



# EDITORIAL

## THE NEPAD AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM *Prospects and challenges*

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The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is generally described as the most innovative aspect of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Recently there has been much controversy around both NEPAD and the APRM. Days ahead of the 5th NEPAD Heads of State Implementation Committee (HSIC) meeting in Abuja, South African Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad revealed a compromise position that would be discussed in Nigeria. The African Union (AU), through various structures dealing with democratisation, good governance and human rights, would be responsible for the political review component of the APRM. This was confirmed in the subsequent communiqué from Abuja.

The compromise, long in the offing, caused a storm in the media and the donor community, as it appeared to water down the expectation of an independent, stringent test of African commitment to better political governance. Indeed, the competence and credibility of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights is questionable, while other AU institutions which could be tasked with this political review, such as the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) and the Pan-African Parliament do not yet exist.

From the start NEPAD had been promising a process of self-monitoring and what is now being called 'peer learning'. The experience within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

(OECD) from which NEPAD is taking its cue indicates that peer review must be non-adversarial and collegial, relying on mutual trust and understanding between countries being reviewed. It is unrealistic to expect Africa, where democracy is less entrenched and patronage politics is the order of the day, to adopt much more punitive practices. The Abuja decision therefore came as a 'reality check' for many of the NEPAD partners and the donor community, the G8 in particular. It could certainly have been explained and sold to them in a less alarming way, however.

The Abuja HSIC meeting also settled long-simmering tensions between the AU Commission and the NEPAD Secretariat. The communiqué clearly subordinates the NEPAD Secretariat and insists on its closer co-operation with the AU, until such time as it is merged into the new AU structure. This is in line with the original adoption of NEPAD as an official programme of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)/AU, by Heads of State and Government in Lusaka, Zambia in July 2001.

Much of the rivalry between the AU and NEPAD relates to an earlier, Nigerian-driven initiative within the OAU. The Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation in Africa (CSSDCA) predates NEPAD by several years and had slowly but steadily been building consensus around a series of benchmarks, standards and timetables towards a continental African peer review process. At

the Durban Summit in July, African leaders adopted a memorandum of understanding that set out a framework and process of peer review including a set of core values and commitments and some 50 specific key performance indicators regarding democracy, human rights, security, economic issues and development.

While there are important differences between the AU peer review process embodied within the CSSDCA and that of NEPAD, there are also obvious areas of overlap, most glaring of which is the proposed creation of a parallel panel of eminent African persons. The most important difference between the two is that the CSSDCA process is inclusive of all AU member states, while NEPAD is voluntary. While the CSSDCA benchmarks are very specific and ambitious, those of NEPAD constitute a series of best practices culled from international institutions.

In October 2001, the first meeting of the NEPAD HSIC met in Abuja, Nigeria, and decided that, at its next meeting, it would consider and adopt an appropriate peer review mechanism and a code of conduct. As a result the next HSIC meeting of March 2002 adopted the APRM, although the document was only publicly available some months later.

The third HSIC meeting in Rome, in June 2002, approved a Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance. The committee approved the establishment of a Panel of Eminent Persons and recommended that the proposed Secretariat of the APRM be located in the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) based in Addis Ababa.

When eventually available for public scrutiny several months later, the APRM document did not provide for the location of the APRM Secretariat in the UNECA, but within the Commission of the AU. Despite the clear decision to locate the APRM within the UNECA as reflected in the Rome communiqué of the 3rd NEPAD HSIC meeting, Nigerian President Obasanjo reversed his position thereafter. Now Obasanjo was arguing that the UNECA was

non-African and inappropriate since it represented the interests of the Washington consensus. The fact that he was really defending the legitimacy and role of the Nigerian-driven CSSDCA initiative was apparent to all.

Ever since the early discussions in Tripoli where the UNECA presented its much acclaimed Compact for African Recovery became the substantive part of what was then known as the Millennium Africa Recovery Programme (MAP), South African enthusiasm for the role of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) has been key to understanding the debates around the APRM. The original South African intention was simply to use the UNECA Governance Project as a basis for the entire APRM. In time, this idea became hostage to any number of other agenda's.

In October 2002, the NEPAD Secretariat organised a two-day workshop in Cape Town. The purpose of the meeting was to operationalise the APRM by developing indicators and benchmarks, and to provide a detailed framework and content for the review process. While the UNECA did, to a degree, defuse the barrage of criticism about its methodologies and processes during the Cape Town meeting, it had no defence when it came to its lack of expertise on human rights and standards of democracy. In fact, by the end of the meeting, the complexity of the challenge of peer review became apparent. Four of the most relevant papers from this workshop are reproduced in this issue of *African Security Review*, with the permission of the NEPAD Secretariat. These include perspectives on peer review from the UNECA, the OECD, the AU and a private sector view from the Commonwealth Business Council.

Having toyed with the idea of comprehensive review, one could sense the desire of the Secretariat to return to their original idea to use the existing UNECA Governance Project as the basis for the APRM. Eventually the UNECA argued in favour of a two-track approach with one track focusing on democracy and political governance which the UNECA

recommended should be undertaken by persons or institutions appointed by the Panel of Eminent Persons.

The second track would cover economic and corporate governance issues. Of these the UNECA would deal with economic governance issues while the African Development Bank focused on banking and financial standards.

This pragmatic consideration, together with the need to present a practical compromise acceptable to Nigeria and the Commission of the AU were the considerations that saw the compromise position first floated by Deputy Foreign

Minister Aziz Pahad a few days before the Abuja meeting.

Despite recent difficulties, the achievements of NEPAD are significant even in the face of the trade-offs and concessions made in the process. Never before has Africa been the focus of so much engagement and support. Had it not been for Mbeki and NEPAD, Africa would have suffered severe marginalisation after the events of 11 September 2001. Instead it was the focus of discussions at the G8 in Canada and will again be that in Italy in 2003. Finally, NEPAD has invigorated and spurred much action at the continental level.