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Peer Review: Who Owns the Process?

FOR two years Africa's leading reformers have been raising expectations on and off the continent with a novel promise: To avoid repeating the sins of the past, heads of state would hold each other accountable to higher standards. Now the hype is over. Amid much anticipation, the African Peer Review Mechanism is gearing up to begin its first assessments.

As a core element of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, peer review is potentially the most innovative initiative ever to emerge from Africa. Its purpose is to build more stable and prosperous countries. That means sharing ideas that work, identifying what doesn't, and taking an unambiguous stand against corruption.

But so far few exercises have been less transformative than African leaders passing judgment on one another. Look no farther than Zimbabwe for proof. While Robert Mugabe violently dismantles a state that was, until recently, functional, his peers applaud.

So which vision of peer review is it to be? Vigorous and constructive criticism or more coddling of autocrats? Africa's credibility – and probably its future – hinges on the answer.

Through Nepad, African reformers have helped open a more robust discussion about prevailing global imbalances that have hamstrung African development for decades. Their pleas have helped shift the international dialogue on aid, for example, and trade.

But the bulk of Africa's governance and

development problems must be fixed through concerted action at the national level. As a tiny continental organisation, the Nepad Secretariat has no capacity to force nations to act. By requiring leaders to create national action plans and submit them to broad public scrutiny, peer review offers the possibility of making Nepad a reality at the national level where it is needed most. For peer review to work in this way, it must become a fully open process, encouraging robust public debate and involving the broadest array of civil society.

So far that hasn't been the case. Peer review was conceived behind closed doors, and concerns about how trans-

parent it will be rightly persist. Africans deserve better, and as peer review gets underway, must demand more.

Unfortunately, much of African civil society has not mobilised to exploit the opening that peer review offers.

This issue of *eAfrica* examines the intended APRM system and compares it to the peer review system used in the Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation. We also present a roundtable debate on the role of civil society in peer review by a panel of African scholars. Other stories assess the impact of the Cancun trade talks and the vicious cycle of food aid and poverty in West Africa. – **Ross Herbert**



Verbatim

“There is no other American crop that causes more chaos and misery around the world.”

– Ken Cook, president of the Environmental Working Group, which analyses data on American subsidies, referring to highly subsidised US cotton.

“Let’s be absolutely clear, it’s politically antiquated, it’s economically illiterate, it’s environmentally destructive and it’s ethically indefensible. It’s time it stopped.”

– World Bank chief economist Nicholas Stern, on the lavish farm subsidies of wealthy nations.

“Despite the commitment of many able people, the WTO remains a medieval organisation... There is no way to structure and steer discussions among 146 members in a manner conducive to consensus. ... I don’t think it’s (the Doha round of trade talks) dead but it’s for sure in intensive care, which is somewhere in between.”

European Union Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy, after the collapse of the WTO talks in Cancun, Mexico, in September.

“The women are slower to train, but when they are trained, they are braver than the men.” – Colonel Martin Collins of Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, on women rebel soldiers.



“The position of the World Bank is clear: bilateralism would not be beneficial in the short run or even in the medium term. We would like for everyone to get together in a multilateral setting in order to solve the trade issue.” – World Bank president James Wolfensohn following the failure of the WTO negotiations.

“We are friends with Nigeria and we are not attacking them, but this is murder.” – South African education minister Kader Asmal, to demonstrators who marched to parliament urging legislators to intervene in the Nigerian Amina Lawal death sentence case. Lawal was later acquitted.

“It takes two to tango, so why is it that just the woman must suffer?” – South African protester Nomsa Makhaye referring to the Amina Lawal case.

“I wouldn’t say one must adopt, as a matter of universal principle, term limitation.” – South African President Thabo Mbeki, responding to a question that, with Zimbabwe’s Robert Mugabe clinging to power, didn’t he (Mbeki) think a strict term limit to the term in office was vital to democracy.

“We are here to bury the honourable Robert Mugabe.” – A slip-of-the-tongue from a speaker at the funeral of a senior Zanu-PF figure Robert Marera.

“Puppets of the British will never rule Zimbabwe as long as the crop of revolutionaries in the mould of Vice President Muzenda are alive.” – Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe, at a memorial service for his close ally Vice President Simon Muzenda, who died in late September after a long illness.

“Several top Republicans ... have recently been to Africa, where they hugged orphans and visited the dying. If they break America’s promise on Aids, they will be cynically using suffering Africans as nothing more than a photo opportunity.” – An editorial in *The New York Times*.



“I can feel good things are starting to happen.” – Microsoft chairman Bill Gates, on the various government efforts in South Africa and Botswana to fight HIV/Aids.

“Aids is really hitting the Maasai people hard because they are illiterate and they still believe it is a curse and not a disease.” – Susan Seela, a Maasai, at the 13th International Conference on Aids and Sexually Transmitted Disease in Africa held in Nairobi, Kenya, in September.

“There isn’t a single ‘A’ in the report card.” – Peter Piot, head of UNAIDS, on new reports from 103 governments, which showed that despite more money and a myriad of programmes, most countries had failed to provide treatment or prevention plans that could reverse the Aids pandemic by 2015.

“Personally, I don’t know anybody who has died of Aids ... I really, honestly don’t.” – South African President Thabo Mbeki, during an interview with the *Washington Post* in New York in September.

“I invite the President to make friends with some of the thousands of people living with HIV and to witness the deaths of people who do not have access to medicines.” – HIV-positive Zackie Achmat, who heads the Treatment Action Campaign, a South African organisation lobbying the government for affordable treatment for people living with HIV and Aids.

“When mad dictators emerge in Europe, they get bombed back into the stone age. That is the right and proper thing to do. But why is it that when even madder dictators wreak havoc in Africa, their excesses are not just condoned, but actually justified?” – the *Zimbabwe Standard*.

“This vote marks the rebirth of Rwanda.” – Rwandan Leopold Wanzumuhire, 64, after casting a vote in the country’s first parliamentary elections since the 1994 genocide.

“As a person, I have nothing against Kumba Yala. He can stay in Guinea-Bissau as well as leave the country.” – Guinea-Bissau military leader General Verissimo Correia Seabra, soon after overthrowing President Kumba Yala in the September coup in Guinea-Bissau.

“Just as I’ve been going round the world looking for Nigerian money stolen and stashed away ... I believe his country can try to find out – if truly he has stolen money ... It’s their right to recover the money from him.” – Nigerian President Obasanjo, responding to a question regarding Charles Taylor’s misappropriation of Liberian funds.

“Your coming here is not an act of tourism; you are called by Africa to help Africa through Burundi. You are not here to watch war, but to fight for peace.” – Mamadou Bah, head of the African peacekeeping Mission in Burundi (AMIB), welcoming 226 Ethiopian peacekeepers.

Cancun Crashed, Now What?

Developing world's victory has been shortlived and now Africa is left to fend for itself

MANY developing nations gleefully applauded the collapse of World Trade Organisation (WTO) trade talks in Cancun, Mexico, in mid-September. But they are now finding that their united stand-off against wealthier Northern countries may be as bitter in the belly as it was sweet in the mouth.

The world looks likely to become a harsher place in which to trade – especially for the poorest and least developed continent. Vijay Makhani, the African Union's trade commissioner, has suggested that Africans should pull out of the WTO since it does not seem to serve their interests. That may be an unnecessary threat. Irritated by yet another wasted round of expensive global talks, richer nations and blocs are wandering off to cut their own deals, and Africa is left to fend for itself.

It may be a long time before friendlier days return. With a high-stakes presidential election season starting in the US and European farmers determined to cling to subsidies, a resumption of serious trade talks before mid-2005 is extremely unlikely.

'Everyone has lost their appetite for the WTO,' said Francis Molloi, South Africa's director of trade negotiations. 'The US made this point in Cancun, basically saying, "We don't care what happens here, we will negotiate with you one by one, and we will get what we want.'"

For the first time in the history of broad, multilateral trade negotiations, at Cancun the developing nations turned the tables upside down. Led by the newly formed Group of 20-plus (G20+) that included China, Brazil, India, Nigeria and South Africa, they successfully resisted the North's attempt to force its terms.

The emergence of the G20+ has changed the equation in international trade negotiations considerably. The group represents half the world's population and two-thirds of its farmers. If it survives, the G20+ is certain to transform the way business is done in the WTO.

But Cancun has shown that brinkmanship has its limitations for both sides. The traditional powerhouses in the WTO – the US, EU, Japan and Canada – may no longer be able to pre-determine the outcomes of international trade talks.



But they can walk away. The failure of the trade ministers to agree on a broad negotiating framework – the apparently modest task they were asked to perform at Cancun – leaves the Doha round of multilateral trade negotiations in limbo.

Celso Amorim, the Brazilian foreign minister, predicts that the G20+ has become a 'permanent actor' on the global trade stage. Others aren't so sure. According to several reports, Washington is already trying to drive a wedge into the group, offering Costa Rica, El Salvador and Guatemala greater access to US markets if they leave the G20+.

Splits are also developing within the group as China, India, and Brazil signal their intention to seek trade deals that first serve their own national interests.

As one of the world's most efficient food producers, Brazil can afford to be a pragmatic negotiator. India exports few agricultural products and has a reputation for adopting a hard-line defensive stance in international trade negotiations. Given the magnitude of its economy, China has plenty of clout to arm-wrestle the West. An aggressive exporter, Beijing's long-term membership in the G20+ is doubtful.

South Africa, meanwhile, faces a careful balancing act between serving the collective interests of its region and maintaining a measured relationship with its Northern trading partners – the European Union and the US.

'With our partners in the Southern African Customs Union (Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland), South Africa will now focus on the free trade area negotiations with the US and others like India and Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay),' Molloi said.

The Deal Breakers

Agriculture was the central issue at Cancun. Developing nations want their wealthier counterparts to phase out the huge subsidies they provide to their farmers, which they say prevents them from accessing markets in wealthier countries. The G20+ group came together in reaction to the US and EU forming a joint position on agriculture, which appeared to many in the developing world as a step backward.

Despite being derided by critics as aggressive and unreasonable in its demands, the G20+ defied expectations and maintained an unshakeable unity and sense of purpose. Their Northern counterparts accused the G20+ countries

of floating a radical demand for cuts in Northern agricultural subsidies while offering nothing in return.

But the G20+ nonetheless succeeded in extracting concessions. The draft text on agriculture, which ultimately was never signed, provided for the eventual elimination of export subsidies by the EU; substantial reductions in farm subsidies in the US, EU, and other countries; and the opening of agricultural markets for developed and developing countries alike.

While the US and EU seemed to accept these concessions in principle, the Europeans demanded concessions in return. They insisted on the inclusion of the so-called Singapore issues: competition policy, investment, transparency in government procurement and trade facilitation (to ease customs and other trade procedures). On these issues consensus could not be found.

Other stumbling blocks that did not make the headlines included manufactured goods, a cotton initiative, special and differential treatment, and geographical indications. At the last moment, the EU agreed to drop competition policy, investment, and transparency in government procurement from the negotiations, but the developing world – particularly the poorest nations – refused to bargain on trade facilitation, which would impose significant new costs and administrative burdens.

Some members of the G20+, including South Africa, were prepared to negotiate on the Singapore issues, contingent on significant gains on the agriculture issues. But a group of 70 developing countries, led by Malaysia, rejected outright any discussion of the Singapore issues.

The stand-off over cotton illustrates the imbalance poor countries were trying to correct. Four West African cotton-producing countries – Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali – asked the WTO ministers

in Cancun to agree to a timetable for eliminating the \$6 billion in subsidies rich countries pay their cotton producers annually, and they wanted compensation while those subsidies were being phased out.

But the US, whose cotton subsidies amount to \$3 billion a year, countered that if the West Africans dropped their demands on cotton subsidies, Washington would invest in their textile industries. This effectively asked African states to abandon their most competitive industry, in exchange for investment in sectors where they are far less competitive. That outcome contributed to a deep sense of bitterness among least developed nations.

Winners and Losers

The WTO is now derailed. Washington has turned its focus to next year's presidential election, while France and other European countries – frustrated by the stalemate at Cancun – have indicated they might now try to reverse EU plans for agricultural subsidy reform published in June 2003. The EU will also be increasingly distracted by its own expansion process from 15 to 25 member states in 2004.

The developing world does hold one trump card: The peace clause, which prevented WTO litigation over agricultural subsidies, expires at the end of 2003. When it does, poor countries will be able to launch trade disputes, initiate anti-dumping measures and threaten retaliatory actions such as refusing to honour intellectual property protections on developed world products.

But such action could prompt North-South acrimony to deepen. If developing

nations start throwing punches, the West may respond by cutting off aid, closing its markets and denying debt relief. US Senator Charles Grassley, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, said he would use his position to hit back at countries that blocked progress in Cancun.

The US has also served notice of its intention to pursue bilateral and regional trade deals with renewed vigour, including the ambitious Free Trade Area of the Americas.

Australia and the US are poised to sign a bilateral deal soon.

Japan, which previously shunned regional trade agreements, has already clinched a deal with Singapore. Tokyo is exploring bilateral trade terms with Mexico and also studying at least seven similar opportunities with other countries.

Poorer developing countries may be the greatest losers from Cancun because, as individuals, they tend not to be attractive bilateral trading partners for developed nations. Ironically, if they seek deals with wealthier partners, they may find themselves having to negotiate on the governance questions that are included in the Singapore issues and which they uniformly resisted.

In Cancun, the G20+ was preoccupied with a single mission: demanding concessions from their richer counterparts, especially on agriculture. But demands are not in and of themselves a negotiating strategy. The G20+ had no plan to offer compromises of its own that might have yielded a more fruitful outcome. Looking forward, if the G20+ becomes a fixture in the WTO, it must evolve into a mature and constructive voice for the concerns of developing nations. That means learning the art of give and take. – **Olu Fasan, trade lawyer lecturing in WTO law at Birkbeck College, University of London, and Steven Gruzid**

'Poorer developing countries may be the greatest losers – as individuals they tend not to be attractive bilateral trading partners'

'The G20+ was unable to offer compromises that might have yielded a more fruitful outcome'

Becoming My Brother's Keeper

Peer review may mark the start of a new kind of African diplomacy. Its success will determine whether Nepad remains a dream or becomes reality.

FOR decades autocrats in post-colonial Africa turned a blind eye to each other's corruption, human-rights abuses, and coups d'état in obedience to a cardinal rule: sovereignty above all. Agreeing that a state's internal affairs were no one else's concern, Africa's Big Men plundered their countries for personal gain, destroyed constitutional checks and balances and violated the rights of their people.

Abuse of power sparked incessant conflict, state collapse and genocide. Africa in the 1990s became a parade of state dysfunction: Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Chad, Niger and Central African Republic.

But as the older generation of liberation leaders fades out, their younger, more progressive heirs are replacing the notion that sovereignty is sacrosanct with an acceptance that each is, in fact, his brother's keeper. Two years after agreeing on the broad terms for assessing one another's performance in office, 16 African leaders have consented to be judged by their peers. The hope is that many more will follow.

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), as it is formally called, is an integral part of the blue-print for African renewal known as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad). Some say it is the sharpest tool in the Nepad box, potentially the most important reform ever to emerge from the continent. Others say African leaders still don't have the stomach to speak bitter truths to one another. One thing is certain: The continent's credibility hinges on it. If African leaders fail to hold each other strictly accountable to the new principles they espouse, the renaissance is dead.

'There is nothing in Nepad without peer



review,' said Robert Rotberg of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. 'There is nothing coming out of Africa to make the US or Europe say that it has got its act together. African leaders have to act. They have to be tough-minded about peer review or no one will pay attention to it.'

This article examines the crucial questions that remain unanswered: Can peer review solve the complex political and economic governance problems confronting Africa? Will civil society be allowed to participate? Who will keep the process rigorous and honest?

APRM Basics

Although the Nepad Secretariat has been miserly with information on peer review, it has worked painstakingly to create a coherent structure and process. Each assessment will look at four main areas: democracy and political governance; economic management; corporate governance; and socio-economic development.

A seven-member **Panel of Eminent Persons** has been appointed to ensure the integrity of the process. Only the chairman (as yet unnamed) will be paid.

The others will receive honoraria for their hours and serve a single four-year term.

The panellists include a diplomat from Algeria, a central banker from South Africa, two former UN officials from Nigeria and Senegal, an educator from Cameroon, a former first lady and philanthropist from Mozambique, and a stock exchange CEO from Kenya.

The APRM process begins when a country voluntarily accedes to a memorandum of understanding. This commits the government to participating in peer assessment and following through on the recommendations of completed reviews.

The 16 countries that have so far signed up are Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda. Heads of state from these countries constitute the **APR Forum**, the highest body governing the peer review process.

While the Eminent Persons Panel will exercise oversight on the whole process, an **APR Secretariat** will manage the technical and administrative aspects of the reviews. Both the Nepad and peer review secretariats will be based in South Africa, for the first three years of the programme.

Four types of peer review are outlined in the APRM documents: a base-line assessment to establish a country's plans and current level of governance; a follow-up to be held two to four years after the initial review; a special assessment that can be requested by a country; and a special review ordered by the APR Forum in the event that a participating country is sliding into crisis.

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Each review process will have five stages (see The Five Stages of APRM, opposite).

Will it Work?

African peer review should be assessed in terms of both the practicality of its processes and its credibility. Practically, its architects envision wielding it as a tool for assessing government performance and helping fellow leaders identify and apply the best solutions available from a broad range of continental experts. Although they call it peer review, they see it more as 'peer learning.'

'We must not expect sensational results,' said Chris Stals, former governor of the South African Reserve Bank and a member of the APRM Panel of Eminent Persons. 'But every time you go to a country and plant three or four or five ideas, you will get change.'

Nepad depends on extensive external funding and seeks major concessions in trade, aid, debt relief and massive new investment. But in numerous surveys, corruption is cited as the biggest issue dissuading foreign investors and is the predominant concern of foreign aid donors. If Africa does not begin to adhere rigidly to its espoused ideals of good governance and sound economic management – the issues for which peer review is the only solution on offer – Nepad is little more than a wish list.

If it works, peer review will give African reformers the credibility they desperately need at a time of growing donor fatigue and deep cynicism abroad.

Peer review is critical to building credibility at home, too. For too long, African governments have trampled on the democratic rights of their citizens. They have treated elections as games to be won through vote rigging and suppression of the opposition. If Nepad is to be taken seriously by the African public, leaders must think beyond the partnership with aid donors and seize peer review as an opportunity to restore the long-neglected partnership between governments and citizens. The first step, which has happened only fleetingly in a

The Five Stages of APRM

AFRICAN peer review involves a broad range of actors and unfolds in five stages. The following is a brief outline of the process.

In **stage one**, the APR Secretariat and the country under review simultaneously (but independently) compile preliminary documents. The APR Secretariat must prepare a **background document** assessing the country to be reviewed, drawing on up-to-date information from national, sub-regional, regional and international organisations. At the same time, the country must prepare a national **Draft Programme of Action**, which must reflect broad civil society input.

The Programme of Action must include specific time-bound commitments detailing how the country will bring itself into line with Nepad objectives and the wide array of commitments that African states have made through treaties, declarations, the African Union Charter and UN obligations.

These targeted commitments must reflect obligations to protect: human rights; observe free and fair political processes; practice sound fiscal management; promote robust corporate and macro-economic governance; adhere to fixed terms of office for heads of state; pursue transparent and consultative policy-making; and preserve a meaningful separation of powers among the executive, parliament and judiciary. A nation must also vow to uphold the rule of law and strive to meet the UN Millennium Development Goals – a collection of internationally recognised targets for halving global poverty, diseases and illiteracy by 2015.

To ensure that it competently addresses the many technical aspects of governance, the APR Secretariat may collaborate with various outside institutions able to make relevant contributions to the background analysis paper. These include the UN Economic Commission for Africa (economic governance and management) and the African Development Bank (banking and financial standards). For matters related to human rights, democ-

racy and political governance, the APR Forum may request assistance from various African Union bodies, including the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Central Organ of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, the Peace and Security Council, the Pan-African Parliament and the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation.

Based on these two documents, the secretariat then writes a report outlining the central issues on which the review process will be focused.

In **Stage two** a team of experts visits the country under review and meets with government, business, academics, parliamentarians, the media and other members of civil society to assess the draft national Programme of Action. Team members are not permanent staff and are appointed only for work on a given country visit and report.

During **stage three**, the country review team drafts its report and shares its findings with the government being assessed. Any responses from the government under review are then appended to the team report and, if needed, the national Programme of Action is modified according to the team's findings.

The Panel of Eminent Persons takes over the process in **stage four**, writing recommendations for policy reforms based on the findings of the review team. The heads of state in the APR Forum then discuss the panel's recommendations with the leader of the country under review.

In **stage five**, which must be completed within six months of the start of the review, the final report is made public and tabled in the African Union, Pan-African Parliament, Peace and Security Council; Economic, Social and Cultural Council and other relevant bodies. The APR Secretariat also follows up on commitments made, holds regional workshops to share best practices identified in the reviews and offers technical support to assist countries in fulfilling their APR plans.

– **Ross Herbert**

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few countries, is to actively encourage involvement from business, non-governmental organisations, parliaments, the media and ordinary citizens in all stages of peer review.

From the beginning, African reformers have undermined the credibility of Nepad – and the peer review process now emerging from it – in two important ways. First, they've oversold it, raising impossible expectations about its ability to fix what are profound social, economic and political problems.

Second, they've hidden the process behind closed doors. Officials have given out very little information to the public or the press, feeding widespread scepticism. Politicians blundered badly, for example, when they first declared that peer review would deal with political governance, and then later denied that it would. Under pressure from donors, who had been given a clear undertaking that political governance would not be left out, Nepad leaders reversed course again and included political governance within the ambit of peer review. How such reviews will be handled, however, and whether they will be taken seriously and conducted transparently, remains to be seen.

The Zimbabwe Problem

The ongoing crisis in Zimbabwe underscores the urgency of the debate on political governance. How, critics ask, can Africa conduct a serious peer review when it is unable to publicly admit obvious, well-documented human rights and electoral abuses by Robert Mugabe? Far from condemning the aging autocrat, his peers repeatedly rally to his defence. They refused to attend a summit with the European Union from which Mugabe was banned, blocked a UN human rights investigation, and applauded him recently at a regional summit. Regional ministers repeatedly assert

that allegations of human rights abuses and torture are fabrications of the media.

Although Africa's response to Zimbabwe has damaged its credibility, peer review is not designed to deal with such regimes. The planned AU Peace and Security Council – with its ability to deploy peacekeepers, embark on urgent diplomacy or threaten sanctions – is intended to be far better equipped to deal with governments that brazenly defy accepted principles of good governance.

In designing the peer review mechanism, African leaders faced a fundamental choice: Should it be voluntary or mandatory? A mandatory process might be able to produce a report lambasting Zimbabwe for misdeeds, but autocrats the world over have shown how easy it

is to ignore such reports. Even if a hard-line peer review helped to build Africa's credibility on the world stage, the reality on the continent is that a majority of African states would have rejected it.

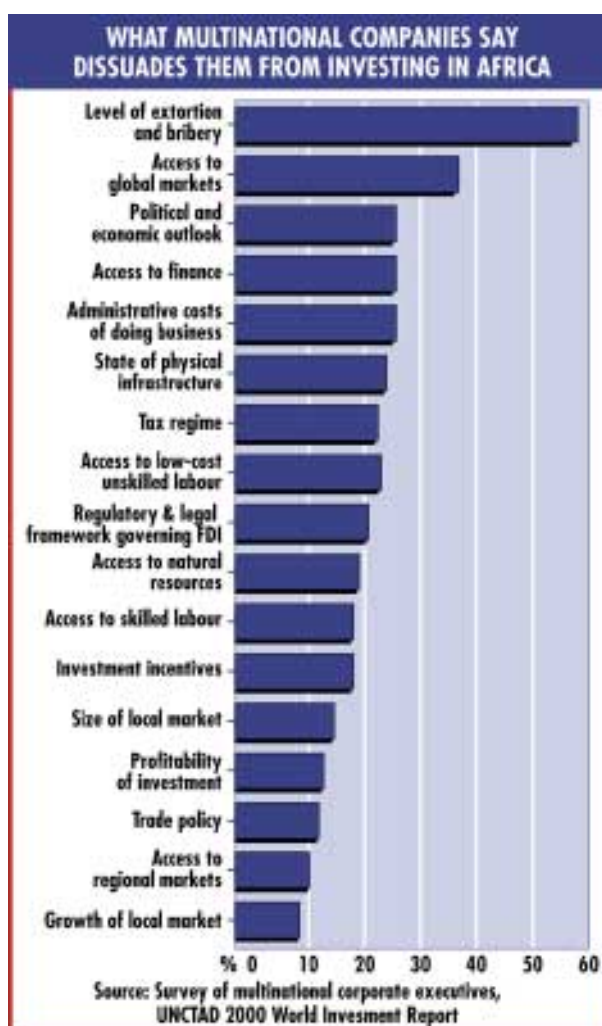
Within a voluntary peer review process, however, participating states have an opportunity to engage with one another with more trust and in greater depth. Not only do participants agree to open their books to review by peers, they also pledge – on paper, at least – to bring civil society into the process.

That kind of openness is unprecedented on this continent. The process, hopefully, will force participating states to acknowledge the many detailed commitments they have made under various African Union treaties and declarations and create a means by which both their peers and civil society can hold them accountable when they break their promises.

At the most basic level, peer review is an excuse for an in-depth public conversation on policy directions, something that has been long neglected in African politics. Although a number of states attempted to weaken or eliminate civil society participation in the peer review process, the final APRM agreement includes clear requirements for broad public participation in drafting the country Programme of Action and in interacting with the country review team. In addition, the final review report is intended to become public, which provides additional leverage for reform.

Driving Nepad Through Peer Review

The debate over Zimbabwe has obscured a crucial weakness of Nepad for which peer review may be the only viable solution. Nepad has a vast agenda – improved healthcare, better education, conflict resolution, fair trade, expanded infrastructure, proper fiscal



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management, among many others – but no clear mechanism to implement its plans. Anywhere in the world, such ambitious reforms would be very difficult politically, financially and managerially.

This gap between intention and implementation is compounded by the nature of Africa's problems, only some of which – like peacekeeping and trade imbalances – can be solved at the continental level. Most of Africa's key development and governance challenges – managing education, fixing roads, fighting corruption – require action by national governments.

The African Union, still in its infancy, has little capacity to handle Nepad's sweeping agenda. And the Nepad Secretariat is quick to point out that it is not an implementation agency. Its mission is to study problems, find solutions and, when necessary, bring political pressure to bear on governments, multilateral agencies or other players.

If the Secretariat can't play the role of implementing agent, how can Nepad's architects hope to accomplish the plan's ambitious agenda?

That's where peer review comes in. By requiring nations who have signed up for the APRM to publicly develop a national Programme of Action, peer review may help bring Nepad implementation to the national level.

But these national Nepad plans must guard against the problems that afflict the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper process, which the International Monetary Fund requires of countries seeking debt relief. Like Nepad plans, these anti-poverty papers were supposed to be developed with broad civil society input to reflect the popular will rather than the economic interests of the elite. In practice, however, almost all of them read like vast



wish lists that assume any desired programme will be donor-funded. They failed to make choices between competing priorities when donor funds didn't arrive. Because in most cases they are divorced from the national budget process, the ideas they espouse rarely translate into action.

Calling a Lie a Lie

Peer review assumes that participants will act in good faith and that their development problems have arisen from lack of resources and capacity. But that assumption is clearly false for several of the countries who have signed up, which means an honest peer review inevitably will have to confront a different form of the Zimbabwe problem.

Every country has laws and institutions that ostensibly act against corruption. And every rotten leader has plenty of excuses. But corruption flourishes in Cameroon, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Gabon, Republic of Congo – all of which have acceded to peer review – because leaders consciously choose to do the wrong thing. Likewise, human rights or elections are not abused accidentally. Indeed, expansions or repair of ports, roads, rails, schools, hospitals, telephone systems and electric plants are delayed for years because of corruption, and the number of projects that states complete are severely limited because corruption adds enormously to the costs of each. A study in Kenya, for example, found that only 3% of presidential construction projects was ever completed, because politically linked contractors were paid up-front and no one cared that the work was never completed. In much of Africa the government's entire programme is derailed or warped by the demands of corruption.

A rigorous peer review will, therefore, have to confront states that deny what is patently obvious: that the leadership



knowingly violates the rules for self-enrichment. Peer reviews that apply the type of diplomacy used on Zimbabwe will meekly accept plausible denials and accomplish nothing. The process, therefore, must break the diplomatic mould and enable leaders to find the courage to tell their peers that they are lying and that their excuses are unacceptable.

'Quite clearly we have been unable to look our colleagues in the face and say exactly what is wrong. It is time we started doing that,' said Kwamena Bartels, minister of private sector development in Ghana.

The Size of the Task

If peer review follows the letter of the APRM documents, the process will be exhaustive. The documents refer to 37 major international standards, treaties and declarations against which participants are to be judged. Some, such as international accounting standards, are highly complex. In addition, the documents define 21 major objectives, 78 criteria and 98 examples of indicators that must be examined. But the examples are only a suggested, partial list.

Under the objective to fight corruption, for example, there are only four examples of indicators: ratification of international and African anti-corruption codes; enactment of effective laws; effectiveness of institutions; and the results of an overall assessment of corruption and money laundering. Such generalities will not get to the heart of the problem. To truly assess corruption and who is to blame, a rigorous review must conduct extensive interviews with corporations, lawyers, judges, the police, citizens and various governance monitors.

To properly investigate corruption or human rights abuses, country review teams will need to have the ability to protect witnesses who fear reprisals by conducting anonymous interviews

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without interference from the state. If the government insists on public hearings or succeeds in controlling with whom and how interviews are conducted, peer review is certain to fail.

The South African Institute of International Affairs conducted a study of the APRM indicators and standards and concluded it would take 20 investigators, working in teams of two, five weeks to reasonably examine all the objectives and criteria set out in the APRM documents. That calculation assumes that interviews would be perfectly scheduled back-to-back for eight hours a day. Scheduling in the real world could easily stretch the process to two or three times that long. Assuming a team of five support staff to schedule interviews, 15 of the 20 investigators coming from outside the country of review, \$150 a night for hotel and food, a vehicle for each pair of investigators and a modest salary for international investigators, such an examination would cost \$413,884 a country. That's \$6.62 million for all 16 countries that have signed up for peer review so far. This figure excludes computers, telecommunications and the cost of the APR Secretariat's offices and salaries.

Speed Versus Quality and Credibility

Time is a key factor working against a rigorous process. Participating countries are supposed to have their baseline reviews conducted within 18 months of signing the APRM memorandum of understanding – roughly the end of 2004 – and all five stages of each review must be completed in six months.

These deadlines already look implausible, given that none of the countries has produced their national Programme of Action. To meet the deadline, many peer reviews will have to be conducted simultaneously by an APR Secretariat that does not yet have staff. Given time constraints and the chronic under-funding

of continental institutions, African civil society must remain watchful that monetary pressures do not force the APR Secretariat to cut corners.

The process does envision using outside experts, such as the UN Economic Commission for Africa, to help conduct the background research into each country. Whether the Eminent Persons will demand a rigorous review remains to be seen. But the language of the APRM documents and interviews with participants suggest that the country review team will primarily assess the adequacy of the national Programme of Action and will not directly assess the extent and character of political and economic problems according to the questions set out in the APRM documents.



That leaves plenty of room to cut corners. Time and staff shortages will create enormous pressure to rely on the background research to assess, for example, the state of corruption in a country under review. That makes the choice of researchers and partner institutions critical. The APRM

documents note that the examination of political aspects of governance will be managed by the new organs of the African Union, but most of these don't yet exist. Those that do only have a skeleton staff and no administrative capacity to engage in complex reviews.

Another key concern is whether the leaders of countries under review will have the ability to, in effect, edit review reports before they are released in their final form. The documents laying out the organisation and processes of peer review say that a review team's final report only needs to

contain 'all the essential elements' of the draft report by the country review team. This wording suggests that the draft report may be edited – potentially by the heads of state under review – before it is released to the public.

'All politics depends on legitimacy and appearances and Nepad won't have any until it does something.'

'The less transparency you make in the process, the more opportunity you create for this kind of speculation,' Stals said. 'There is still a lot of uncertainty about when the report should be released to the public. We (the Eminent Persons Panel) feel strongly it should go

public when we release it to heads of state.'

Recommendations

The APRM system was drafted with no meaningful public input, which has generated significant suspicion among African civil society. To build that credibility, the Nepad Secretariat must accelerate the process and end the secrecy that shrouds it. African heads of state must get over their fear of public scrutiny. They must craft a new diplomacy that calls a thief a thief without equivocation.

Despite its flaws, peer review does represent a major opportunity for civil society to hold leaders accountable for their public promises. To take advantage, business, academics and non-governmental organisations must organise themselves to make meaningful contributions both to the national Programmes of Action and to the peer review teams. When the final reports are released, civil society must also use them to demand that governments fulfil their commitments to reform.

'They have to be tough-minded about it or no one will pay attention to peer review,' Rotberg said. 'All politics depends on legitimacy and appearances and Nepad won't have any until it does something. They have to act, not just talk.'

– **Ross Herbert**

Peer Review in Practice

Lessons from 40 years of OECD experience

AS AFRICAN leaders launch a new experiment aimed at improving the way they manage their countries, they'd be wise to look to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for tips on how to give and take constructive criticism. Its members have been looking over each other's shoulders and sharing best practices for 40 years.

'If peer review is taken seriously by countries, and if they devote enough resources to the process when they are examining and when they are being examined, then there is no reason that it should not succeed in Africa,' said Fabrizio Pagani, an OECD analyst of peer review.

Africa presents challenges that may not have arisen in the European context – at least not to the same degree. African countries lack a deeply engrained and broadly shared culture of political and economic accountability. The continent is mired in the legacy of a highly destructive century: war-shattered infrastructure, widespread poverty, arbitrary borders, ethnic strife, plundered treasuries, dysfunctional parliaments and intimidated judiciaries.

Comparing Approaches

It'll take more than tinkering to fix what's broken. But that doesn't mean important lessons from the North can't – or shouldn't – be applied. 'The key factors are that there must be enough political will and sufficient resources for the process to work effectively,' Pagani notes.

The proposed African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) includes provisions to critique economic, political, corporate and socio-economic performance. Its architects say the process will enable African leaders to perform holistic assessments to help their peers run their countries better.

Critics caution that, while their intentions

are noble, African reformers may be overreaching. A wide-angle approach may capture too many distractions.

The African approach to peer review appears to be 'a multi-objective process, defined by multiple criteria and standards, covering multiple countries, involving multiple stakeholders and reporting to multiple principals,' says John Ohiorhenuan, the UN's head of mission in South Africa.

Europeans attribute the success of their review process to these key factors: limited scope; transparency and inclusiveness; demonstrable political will; and sufficient human, financial and technical resources.

'OECD countries have far more capacity than Africa, with trained people in presidencies and ministries who can be spared to do peer review work'

Rather than conduct one all-encompassing review as the APRM envisions, the OECD's various committees operate independent peer reviews for different sectors, which makes these processes more focussed and manageable. Because environmental assessments, for example, are separated from economic reviews, assessors can specialise rather than review all aspects of governance. The OECD also employs permanent review staff as opposed to Africa's plan to use temporary staff.

The process works when leaders take it seriously, whether they are reviewing or being reviewed. Unlike in Africa thus far, civil society has unfettered access to all phases of the European review process.

Assessment Expertise

Deploying the right team to conduct a review is critical, says Michael Ruffner, of the public governance directorate of the OECD.

'Getting the right people involved is key,' he says. 'The OECD insists that every person who will be held accountable for implementing the outcomes of peer review must be involved in the process.'

Developing human resources and strong institutions is also important. 'OECD countries have more capacity than Africa, with trained people in presidencies and ministries who can be spared to do peer review work,' says John Stremlau, professor of international relations at the University of the Witwatersrand. The US Congress has 700 researchers, he points out, while most African governments have none.

The OECD approach to peer review has evolved steadily over time to accommodate changing circumstances. Initially only a few OECD member states acceded to the anti-bribery reviews, which are now mandatory for all members.

Over time, peer review has developed a culture of its own. Though initially wary, OECD member states now embrace the consensual, non-judgmental and knowledge-sharing aspects of the process.

Africa's process can have the same uplifting effect if taken seriously and made transparent. Proponents argue that mutual trust encourages the sharing of constructive ideas across borders.

'The OECD experience has shown that peer review provides an effective way for countries to try to keep each other mutually accountable,' Stremlau says. 'Not as a report-card, as the press seem to suggest, but rather because countries talk to each other. It works because governments don't want to be embarrassed.' – **Ayesha Kajee**

How Should Civil Society Respond to Peer Review?

THE most persistent complaint about the African Peer Review Mechanism is that it was crafted behind closed doors with little input from civil society. To gain a continental perspective, *eAfrica* invited four scholars of African government to a round-table debate on peer review.

Makau Mutua is from Kenya and is professor of International Law and director of the Human Rights Centre at the University of New York at Buffalo. He recently participated in Kenya's constitutional review commission.

Mahmood Mamdani is from Uganda and is professor of Anthropology at Columbia University. Author of *Citizen and Subject* and many other published works, he specialises in examining the relation between African political systems and citizens.

Dapo Oyewole from Nigeria is the coordinator of the London office of the Center for Democracy and Development, which operates several projects in West Africa.

Khabele Matlosa from South Africa is the senior advisor for research at the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa where he focuses on governance, electoral systems and conflict management.

eAfrica: Is peer review worth the time and effort? Can something this complex work?

Oyewole: Without any doubt, peer review is one of the boldest ideas that African leaders have come up with in the recent past. Initially, African leaders tended to let other governments go about with their own business without inter-

ference, citing 'national sovereignty' as a cover for their lack of accountability and transparency. So peer review definitely is a positive step in the right direction. However, the devil is obviously in the details. The APRM does not seem to offer more than a promissory note for increased accountability, and the process itself is more opaque than transparent.

Here in London, the debate on peer review continuously asks how African leaders can say that they're going to implement a peer-review system when, on one hand, they only use the softly, softly approach in dealing with President Robert Mugabe; and on the other hand, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo offers ex-President Charles Taylor asylum from a UN-backed indictment. How do you reconcile these actions with the noble aspirations of Nepad such as good governance, accountability and respect for human rights?

Mutua: But what appears to be somewhat different about Nepad is the admission by African states that they need to be policed by each other. This is a response to pressure from below, but also from external sources within the donor communities and capital-exporting states. At another level, it is an

attempt to cultivate more respect for the rule of law and the creation of a culture for the respect of human rights and good government.

The Nepad concept of peer review, though based largely on the

'Is peer review supposed to be an alternative to accountability of leaders to their voters?'

European peer review system, has evolved under less ideal circumstances. As a result, we must question whether a system of this nature would work on a continent where there are no shared political and cultural

underpinnings. The African Union, if such an entity is a reality, *is* different from the European Union. Many African states lack the political will to create clean governments. They lack political classes that are driven by the national interest, the consequence of which is the incoherence of the state. That is why I feel that they have put the cart before the horse. They first need to develop coherent states internally and a political commitment to constitutionalism before such a peer review system can be sensibly implemented.

Mamdani: African peer review is a case of a 'turnkey technology' – an arrangement that has arisen in the European Union. And now we have an attempt to import the technology with the creation of the AU. Even the name is not particularly original, let alone the specific arrangement of peer review.

Having said that, it would stand that even if you import the technology from the outside, the effects are going to be very different because the circumstances and conditions internally are different. Immediately, two questions arise. The first is whether peer review, in our context, is supposed to be an alternative to accountability of leaders to their voters? If so, it is a poor substitute for genuine democracy.

Having said that, there is also another possibility, depending on the kinds of

'Peer review is an admission by African states that they need to be policed by each other'

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pressures that are brought to bear on the peer review process. The process itself is not detailed in any way, the commissioners or whatever they're called – they have been appointed. In my view the most that one can expect is that the peer review process will become a public review process.

We need an open review process that invites the non-state constituencies throughout the continent to come in and define the nature of the arrangement, the nature of the process and the nature of the outcome so that it would be at least publicly accepted as legitimate and credible.

Matlosa: I think that accountability is the test of this African Peer Review Mechanism. There are three aspects that will determine its effectiveness: Whether leaders genuinely submit

to the process; whether the mechanism can ensure participation of the civil society organisations through the whole process; and whether the ordinary people out there understand exactly what this is all about.

The government of Botswana has said they are not in agreement with this peer review. They say they are a shining example of liberal democracy and they are not sure what measures will be taken against countries that don't conform. So Botswana believes that it brings no benefit. But provided that the mechanism is broadly accepted by African states and it is credible, it is useful. Once you get a clean bill of health, it helps. It may help with foreign aid and foreign direct investment. It won't replace aid conditionality, but it can influence donor aid in a country's favour.

eAfrica: Is this process going to lack credibility because it was essentially drafted behind closed doors? What do

they need to do to make it credible?

Matlosa: Civil society participation was frankly non-existent. The process must take the debate out of the top floor and bring it to the community. That is basically a dialogue process. Communities must have a clear idea about what peer review means. There should be a shadow process by civil society organisations so that if they can't participate in the formal process, they have their own process to keep it honest. As civil society, agencies must interrogate peer review, conduct research and share information with each other.

'This thing can be seen as neo-liberalism creeping through the back door'

For the Nepad idea to succeed, it must be a truly African-developed vision and it has to be really owned by Africans themselves. Not just at the top but all the way to community level.

This thing can be seen as

neo-liberalism creeping through the back door. So the failure to communicate directly sabotages the sense of ownership and the chances of long-term success.

But I think we have to be cautious, though, not to dismiss it too early. To my mind this is a very innovative instrument for our continent. Remember that it has to go through four stages where there are opportunities for civil society participation.

It will lack credibility and legitimacy if the heads of state operate in such a manner that it remains primarily their own responses, without involving other non-state actors in the whole process. Therefore, they need to quickly begin to engage

them. They can't just rely on background sources of information and generalities. They need to really engage with civil society to determine what the problems are in the country under review.

Mutua: I am afraid that Nepad was

CONFLICT WATCH

Rekindling Conflict: Rebel leaders in Côte d'Ivoire pulled out of a unity government, accusing President Laurent Gbagbo of manipulating the sensitive defence and security portfolios. The country was split into a northern rebel stronghold and the government-held south when the rebels launched an offensive to topple the president last year. The two sides subsequently agreed to share power, but the deal has fallen apart. The state reacted to the rebels' withdrawal by closing the main road linking the north with the capital.

Me against my brother: In mid-September, humanitarian agencies were called upon to assist about 10,000 displaced civilians in Burundi's Bujumbura Rural Province following renewed fighting between two rebel groups, the CNDD-FDD and the FNL. The fighting between the factions took place 25km from the capital Bujumbura. The FNL has repeatedly refused to negotiate with the government. About 800 Ethiopian troops joined AU peacekeeping forces in Burundi.

Here come Kofi's men: The first of roughly 15,000 UN peacekeepers started arriving in Monrovia, the troubled capital Liberia, in early October, as US troops began withdrawing from the waters offshore. Businessman Gyude Bryant is due to take over as interim president on 14 October, heading an administration including both government and rebel representatives. Former Liberian President Charles Taylor has been accused of meddling in the political affairs of his country from exile in Nigeria.

Two decades later: Sudan's government and the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) have agreed to a security deal for the south of the country, removing a stubborn obstacle to the peace talks taking place in Kenya. Under the deal, Sudan will have two armies during a six-year interim period, controlled jointly by Sudanese president Hassan al-Bashir and SPLA leader John Garang. Each side will also contribute 10,000 troops to serve in a joint peacekeeping unit to be deployed in areas of conflict.

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conceived as and has remained state-centric. I am, for instance, disappointed with those who were appointed to sit on the peer review panel. They are predictable, cautious, pro-establishment people who lack dynamism and the energy of new innovation. The process is clearly still driven by the state. I cannot see where the innovation will come from.



Mamdani: The more open the process, the greater the disadvantages of not acceding to it (from the perspective of heads of state). There is a need to make the process more open. We have to address the question: Is it so totally closed that there is no possibility to engage with it? What are the possibilities to make it less state-centred? There are two questions that need to be addressed. With regard to the panel of the wise, what linkages do these seven eminent persons have to people on the ground? What structures and processes can be initiated to bring a linkage between these people and ordinary citizens on the ground?

Secondly, a review of what? What is the scope of the review? What is open to review? Is it simply to be an extremely narrow affair confined to instances of individual corruption and human rights abuses?

Oyewole: Heads of state must understand that they cannot be the referees, players and linesmen all at the same time. We must explore mechanisms to foster more openness, inclusiveness and less state-centric processes. Africa is beginning to see a very vibrant civil society. The state must realise this and realise that they do have to engage with civil society in order to make this APRM

process viable and credible. Also, peer review, as it is conceived, seems to be trying too hard to prove something to the West. This is a critical mistake. Too much energy is being directed at proving points to the West, when the people whom the programme is supposedly designed to benefit have not even been consulted.

Mutua: I find it sinister that the process is state-centric. There is no endeavour by the state to engage citizens on Nepad. This failure to engage citizens on Nepad is extremely disturbing because it is deliberate. I cannot think of any major initiatives in Africa that have come from the state over the past decade. We know that it is civil society that has been the engine of change, and that it why the exclusion of this critical society spells doom for Nepad. How can the state, through their self-appointed panel, review themselves? Who is going to review the self-reviewers? There is a need

to open up space for civil society in this process so that they can hold Nepad accountable through dialogue, criticism and shadow reporting. The peer review process will not attain credibility unless other actors, like

civil society, are brought in.

eAfrica: Leaders do seem to care for the opinion of their fellow heads of state. Is the room for potential embarrassment by fellow leaders a psychological lever that may be used to bring recalcitrant states back into line?

Mamdani: There has been a noticeable shift in Uganda over the last year. Previously, the government didn't care about the states in the rest of Africa. This is changing towards a greater acknowledgment of the mutual

inter-dependence of African nations. The process began in response to pressure from the outside. Is this response one which includes civil society?

Parliament itself is meant to be a mechanism of civil society, but in Africa it clearly does not function in this way. This is, therefore, a challenge to media organisations and publications who can help change the state of affairs by conscientising citizens about the process as a whole and their participation in particular. We also need to recognise our own limitations as well as the limitations of the process.

Mutua: There is anaemia within Nepad which is increasingly evident in the way in which non-state actors are being sidelined from the process. The peer review mechanism is an opaque, shadowy exercise driven by bureaucrats with no civil society input. Consequently, when the interest of Thabo Mbeki and his co-founders wanes, the process will die like so many African efforts, unless civil society starts to take some ownership of it. Africans today, unless they are convinced that they are participating, will switch off. This has happened with Nepad already. The opaqueness of the entire process is disturbing.

We should be careful about viewing the interest in Nepad in South Africa as reflective of what is happening on the rest of the continent. More work

has to be done to popularise Nepad at the lower levels of society.

While one should compliment African leaders for once showing a brainwave, we must remain skeptical because they have not shown that they understand the meaning of popular participation of the people in governance. They had a glimpse of an



'Too much energy is being directed at proving points to the West'

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innovative way forward, but the difficulty lies in making it a viable idea.

eAfrica: Any concluding thoughts?

Mamdani: We need to go beyond the optimism/pessimism question – beyond the question of the origin of the initiative. Now we need to focus on the possibilities. In Africa, the sad reality is that there is little room for new initiatives other than those from the top. Now we need to make the most of it, but the crucial question is how?

We must generate public debate – and this lies in the hands of the civil society organisations. Take the bull by the horns and run with it, bring together others in the media and generate as wide and protracted a debate as possible, so that it is kept in the public consciousness. The panel of the wise – poor things – they remain totally unlinked with the opinion of anyone other than the leaders. How are they expected to do a decent job? Either they will have to take risks or they will have to give the process a cosmetic badge of approval. We need to give them a hand as civil society – to make them aware of the issues in our countries that they ought to be investigating as part of the process.

Matlosa: The peer review teams need to think about the core problem that they need to solve. The problem with African democracy involves elections that are always contested with major allegations of vote fraud and unfairness. There is conflict and corruption that leads to the highest levels of state. The cult of personality has distorted African politics. There is too much centralisation of power and the state has become a license to money and privilege. The question is whether peer review will eliminate those core abnormalities. I don't think it will resolve the heart of the problem. All it can do is minimise the damage. Even the economic crisis can be traced back to these political failures.

The peer review panel, therefore, must enter into areas where there are state cover-ups. They can't allow things to be hidden or excuses to be made. They must

make sure all civil actors are involved at all stages and, lastly, they must follow up to make sure the recommended changes are implemented. If that fails, it will re-enforce the opinion of the skeptics and there will be a serious credibility crisis. The question is whether peer review is an adequate instrument. If peer review is not seen to be meaningful, it will create an extreme credibility crisis for the African Union that could split it.

Mutua: There is evidence of both despair and hope in this discussion. On the African continent the people have been betrayed all too often. It becomes a case of once bitten, twice shy. There must, thus, be engagement across the board with state and non-state actors so that the continent's development is viewed as a holistic exercise. The early signs with regard to the peer review process point towards disappointment. I, therefore, appeal to those who control the media, academia, and other arenas of discussion to take this debate forward and ensure that it becomes an inclusive process.

Oyewole: It is evident in this discussion that there are more questions than answers, and this reflects the deficiencies in the formulation of the peer review process: Civil society organisations and African citizens are expected to find their own way – to find the truth in the dark, so to speak. The 'cloak and dagger' nature in which some of the discussions are held and the non-consultative manner in which appointments are made leave a great deal to be desired. Nepad and the APRM need to be brought into the public domain. The leaders won't do this, thus the onus is on civil society itself. We need to be proactive and drag the initiative into the public domain. I subscribe to the idea of a shadow civil society review and public reports on outcomes. Also a range of initiatives on how to popularise and stimulate public debate on Nepad need to be fostered by civil society organisations. There is a clear need for civil society to mobilise at local, regional and national levels to become involved in the process. They need to become the frontrunners of the discourse. ■

Briefly

Gagging the Press, Part 1: President Robert Mugabe forcibly shut the *Daily News*, Zimbabwe's only independent daily newspaper and confiscated equipment, defying a court order. Most of the staff were charged in late September for violating the country's draconian new press law that requires all journalists to get licences.

And Part 2: Algeria's 11 independent daily newspapers closed down for a day in September protesting attacks on freedom of expression after several journalists were detained. The reporters were accused of insulting President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The government booted foreign correspondents out in July. Presidential elections are due in 2004.

Revealing assets, kicking corruption: Kenya's President Kibaki and his entire cabinet have declared their wealth, and warned that public officials who fail to do so will be disciplined. The government has vowed to improve public administration, riddled by pervasive corruption under the previous regime. The rot is particularly bad in the judiciary. A report by Kenya's Integrity and Anti-Corruption Committee found half of Kenya's judges and almost a third of its magistrates to be corrupt and named them in a 'List of Shame'.

Blasting into Orbit: Nigeria was propelled into the space-age with the launch of the \$13 million NigeriaSat-1 satellite aboard a Russian rocket. It will be used to monitor water resources, soil erosion, deforestation and disasters. While space consultants declare this makes economic sense for the vast country, critics say the money could be better-used in providing clean water, health services and education to Nigeria's 132 million citizens, most of whom live in poverty.

Happiest Nation: A survey of happiness levels in more than 65 countries by the World Values Survey shows Nigeria has the highest percentage of happy people, apparently proving the theory that money can't buy happiness. The worldwide investigation of socio-cultural and political change was published in *New Scientist* magazine.

The Harmful Effects Of Handouts in Africa

IN THE dusty desert village of Tambacounda, an arduous 500km journey from Dakar, a vicious and complicated cycle plays out daily in Aissatou Thiobane's classroom at the Fadiame Sylla primary school – and plenty of others like it across the developing world.

No one denies that education is critical to stable societies. Getting children to come and sit attentively in front of Ms. Thiobane's blackboard requires warding off hunger with daily parcels of internationally donated food. But that, in turn, creates another problem: Free sacks of foreign grain, some weary third-world leaders are beginning to realise, ultimately destabilise the countries that grow to depend on them.

'Africa will never develop with aid,' Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade told a conference on school nutrition in Dakar last month. African leaders must beware not to fall into 'a destructive cycle of aid.'

An African Does It Again

ON 2 OCTOBER 2003, South African author John Maxwell Coetzee became the fourth African writer in the last three decades to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. In the words of the Swedish Academy that chooses the winners, JM Coetzee's writing 'upholds the fragile experience of the individual against the barbaric arbitrariness of history.' Coetzee pipped the favourite, Syrian poet Ali Ahman Said (known as Adonis). Coetzee is the only writer to have won the prestigious UK Booker Prize twice, in 1983 for *The Life and Times of Michael K*, and in 1999 for *Disgrace*. The reclusive writer from Cape Town pockets \$1.3 million in prize money. The other three African Literature Laureates are Nigerian Wole Soyinka (1986), Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz (1988) and fellow South African Nadine Gordimer (1991). Two Africans have won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry, and five have won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Across the countries of the Sahel, hunger is too often a child's constant companion. In Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, according to the UN, more than 30% of children suffer from malnutrition. 'A hungry child doesn't sit still in class,' says Arlene Mitchell of the World Food Programme (WFP). 'A hungry child doesn't concentrate. A hungry child does not learn.'

To combat illiteracy the WFP started a school feeding programme several years ago. Today it distributes food parcels to about 12 million children in 54 countries.

Last year the WFP started to distribute food parcels to 1.1 million children in the Sahelian countries (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Chad, Senegal, Gambia, the Cape Verde Islands and Guinea Bissau), at a cost of \$18 million. By 2015, it hopes to be able to distribute food rations to 5.7 million children in the region.

The immediate impact is measurable: Before the WFP started delivering daily food parcels to children in Tambacounda, only 12 children went to class at the Fadiame Sylla primary school each day. Now, 109 do, and most of them are girls. Apart from the food they receive at school, pupils receive food parcels to take home to their parents. This is seen as a motivation for parents to send their children to school.

'School nutrition leads to better health of children and the community,' says Sheila Sisulu, the new deputy director of the WFP in Rome. 'The economic costs of malnourished children are enormous.'

But there are hidden costs to long-term food programmes, too, and even the WFP acknowledges that countries that cannot feed their own children with their own agricultural products are doomed.

Senegal is one of the African states that receive the most international development aid. But Wade still believes that fiscal systems must be fundamentally altered so that countries can become more economically self-reliant. This can only be achieved if people consume what they produce.

SAIIA Nepad Conference

THE South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) and the Finnish Institute of International Affairs will jointly host a conference entitled '*From Policy to Implementation? Assessing Nepad's Path and Progress*' on 5 November 2003 at the BMW Pavilion, V&A Waterfront, Cape Town, South Africa. President Thabo Mbeki will deliver the keynote address. The conference fee is R100.00 (approximately \$15) per person, and only after this amount is paid to SAIIA will your seat be secured. Only 150 people can be accommodated. For further details, please contact Mrs Katy de Villiers on +27 11 339-2021, or email her at devilliersk@saiia.wits.ac.za

In Senegal, for example, people have become accustomed to a staple food, rice, which does not grow well in this dry climate. Every year, 600,000 tonnes of rice are imported, while just 100,000 tonnes are produced locally.

Sisulu agrees with Wade that countries must develop the ability to feed themselves and notes that the WFP is striving harder than it once did to support local farmers. In the past, the WFP was criticised for distributing developed world grain in poor African countries, which had devastating effects on local agriculture. Now, the organisation strives to buy locally, despite the often higher costs of doing so. The WFP also buys about two thirds of its rice, for example, from local producers.

Ahmedou Ould Abdullah, the UN special representative in West Africa, said at the conference the WFP has become the most important client of West African farmers.

Huge agricultural subsidies make the world's largest markets all but inaccessible for African farmers, so most now sell the majority of their produce to emergency programmes in refugee camps in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea.

That, however, has added yet another twist in the dependency cycle. 'Millions of children can't go to school because their countries are plagued by war,' Abdallah said. 'But wars have become an important source of income for Africa's farmers.' – **Liesl Louw in Senegal**