-Economic Development, the report virtually reechoes an all known story. It says the three Northern regions, i.e. the Upper East, Upper West and Northern Regions as well as parts of coastal Ghana, in reference to the Central Region, are behind in development. This has long been the recognition of the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) document.

It says the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as set out in the GPRS are not achievable. What this means in effect is that the agenda to reducing poverty by half by the year 2015, achieving universal education, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic, all by year 2015 cannot be attained.

Corporate Governance

Similar findings go for corporate governance. Lengthy and costly dispute resolution, cumbersome business registration, high cost of utilities, and outmoded legislation and the unavailability of finance for domestic businesses are all the baggage of corporate governance.

Ghanaians have long raised the red flag on all these issues. So what has happened under the APRM is nothing more than a rehash. The good thing about it though is that, it adds an international legitimacy to what Ghanaians have long identified as constraints on their socio-economic and political development. Aside that, nothing bites!

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