AFRICAN STATES EXPERIMENT WITH PEER-REVIEWING

The APRM, 2002 to 2007[*]

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The initials APRM stand for "African Peer Review Mechanism." This is an international agreement *cum* organization of (currently) 26 African state signatories. (A list of these 26 will be found in the middle column of Table No. 1.) In joining APRM, each of these so-called "participating states" has agreed to be periodically "peer reviewed" by a multi-national "mission" (team) of African reviewers, acting on behalf of the organization as a whole. APRM's central purpose is to promote political, economic, and social "best practices" in the public affairs of, over time, *all* its participants.

APRM peer reviews are designed to be "Africa-owned," non-adversarial, and voluntary. Neither sanctions nor coercive steps are contemplated against a reviewed state whose public life falls short of standards of open, democratic practice, and whose rulers ignore APRM recommendations designed to help move their country closer to these goals. The clear wish and expectation of APRM participants is that by subjecting themselves to such reviews, they will individually voluntarily *choose* to become better governed over time and, so choosing, will – singularly and as a group of states -- earn increased international respect, and the favor especially of international donors.

APRM in early 2007 is not quite yet five years old and, especially if it succeeds, obviously still very early in its institutional lifespan. Yet most analysts appear to agree with Malachia Mathoho of the Center for Policy Studies in Johannesburg that APRM "could be a major regional instrument [in Africa] promoting democracy."[1] And also in some measure an original one, as those clauses in the organization's mandate authorizing its attentions to *political governance* issues are said – e.g., by Mathoho, and he is not alone -- to be unprecedented for an international peer-reviewing activity. APRM's concern with *political* performance is a "novel practice," he writes, "never before tried anywhere in the world." (p. 12) This is all the more remarkable when it is remembered

Table #1

COMBINED AVERAGE RATINGS OF PUBLIC FREEDOMS FOUND BY "FREEDOM HOUSE" WITHIN INDIVIDUAL AFRICAN STATES, 2005

"FREEDOM HOUSE" RATINGS *Ranges:* *1.0 to 2.5 = "Free"* *3.0 to 5.0 = "Partly Free"* *5.5 to 7.0 = "Not Free"*	***26 APRM PARICIPANTS***	***27 NON-PARTICIPANTS***
1.0	Mauritius	Cape Verde
1.5	Rep of South Africa	
2.0	Benin, Ghana, Mali, San Tome & Principe	Botswana
2.5	Lesotho, Senegal	Namibia
TOTAL "FREE"	***8***	***3***
3.0	Kenya	Madagascar, Niger, Seychelles
3.5	Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Tanzania	
4.0	Malawi, Nigeria, Zambia	Comoros, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau
4.5	Burkina Faso, Gabon, Congo Brazzaville, Uganda	Liberia, Morocco
5.0	Ethiopia	Burundi, Djibouti
TOTAL "PARTLY FREE"	***12***	***10***
5.5 =	Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Rwanda	C. African Rep, Chad, Guinea, Togo, Mauritania, Tunisia
6.0	Cameroon	Dem Rep of the Congo, Ivory Coast, Swaziland
6.5		Zimbabwe, Somalia, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea
7.0	Sudan	Libya
TOTAL "NOT FREE"	***6***	***13***
AVERAGE RANKING	**3.807**	**4.796**

Source: http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=193&year=2005

that to date, just over half of the African Union's 53 member states have since their independence at some point been taken over extra-constitutionally by military governors. The UN's Kempe Hope writes that acceptance of APRM "represents a sea change in the thinking of African leaders."[2]

Still, to the end of 2006, only three of the 26 participating states had gone completely through the reviewing process (Ghana, Rwanda and Kenya), far short of the pace of peer-reviewing initially projected. But the peer-reviews of two others (Mauritius and South Africa) are thought nearly done, especially South Africa. Additionally, Uganda, Nigeria, Algeria, Benin and Tanzania had all begun the formal process by the middle of 2006 (at the latest), and Senegal, Mali and Mozambique were reported to be at the head of the APRM queue for future reviewing.

Below I review briefly the origins and purposes of APRM, describe its peer-review process in its generic form, discuss specific elements of three reviews already completed, and finally draw such conclusions from all the foregoing as this still very early record of achievements and problems may justify. Anticipating my core argument, this is that the APRM "experiment" (as I chose to see it) is a bold, worthy and indeed (in the context of contemporary Africa) surprising democratic gamble, on a continent that would be greatly served by its success. But this said, and notwithstanding the generally impressive efforts of those who have orchestrated the three APRM reviews already completed, the very considerable logistical requirements of these reviewing efforts, coupled with the political necessity of their resulting -- *and being seen to result* -- in dramatic new infusions of developmental capital coming into the continent from abroad, could, after the novelty of APRM wears off, undermine the whole enterprise, and in time derail it.

"A SCAR ON THE CONSCIENCE OF THE WORLD"

In 1990 a so-called "Human Development Index" (HDI) was developed by a Pakistani economist, and since 1993, the HDI has been used in annual reports of the UN Development Program (UNDP) as a measure of a country's well being. HDI is a useful statistic for inter-state comparisons of this matter, taking into account, as it does, four

items: (i) life expectancy at birth, (ii) adult literacy, (iii) school enrollments, and (iv) standards of living as measured by GDP per capita at purchasing power parity.
In 2005, 177 UN members were so measured by the UNDP and then ranked.[3] Norway achieved the highest score, meaning it was the most developed of all 177 in this HDI sense. Niger scored the lowest. But the 24 *lowest* ranked countries were *all* African, and African states (including Madagascar) were 36 of the bottom-ranked 40. Tunisia at # 89 was the highest ranked *continental* African state (island states such Mauritius and Seychelles – both members of the African Union -- excluded). By these standards, among others, then, *Africa is clearly the world's poorest and least developed continent.*

Further, African poverty would appear to be increasing. Hope writes (op. cit., p. 284) that at the beginning of the 21st Century, per capital income in sub-Saharan Africa was 10% lower than it had been in 1980. In 2002, researcher Alex de Waal noted[4] that economic growth in Africa from 1991 to 2000 had only averaged 2.1% per year, while population growth during the same period rose by a yearly average of 2.8%. These figures mean, de Waal wrote, that a contemporary annual continental African financing *shortfall* exists of about $10 billion, the meeting of which, if this is accomplished at all in the future, will necessarily require: (a) an unprecedented increase in domestic savings, joined with (b) debt relief, (c) foreign direct investment, and (d) overseas development assistance -- in short, substantial *international* help. On the other hand, if recent conditions simply continue along essentially unchanged, de Waal grimly predicted that by 2015, about 37% of all continental Africans (or three times the contemporary average for *all* developing countries) will be living on incomes of just $1 per day.

Foreign economic assistance to Africa is scarcely a new idea, or a novel reality. Nearly half a century has passed since the creation in 1958 of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa with a mandate to "foster regional integration and promote international cooperation for Africa's development." Simon Maxwell and Karin Christiansen wrote in 2002 that Africa's "development crisis has [in fact] been high on the international development agenda for at least 20 years."[5] The total of all G8 countries' economic assistance to Africa in 2005 [including $3.924 billion of American assistance to just sub-Saharan Africa (FY 2005 estimates)] appears to have been about $25 billion.[6] Still, notwithstanding earlier foreign assistance to the continent, the reality is that Africa's current economic conditions remain bleak and, in British Prime Minister Tony Blair's memorable words in 2001, "a scar on the conscience of the world." [7]

Blair's judgment in this instance was presumably informed by the specially invited participation of three African presidents (of South Africa, Nigeria and Algeria) at the July 2000 G8 summit meeting held in Okinawa. After this summit, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now marginally more confident of at least the *possibility* of an increased in available foreign assistance to Africa, invited the same three African presidents to develop for the continent as a whole a development plan. A year later, the follow-up efforts of these presidents, joined to those of others leaders, resulted in the 37th OAU summit of African heads of state endorsing on July 11, 2001, in Lusaka, Zambia, a so-called "New African Initiative." Subsequently renamed NEPAD (for "the New Partnership for African Development"), the new "Initiative" was placed under the management of an "implementation committee" of 15 African heads of state. From NEPAD's inception, the organization's stipulated "principles" (i.e., goals) have highlighted the need for "good governance" in Africa and the fostering of "international partnerships" that, being linked to the continent's agreed-upon development "targets," help change "the unequal relationship between Africa and the developed world."[8]

At an ensuing G8 meeting at Gleneagles, Scotland, in 2005, Prime Minister Blair urged his G8 colleagues to agree to *doubling* their annual assistance to Africa by 2010, five years later, and to *tripling* it by 2015. Were this to happen, G8 foreign assistance to Africa eight years from now would total $75 *billion* annually, a figure hard to ignore even if in 2005 it was just an uncertainly grounded aspiration of a single European leader, albeit an important one.

PEER REVIEWS

Clearly, many causal factors lie behind what O.E.G. Johnson (formerly an IMF resident representative in Ghana) called in 2004 Africa's current "economic debacle."[9] And few analysts would dispute that domestic (or local) *man-made* inadequacies have played their own, contributing roles, such as ubiquitous official and unofficial corruption across much of Africa[10], leadership failures, and oppressive and/or inefficient regimes -- in a word and undeniably, “bad” policies and practices. It is thus not surprising that for decades, international aid donors to Africa (and as well to other developing areas) – entities such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank -- made the granting of their loans and/or assistance “conditional” upon recipient countries prior acceptance of certain stipulated “structural adjustments” to their national institutions and/or changes to their existing macroeconomic policies. And of course recipient-country acceptance of such externally mandated “conditionalities” has inevitably been followed by donor program monitoring and on-site reviews to ensure that such earlier undertakings have been kept and are working adequately.

Leaving aside the very good if vexing question of whether foreign aid can “buy” (as it were) what Johnson has called “a good economic policy environment,” or alternately only selectively *reinforce* one that already exists, it appears that foreign aid “conditionalities” and their follow-up monitoring in Africa have often been judged, it is said, “at the receiving end” as burdensome, sometimes misguided, and implicitly nationally humiliating.[11] On the other hand, given the public record of public service corruption in contemporary Africa, political abuse and general mismanagement, it can scarcely be supposed that prospective international donors could be indifferent to the need for objective assurances that the resources these donors offer to African governments are being correctly and effectively used.

A possible answer to this seeming dilemma emerged in 2002 when African leaders, seizing upon ideas that Jakkie Cilliers (executive director of the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria) writes[12] had been percolating for some years among various multi-national organizations and high-level meetings on the continent, joined and recast several related notions to establish a full-blown, voluntary, non-adversarial, and “Africa-owned” (as I have said) peer review process. This occurred at the July 2002 OAU/African Union summit of African heads of state, in Durban, South Africa. Named the “African Peer Review Mechanism,” the new structure was immediately linked organizationally with NEPAD, itself scarcely a year old. Concurrently, APRM’s organizational details were spelled out in a written statement dated 8 July 2002 [AGH/235 (XXXVIII), Annex II] that has subsequently come to be referred to as APRM’s “Basic Document.”[13]

The assumption behind the APRM peer-review process is that respected African experts – some of them technical experts, reporting objectively-developed findings to legally empowered African rulers, will, in the words of official NEPAD-issued "Guidelines" for the process, published in March 2003 (paragraph 4, p. 1), "foster the adoption of policies, standards and ['best'] practices that [can] lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated sub-regional and continental economic integration."[14] And in doing this, the architects of the new process hopefully anticipated that such reviewing would, as indicated earlier, encourage foreign donors to increase – perhaps markedly -- levels of their foreign assistance to participating African countries in the future.

APRM "MECHANICS"

APRM is a *voluntary* organization, as previously indicated, unlike the African Union itself where membership derives primarily from geographic location. The 26 African states that by December 2006 had *chosen* to "accede" to APRM are almost precisely half the number of current members of the African Union who are those (and only those) who are eligible to join APRM. But it is reported the 26 members represent also close to 3/4 of the total population of the continent. APRM is also voluntary in the additional sense that membership in the body entails, as was also indicated earlier, no obligation to do anything at all other than be periodically peer-reviewed. As a legal matter, the results of APRM reviews are entirely non-binding and advisory.

Who are these 26? Interestingly, the average of the HDI scores (2005 figures) of the 26 states that had as of the beginning of 2007 acceded to APRM, was marginally *lower* – meaning they were less well-off -- than the counterpart average for 24 of the 27 other AU members who had *not* joined (or not yet). Liberia, Somalia and Western Sahara, which *are* three of the 27 AU members outside of APRM, had no HDI scores (or rankings) reported for them in the 2005 table of HDI scores referred to. It is true that each of these three excluded cases is desperately poor; nonetheless, the foregoing comparative findings (taken alone) suggest that relatively poor and undeveloped African countries have "signed up" for participation in APRM at essentially the same rate as their better-developed continental neighbors.

If, however, the foregoing analysis is recast to focus not on a country's HDI standing, but instead on where an African country is placed in the annual "Freedom House" rankings of how internally "free" that country is – that is, *politically* "free" in a classic Western, liberal sense, then it does appear that, as a group, APRM participants were politically "freer" in 2005 than non-participants were – again, taken as a group. (See Table No. 1.) They were also, as a group, marginally *less* likely to have experienced military dictatorships in the past than non-participants (12/26 versus 15/27). These findings appear to support the fear some have expressed (see Mathoho, p. 8) that APRM's explicit, high-profile concern with fostering liberal democratic practices in Africa would create a *disincentive* for authoritarian regimes, and for countries with populations little attuned to democratic values, to accede to the Mechanism – indeed, tending to drive away from the APRM "experiment" precisely those states that are, in a sense, its principal targets. Some authoritarian regimes perhaps *have been* repelled, but not all of them, as Table No. 1 shows.

As for the peer review process itself, overall it is managed by a "Panel" (so-called) of "eminent" Africans. These are 5 to 7 professionally distinguished individuals selected in part as representatives of the several principal regions of the continent by the heads of state and government of all states participating in APRM. These latter chief executives together comprise the APRM "Forum." This is the supreme governing authority of the Mechanism – the "peers" in the APRM peer review process.

APRM members are reviewed in accordance with a stipulated schedule – an initial review supposedly coming within 18 months of a country's acceding to APRM, followed by an ensuing review at least once every four years.[15] As the time of its APRM review draws near, each participating country [preliminarily assisted by a brief visit of an external "*country support mission*" (CSM), whose goal it is to ensure that all parties have a common understanding of the process] is required to undertake its own national "self-assessment." This is in response to a detailed (and daunting!) standard 88-page questionnaire provided the country by the APRM secretariat in Midrand, South Africa. The questionnaire directs respondents to four general areas: (i) democracy and political governance, (ii) economic and (iii) corporate governance, and (iv) socio-economic development. Sixty specific questions are asked. These efforts at self-appraisal then lead, under the guidance of a so-called national "governing council" (see below), to a lengthy, written summation of the case, and then in due course to the drafting of a provisional "programme of [remedial] action." These documents provide two of the most important bases for later discussions with the reviewers.

The foregoing reports are intended to be grounded on broad consultations between government officials, on the one hand, and corporate officials and appropriate representatives of civil society, on the other – all of this under the local supervision of a broadly representative body, the previously-mentioned "governing council," headed by an individual (or office, or agency) referred to in the governing regulations as the country's APR "focal point." However organized, this last element in the structure – the "focal point" -- is the key on-going interface between a country undergoing review (or anticipating it) and the several continental agencies of APRM. In two early reviews, the "focal point" was a serving cabinet minister, but in deciding this matter, individual countries enjoy considerable discretion.

The country self-assessment and related background reports, some prepared by technical experts outside the country, are read and then subsequently utilized on-site by a visiting "*country review mission*" (CRM) of African experts specially recruited to this function by the APRM secretariat. In due course, this 15-18 person (or so) review mission (or team), after a country visit lasting several weeks and ending in preliminary discussions of the team's findings with high-level government representatives, reports final conclusions to the APRM Forum through the APRM Panel of Eminent Persons.

Depending of course on the Panel members' and Forum members' reactions to the specifics of the country review mission's report, APRM Forum members are expected usually to open a "constructive dialogue" with the political leadership of the country under review, a discussion focused on the presumably now revised country "programme of action." In the words of aforementioned APRM "Guidelines," paragraph 26, p. 9: *if "the country shows a demonstrable will to rectify the identifiable shortcomings, then it will be incumbent upon participating [APRM] governments to provide the assistance they can, as well as to urge donor governments and agencies to come to the assistance of the* *country under review."* (My emphasis added) There are, however, as I have said, no overt sanctions contemplated for reviewed countries that fail to respond to the APRM Forum's "soft persuasion" (Mathoho, p. 7) urgings. At this so-called "fifth stage" in the process, the final APRM report is made public (e.g., over the internet[16]) as it is concurrently distributed ("tabled") in a number of relevant and interested international bodies, such as the African Union itself.

From beginning to end in a particular case, the entire APRM process is stipulated to take no more than six months, which timeframe in practice has proven thus far woefully unrealistic. And finally, it should be noted that at the 6th Africa Governance Forum in May 2006 at Kigali, it was reported that APRM's funding -- initially estimated at $15 million for the period 2005-07 -- has come from two sources. The two are "cooperating partners," and mandatory subscriptions from participating African governments. The latter, presumably *annual s*ubscriptions, apparently vary in size, but the minimum was said to be $100,000[17].

THE FIRST THREE FULLY COMPLETED REVIEWS

Had the earlier stipulated schedule for APRM reviews, previously cited, been rigidly adhered to, by January 2007 all countries acceding to the Mechanism before January 2005 -- that is, 23 of them -- ought to have gone through the complete APRM review process cycle once. The actual number as of New Year's 2007 appears to have been just three (Ghana, Rwanda, and Kenya), although the reviews of several others are understood now to be well along in the APRM "pipeline." Each of the first three cases resulted in unexpected problems. The Kenya review took three times longer to accomplish than had been planned. Indeed, on August 1, 2005, NEPAD felt it necessary to issue a press release denying media reports that APRM had halted its Kenya review. And the anticipated locally produced draft "programme of action" for Ghana was not ready for the CRM when it members arrived in that country in April 2003. But these shortcomings were relatively incidental to the central thrusts of the reviewing efforts for Ghana and Kenya, which in both these early cases appear to have corresponded reasonably well to the outline given above of the generic, idealized APRM peer-review process. Rwanda's implementation problems were more serious.

Evidently, APRM must try to balance two largely opposed imperatives, especially in the organization's early years. First and most importantly, as de Waal writes (p. 472), the APR Mechanism needs to set the standards for its reviews high enough so that international donors can comfortably "abandon their own monitoring processes and accept the outcomes of the APR." At the same time, as Mathoho cautions (p. 8), care must be taken not to set the "bar" at the outset so high in these reviews that African countries likely to be lowly ranked are discouraged from participating in the review process for fear of being "exposed." The Rwanda case in particular demonstrated in 2005-06 the former danger, that is, of APRM standards being set too low to establish international credibility for the process.

Political scientist Eduard Jordaan of the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa wrote of this possibility even while the Rwanda review was still underway[18]. For Jordaan in 2005, there seemed a prospect that a "timid and toothless APRM . . . would simply turn into an instrument for bestowing legitimacy upon the official line from oppressive and non-performing governments" (p. 351), thereby ultimately coming to be seen broadly (my paraphrase) as a Mechanism that in practice benefits no one. The key issue here was that when in June 2004 a 49-member "national commission" was created in Rwanda to oversee locally preparation of the country's required "self-assessment" report, 31 of the 49 of the national commissioners (63%) were government officials at some level; there was no representation at all of human rights groups or of the national security forces. The result in the end was a draft 230-page self-assessment report that, when it was released to the public in January 2005, lacked, in Jordaan's opinion, obvious candor in its discussion of the country's then-current political situation, projecting instead an overly "rosy" picture of what was going on. This was a presentation, Jordaan wrote, that inadequately addressed "a number of serious problems of political governance in Rwanda" (p. 341).

At this stage the above document was of course only a *draft* report, and it is possible that over the three months between the draft's appearance in January 2005, and its submission (with the country's provisional "programme of action") to the APRM secretariat in South Africa in early March, the draft report was significantly revised and strengthened. I can however find no evidence that this in fact happened. Jordaan himself allows (p. 335) that it is possible that an APRM country review mission can itself "pick up" on serious problems overlooked or suppressed in a country's self-assessment and, having done this, affect appropriate censure of the relevant authorities at later stages in the peer-review process. Reading the final report of the APRM Rwanda country review mission, my impression is that this in fact may have occurred in the present case. Still, even if this impression is valid, whether or not Rwanda will acknowledge and seek to remedy problems identified in this manner remains seemingly an open question.

The Rwanda APRM review in 2005 highlighted also the difficulties the Mechanism's proponents face forestalling APRM reviews becoming a simple "pass/fail" system of rewards and penalties. That this – a "pass/fail" outcome -- was not the original intent is demonstrated in paragraph 1.4 of the document entitled "Objectives, Standards, Criteria and Indicators" for APRM, adopted on March 9, 2003[18]. That paragraph speaks sympathetically of the "differences of historical context and stages of development" that countries in Africa have, meaning that they start "from different baselines" and should not "be expected to reach their highest level of performance at the same time." Assuming "good faith" of the part of leaders of a country undergoing review, and a political will on their parts to improve, the goal of the reviews, it seems fair to say these proponents mean to argue, should be to positively encourage better performance, rather than simply impose sanctions for perceived current deficiencies – i.e., to offer carrots rather than just apply sticks.

Still, in a tone evidently more cautious and circumspect than that which characterized the APRM Panel's more glowing reactions to the Ghanaian APRM country report – and later still the Kenya report, and while being essentially non-committal regarding the projections (including estimated total costs of implementation of $164.3 millions) of the revised Rwanda "programme for action 2005-2008," the APRM Panel tactfully urges in the final paragraphs of its "conclusions" to the Rwanda country peer review report (pp. 153-54) that Rwanda's citizens and leaders *not* see the review process they have recently participated in as "an instrument to access foreign resources." Nor the Panel argues, should the APR review process simply terminate with the submission of the report to the APR Forum. Rather, the Panel contends, APRM is (i.e., should be) "a continuous process [entailing] periodic reviews . . . of participating states to ascertain progress being made towards achieving mutually agreed goals and compliance with [standards, codes and "best" practices of good governance]." In short, the Panel's judgment in Rwanda's case can perhaps be fairly paraphrased as follows: "A good beginning, Rwanda; now let's keep working at these matters together."

The above "bottom-line" outcome for Rwanda acquires added starkness when it is contrasted with what the APRM Panel had to say following the Kenya review in June 2006, a year later. In its report to the APRM Forum re Kenya, the Panel described Kenya as "a bastion of stability," cited its peer reviewing efforts as "a model of best practice," and did not blanch at the $5.38 billion (!) price tag of the Kenya "programme of action." Still, when the APRM Forum finally considered the Kenya case on October 16, 2006, in the course of the 7th African Union summit meeting at Banjul, The Gambia, Kenya's "programme of action" was found "wanting in some respects." These "shortcomings" Kenya President Mwai Kibaki promptly pledged to deal with within six months, a deadline which at this writing in December 2006 is two days from now.

EARLY ASSESSMENTS

Over three days ending May 11, 2006, it is reported[20], 400+ officials from 30 African countries, together with representatives of various international donor agencies, met in Kigali, Rwanda, under the auspice of the Sixth Africa Governance Forum (AGF). This gathering had as a principal purpose to allow countries that had already undergone an APRM review, to reflect publicly together on that experience. Then precisely four months later in Johannesburg, this time under the sponsorship of the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), these discussions were continued at a second conference of participants in any of the first five APRM reviews (i.e., of the three countries discussed above, plus South Africa and Mauritius). Also present were representatives of several other states whose own APRM reviews were either in process or "coming-up." The thoughts that follow are drawn primarily from the lengthy 65-page official *Report* of the May 2006 Kigali meeting[21] and from a 35-page SAIIA report of its

September 12-13 Johannesburg conference.[22] The latter document is entitled "APRM Lessons Learned."

At Kigali, it is reported by the UNDP, the AGF conference affirmed that successful implementation of the APR Mechanism has three important requirements. Paraphrasing, these are (i) mutual learning, (ii) credibility, arising from "national ownership" of the APRM process and (iii) partnerships, promising [new] resources coming from within the reviewed countries themselves, and from their [international] partners. Certainly, few analysts would find these "requirement" exceptionable, but because of this, it is hard not to notice that to the end of 2006, there was scant evidence – at least scant *published* evidence – that there is in fact appreciable additional wealth "out there," available to be acquired by African states utilizing the APR Mechanism. Implicitly, it seemed at both the above Kigali and Johannesburg meetings there was a common premise to many of the conversations here being reporting on, one that is evident also in several of the recent scholarly articles discussing APRM that have appeared. This premise is that the hoped-for additional material resources *will* in the end be forthcoming, even though it is still too early to know this for sure. A lot is riding on this conviction. I myself hope this trust is not misplaced, feeling as I do that should the idea of there being "out there" available new resources come to be seen as an illusion, Africa's interest and enthusiasm for APRM could soon dissipate.

Indeed, some African skeptics regarding the APRM "experiment" are reported already to exist. These include commentators who feel that the APRM process is impotent[23] and/or still insufficiently "Africa-owned." Specifically, the grim prediction is sometimes heard that APRM, being a "voluntary" organization, will prove powerless to rein in African governments that offend against human rights and "good practices" generally. Concurrently, APRM is also charged with being excessively dependent on the largess of (and hence the opinions of) Western governments.

A parallel apprehension of many skeptics is that APRM reviewers will be unable to remain free of African governments manipulating them – a manipulation much as Jordaan argues already occurred in the case in Rwanda. This latter fear -- that is, of overbearing governments -- was also often expressed by delegates to the September 2006 SAIIA conference in Johannesburg. More diplomatically, perhaps, the *Report* of the

2006 Kigali Forum similarly found (p. 18) that securing an “acceptable level APRM of structures’ autonomy from governments” is a challenge “yet to be resolved in some countries.”

Nonetheless, concurrent enthusiasm for the APRM process overall -- in theory if not perhaps also in its several applications to date -- was a notable characteristic of discussions at both these meetings. For the moment, APRM credibility seems high. In criticizing specific shortcomings of the process – real or anticipated, the foregoing critics may be seen implicitly to have endorsed the idealized principles *behind* APRM reviews.

Connected with what I am here calling the “trust” of many of the African participants in these meetings that there is, so to speak, “gold at the end of the APRM rainbow,” is a seeming concurrent confidence in the abilities of the members of the APRM Panel of Eminent Persons and of the APRM Forum. A confidence I mean in these persons’ abilities (i) to digest and understand long, often nuanced analyses of the complicated affairs of unfamiliar African states; (ii) decide wisely among contending points of view in these situations where these are present; and then, having done so, (iii) be adept, highly effective advocates for African material needs within the international community. This too would see a “tall order,” although the professional distinctions of the initial group of APRM Eminent Persons are undeniably impressive. But such a confidence too seems a presumption under-girding the apparent present day optimism across much of the continent concerning APRM’s prospects.

In consequence, the conversations under review are noticeable for having been little focused on worries about future APRM “payoffs” for the countries participating. Instead, these discussions highlighted alleged earlier deficiencies in the informational “inputs” to the APRM process – that is, in the five cases where it has now, fully or substantially, run its course. Still, these alleged deficiencies too seem to have been accepted as being, in principle, correctible.

There are truly a great many of these alleged “input” deficiencies that have been variously cited. These run *from* (i) the data-gathering ineffectiveness of mass meetings and national data systems (ii) the length and complexity of the ARPM questionnaire, and (iii) the danger that contending unofficial groups (leave alone official ones) could “hijack” the information-gathering process *to* (iv) social science methodological problems in the collection of data, (v) the absence among the published "standards" of any concern for media freedom, and (vi) too little time having been allowed for the development of the national "programmers of action." Personally, I expect working through such difficulties is likely an inevitable and predictable part of "breaking in" any complicated new protocol -- hence not unduly worrying if these difficulties are acknowledged early and are then worked on. Both these kinds of remedial efforts seem to have been attempted, and broadly so, at the two conferences referred to, as I have said.

Doubtless a more fundamental and indeed more common challenge than any of the foregoing is, as alluded to already above, the now well documented tension in the course of perhaps *all* completed APRM reviews between (i) governments that seemingly instinctively want control of the overall review process, in part because of worries about how the media or their political opposition might use a too candid national self-assessment, and (ii) civil society that is just as naturally skeptical "about how government will manage the APRM." Some such tension too seems unavoidable as a general matter, although this is not to say that efforts to manage it, where that is possible, should not be made.

In addition to the perceived credibility and independence of the APRM process, all commentators agree, in the words of Cornell University's Ravi Kanbur, that the "technical competence [of the peer review evaluators] is essential."[24] Even the "Base Document" of APRM, previously cited, points (in paragraph 3) to the need for the reviews themselves to be "technically competent." Provisional estimates are not necessarily reassuring. Quite apart from the complicating issue of government interference, the Kigali Forum *Report* declares (p. 17) that there "is inadequate capacity within the appointed Focal Points/Governing Councils to effectively manage the tasks that are associated with the Peer Review process." Quite rightly, I believe, Kanbur sees a danger to APRM competence if, as may be already occurring, the staff of the APRM secretariat in Midrand "is stretched too thin," or "is asked to do too much," if unrealistic deadlines result in rushed work, or if the APRM review agenda "is too broad, and too detailed . . . to be sensibly handled." (p. 9). These strike me as being all reasonable apprehensions, given what has occurred thus far. A related issue is costs. The 2006

Kigali Forum *Report* notes (p. 19) "the highly consultative nature of the APRM process was found to be quite expensive for the relatively weaker economies."

I conclude this paper, still on the question of the competence of the APRM process, with a possible case in point that may be especially relevant to countries with relatively weak economies. One puzzle I have discovered in the foregoing country reports, one that thus far does not appear widely recognized, is the following disparity between the "programmes of action" for Rwanda, on the one hand, and those for Kenya and Ghana, on the other. Rwanda, whose '03 GNP per capita is listed in its country report as being just $220, has a *per capita* price tag for its "programme of action" of only $19.79. The equivalent price tags for Kenya ('05 GNP/per capita = $460) and Ghana ('04 GNP per capita = $434) -- each thus seemingly somewhat wealthier than Rwanda -- are $159.25 and $111.60, respectively. One wonders what can account for this disparity. Is it in the inherent nature of development (assuming that development is occurring here) that relatively more affluent developing states always get larger shares of the world's development capital than their less well developed compatriots? And should get? Or were some of Rwanda's drafters in 2005-06 perhaps simply *outperformed* by their APRM counterparts in Kenya and Ghana, possibly because, due to the poverty of Rwanda, of their being relatively *under compensated* in Rwanda for their professional labors and expertise?

NOTES & REFERENCES

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