In the late 1990s, the World Bank officially identified ‘bad governance’ as the main deterrent to development in the region. Since then, political and developmental efforts have targeted the pursuit of ‘good governance’. This has been done through various internationally designed and implemented development and reform strategies including the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs); bilateral and multilateral donors have funded projects in African states to empower Civil Society in a bid to meet the required targets of accountability, transparency and other elements of democratic values. The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is a more recent effort by African leaders to take matters into their own hands, establishing a process of self assessment whereby acceding states can strategically investigate and reflect on four key aspects of governance: Democratic and Political governance; Economic governance; Corporate governance; and Socio-economic development (the four themes of the APRM). The aim is to conduct periodic assessment and reports open to peer review within the region, thereby facilitating adoption of best practice and peer learning.

A key principle of this mechanism is its aim/potential to enhance indigenous ownership of the good governance agenda in African states. This is expressed in its emphasis on the inclusion of non-state actors largely consisting of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). However, since its inauguration in 2002 by the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), many academic scholars-critics and apologetics- have identified some loopholes in the design of the mechanism which counteract some of its key principles and its ability to meet its set goals. As a peer review mechanism, it relies on dissemination, feedback and underlying freedom of expression across political spaces. This includes engagement of state and non-state actors in consultation about the issues of governance. Although the APRM has received some media attention across the region and across international donor communities, it is yet to acquire the required prime position in debates of governance at the CSO levels. It is important to identify the role of CSOs in the APRM process in order to assess the extent to which the APRM can claim its leverage of ‘African ownership’, as this cannot be done successfully without significant engagement with CSOs in the region.

Nigeria completed the drafting of its Country Self Assessment Report (CSAR) in November 2008, in all the process took over 3 years from start to finish. In this time, consultations and workshops were organised with various stakeholders-members of government, civil service, parliamentarians, CSO’s, Business and corporate representatives, and so on. The report submitted includes proposed National Programmes of Action (NPoA) through which the country will move forward on the issues highlighted in the report. The value of the APRM lies in the fact that this report would be a reflection of the entire society’s view of the actual state of governance, as well as a way forward.

This paper argues that the ability of CSOs to engage with the APRM process and consider its principles and process ‘common sense’ to the pursuit of good governance is crucial for the success of the mechanism. The potential of the APRM to impact positively on governance in Nigeria is premised on the extent to which CSOs and other non-state actors engage with the process, incorporate it into other governance and development efforts, and hold the all stakeholders-including government, corporate and civil actors- to account at the level of implementation.

The aim of this paper is therefore to investigate the level of awareness, participation and inclusion of CSOs in the review process in Nigeria; and the extent to which their opinions were incorporated into the final report and recommendations. The result of this investigation will provide the basis for conclusions on the degree of peer pressure CSOs wielded during the APRM process and inform a conclusion on the potential of CSOs to wield peer pressure during the implementation of the National Programmes of Action.
This paper is drawn from on-going doctoral research and the fieldwork is scheduled for January-March 2010. Empirical data will be gathered through Focus group discussions, questionnaires and elite interviews with representatives of various CSOs which participated in the recent APRM process in Nigeria.

SOURCES


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