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In Pursuit of Good Governance and Democracy in Africa: Assessing the Benchmarking Role and Mandate of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study acknowledged that the post-colonial expectations of the African societies, and the attendant result of good governance, among other values, were not just desirable, but inexorably high, given the experience of the pre-independence era as characterized by colonial imperialism. The study noted that unfortunately, such expectations may have been a mirage after all, not less for inadequate resources needed for development, but for challenges of transition on the one hand; and factors of maladministration, unbridled corruption, gross insensitivities of the post-independent leaders and their ill temperament to governance, recurring regime change by the military, self-rule, and lately, the phenomenon of rising insecurity among other inimical limitations to good governance on the African continent, on the other hand. With the establishment of the African Union (AU), which replaced the legacy Organization of African Unity (OAU) in May 2002 and now rebranded as the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD), which is conceived as a strategic framework for the socio-economic development of the continent. The AUDA-NEPAD subsequently established the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) as an instrument for monitoring performance in governance among member states. However, the existence of the APRM has generated mixed reactions regarding pursuing its mandate among member-states. This paper sought to critically interrogate the extent to which the APRM has adequately implemented its mandate while benchmarking Nigeria, in the adherence to democratic ethos and values, and the promotion of good governance. This paper has adopted a qualitative research paradigm, relying on secondary data from relevant literature and applying an appropriate theoretical paradigm in its far reaching analysis to underpin the study. The paper concluded by professing prescriptions and perspectives, on how best to place the APRM as a continental regulatory framework for the greater well-being of Africa, particularly Nigeria, while removing the growing contradictions and challenges of governance and development at large.

INTRODUCTION

The realities of the postcolonial posture of the African continent, in terms of development deficit and governance challenges, have arguably become more visible within the compelling dynamics of the contemporary international system. Resultantly, the need by the African continent to exert itself and move within the framework of the agenda that can make the actualization of the objectives of the continent realizable, has been on the front burner of the African leaders' policy thrusts over the years. The initial bold attempt by the African leaders to transmute the apex continental organization of the erstwhile Organization of African Unity (OAU), in search of a new focus, birthed the initiative of the African Union (AU) in May 2002. As part of the postcolonial agenda of the African leaders, the OAU had been founded on some basic philosophical underpinnings to give Africa an identity established on its own common heritage. The decolonization agenda of the OAU as a continental umbrella organization for the newly independent countries of Africa provided the common ground for that collective action built around the total emancipation of the African countries particularly, the remaining territories under the control of colonial rules and other forms of segregated political systems. As a postcolonial continental organization, the OAU

endured a trajectory of turbulent political periods, contending with many challenging crises of governance which have tended to impede its post-independent agenda. The many crises of socio-economic and political dimensions and the increasing phenomenon of one-party states, tight leadership, and personal rule syndromes had given rise to discontentment and social uprisings within member-nations, leading to a high turnover of regime changes on the continent. The scale of undemocratic practices and authoritarian tendencies persisted on the continent, notwithstanding the vague preponderance of multi-party elections, and democratic institutions in spite of the existence of the continental organization of the OAU (Tukur, 2011: 2).

Corroborating this argument further, Odion-Akhaine (2010) contends that, the recorded high incidences of reversal of democratic rules dominated the much of the African political space, with the spate of regimes backsliding into authoritarian rules in form of state level militarization through coup d'états. The OAU's principle of non-interference as enshrined in its charter has been speculated as appearing to be an incentivizing legal shield for the growing tendencies of authoritarianism and other major weaknesses for the lacklustre image of the OAU. With the completion of the decolonization agenda on

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the African continent, and the demise of the apartheid regime in the aftermath of the transition of power to the majority black-dominated government in South Africa, the compelling shift of commitment by the leadership of the OAU became prominent in its search for a new focus. Essentially, the disbandment of the OAU in May 2002 came on the heels of the evolving dynamics of the international system. In this instance, the speculation is rife that the aftermaths of the end of the cold war, and its collateral effect of the collapse of the communist ideology in the Eastern Europe, could have also been the compelling factors for the disbandment of the OAU and its transmutation into the African Union in May 2002. Though, before the period, the OAU had been largely described as an ineffectual multilateral platform with a chequered dossier of poor governance profile considering its much inability to address the burgeoning crises of governance on the continent (Tukur, 2022).

In a fundamental sense, the decision to transmute the OAU into the African Union (AU) could be explained within the same contention of the phenomenal event in European, which also saw the transmutation of the erstwhile European Economic Commission (EEC) into the European Union (EU). The conception of the AU, no doubt had the potentials to offer some hopeful respites for the African continent most especially, with the institutional mechanism of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). As a mechanism with a target-driven agenda for enhancing the governance credentials of member-nations, NEPAD was intended to principally serve as a major metric for driving development and economic prosperity of the continent, and to be seen and regarded as a home-grown African initiative. It is important to point out that the concerns shared originally, by a handful of member states of the AU-NEPAD led to the establishment of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) as an incorporated self-regulatory framework. The ultimate purpose being to ensure periodic assessment and review of member-nations domestic policies in order to ascertain compliance with the best practices on good governance guidelines of the AU and NEPAD.

Going further on our explications about the aspirations of the African leaders for the promotion of good governance and economic development on the continent, the decision to ensure a broader agenda and consolidate the efforts of the AU and NEPAD as regard their mandates received some boosts with the new initiative of the AUDA-NEPAD. The integration of NEPAD into the African Union structures and processes came into force in June, 2018, following the decision of the 31st Ordinary Session of the Assembly of African Union Heads of State and Government held in Nouakchott, Mauritania (AU, 2018). The decision was taken in line with global reforms geared towards improving the impact and operational efficiency of the Union. However, the existence of AUDA-NEPAD and the self-regulatory measure of the APRM have not had any significant

changing impact on Africa's governance narrative. Aside the resurgence of military interventions and the incidences of sit-tight leadership syndrome raving in some parts of the continent, where there are semblances of electoral democracies, cases of irregular conducts and flawed electoral processes in the favour of the status-quo political leadership, and the victimization of political opponents are regular occurrences thus, posing a challenge to the tenets and objectives of APRM.

Nigeria in the Lens of APRM

As succinctly indicated by Moti (2009), the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), is a flagship programme of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, and serves as an assessment system, voluntarily and mutually adopted by member states of the African Union for assessing their performances. Nigeria's membership can be said have begun since the establishment of the programme in 2003, and has undergone two reviews, which were conducted in line with the mechanism's established criteria for evaluation, first in 2008, and second in 2021. Latest reports indicate that about thirty-nine (39) member states have signed in to the APRM, although lesser number have been peer-reviewed, as a result of differing and peculiar circumstances. For Nigeria, reports of the peer reviews, having being submitted to the government, are expected to be studied and acted upon, towards achieving the purposes intended for the reviews. At the concluding section of this study, some plausible changes, attributable to the reports of the reviews are reflected, to indicate the relevance of the programme.

As a leading promoting member-nation of AUDA-NEPAD initiative, Nigeria's preeminent status on the African continent is viscerally tied to its role conception as defined by its Afro-centric foreign policy posture. The abiding commitment of Nigeria to the conception of AUDA-NEPAD and the further translation of such in the domestication of the initiative requires attention and interrogations. Nigeria's return to electoral democracy in 1999, and its inherent contradictions have generated a lot of concerns and reactions particularly, to the ideals of APRM. Against this background, this study ought to appraise the Nigeria's democratic credentials and the aspirations for good governance, within the confines of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The next sub-section below on the relevant research questions to the study helps to contextualise the

Study Research Questions

Against the perspective of the focus of this study as clearly articulated above, this study sought to interrogate how far Nigeria has fared by providing some responses to the following research questions:

1. What does the APRM as a self-regulatory mechanism entail, and what is the process format?
2. What challenges have impeded the effectiveness of APRM as mechanism for promoting democracy and good governance in Nigeria?

3. How much impact has the APRM had on Nigeria since its establishment?

4. What policy suggestions/recommendations can be proffered to improve the benchmarking role of APRM in Nigeria?

Imperatively, the highlighted research questions though, conceived within the context of Nigerian political environment, and essentially for that purpose, emerging findings from the study could however be extrapolated to relate to the other environment on the African continent, and particularly member countries of the continental organization of AUDA-NEPAD.

METHODOLOGY

The study is literature based with extensive engagement of contents and materials relevant to the focus of the paper. The study is essentially predicated on, and enabled by previous literature, which has focused on the thematic issues and discourses around the related concerns of Africa's multilateral arrangements, and other contentious matters regarding its socio-political and economic development. The authors considered a literature survey method to ascertain and identify the germane issues relevant to the contextual undertaking of this paper. Similarly, this study sought to take cognizance of the critical examination of the identified themes and findings with a view to generating further perspectives on the need for the appropriate deployment of the platform of APRM to benchmark participatory democracy, good governance and development among the adopting member-nations, including Nigeria.

The paper also highlighted the relevant theoretical explorations to underscore Africa's democratic trajectory and the evolutionary processes of the multilateral systems put in place to realize Africa's pathways to democratization and development. To this end, the paper provides some insights and appraisals of Nigeria's journey to democratic rule in its inherent contradictions amidst the governance crises.

Theoretical Framework

As much as there are concerns about the existence of relevant theoretical frameworks which remark the Africa's development and democracy, there are also arguments about the plethora of theoretical perspectives which underpin the topical issues of Africa's socio-political and economic agenda. The novel initiative of AUDA-NEPAD and the self-regulatory mechanism of APRM have only provided a relatively new basis for assessing the existing postulations as regard the challenges of Africa's development.

This paper sought to rely on Dependency/Underdevelopment Theory which has its origin in Marxian perspective and developed by scholars of Third World origins. The theory explains the domestic dynamics of the underdeveloped nations and their disadvantaged positions in the highly skewed international system. Such conditions of underdevelopment have continued to

place the Third World countries who have also, due to their contact with colonialism, been subjected to some excruciating and difficult challenges within the global configuration, and the consequences of that for their postcolonial conditions.

For instance, Ake (1996:1), in his thought-provoking examination of the African developmental paradigm and politics, argues that, over the three decades of engagement with development in Africa, little dividends have been yielded while African economy continues to experience retardation or retrogression. Ake's thesis is anchored on the apparent failure of developmental strategies on the continent, in a way that could be attributed to colonial factors and other post-independence challenges, which prevailed on African as a postcolonial entity. On the other hand, he dismissed the notion of failure of development as erroneous on the ground that, development has not only been a premium priority of the African policymaking elites. This position has been remarkably justified by the contention that political conditions in Africa have posed the limiting impediments to Africa's development due to the heritage of colonialism and the factor of post-colonial conditions as the major constraints of developmental paradigms and policies for Africa.

Again, Ake (2000), while ruminating on the feasibility of democracy in Africa, argues that, the determined efforts of the African leaders for a prosperous continent, and the realization of the existential conditions of the Africans, and the state shall be the main thrust of democracy to the African continent. Ake contends that the utility of democracy should be primarily predicated on its ability to meet the social needs of the people and on the willingness of the policymaking elites to ensure the three basic conditions as follow: the appropriate deployment of power to the benefit of the people; make ultimate power reside with the people; and make the people the basis of development. Further to these, Ake (2000) equally highlighted four major attributing measures which are germane to promoting and sustaining democracy in Africa as follows:

1. A democracy in which people will have the decision making over and above the formal consent of electoral choice;
2. A social democracy that places emphasis on concrete political, social and economic rights, as opposed to a liberal democracy that emphasizes abstract political rights;
3. A democracy that puts as much emphasis on collective rights, as it does on individual rights;
4. A democracy of incorporation. To be as inclusive as possible, embracing along with the legislative bodies, other diverse interest groups that are equally germane to democracy and societal development.

Essentially, the relevance of Ake's theoretical postulations to APRM within the framework of AUDA-NEPAD self-regulatory mechanism for benchmarking democracy and good governance in Africa could be located in their far-reaching propositions to the emerging crises of governance on the African continent. The absence of

inclusive governance framework that provides the right political ecosystem for accommodation is no doubt, a major deficit that has limited the attainment of the laudable objectives of good governance and democratic project in many countries in Africa, including Nigeria. The measure of the appropriate political-will put in place by the ruling elites in Africa becomes another key factor for the actualization of such laudable objectives.

However, this paper also identifies limitations with the contentions of Dependency Theorists in their restrictive arguments about development and good governance, most especially as regard Africa's trajectories and narratives of postcolonial dimensions. The fact of the postcolonial sovereignty of the African continent and the concerns of its worrisome and uninspiring leadership profiles should be blamed for the present socio-economic and political predicaments of Africa rather than on its colonial heritage. Consequently, the point can be made that, while the vestiges of colonial experiences remain a ghostly snag in the developmental paradigm in Africa, the factors of leadership irresponsibility, seemingly gullible, hypocritical and complicit followership, have tended to be a recurring scourge in Africa, and in Nigeria in particular. The implication of this human element on the efforts towards creating a sane society, required for developing and building a culture of good governance, has continued to be a cause for concern in Africa, and in Nigeria in particular. In other words, the level of discipline of the minds and a sense of responsibility expected of every individual in the society is yet pleasant and therefore discouraging.

Democracy and Good Governance in Africa/Nigeria: Survey of Literature

As argued previously, there is a plethora of literature which remarks the place of democracy and good governance in the context of African politics, and in Nigeria in particular. Though, the novelty of the initiative of AUDA-NEPAD and its self-regulatory mechanism of APRM, much may have not been captured in the initiative within the dragnet of intellectual interrogations as could be expected, it remains a worthy and salutary agency of the Union for its mandate. To this end, this paper has attempted to embark on some relevant survey of relevant literature, with the view to bringing the practice of democracy and the offering of good governance in Africa into perspective. It must be pointed out at this stage that, while this study is essentially about APRM in Nigeria, a literature survey in this context will reflect writings and studies on the African political environment, given the similarities of the practice of democracy and governance pattern on the continent, laden with instability, recurrent regime change and pervasive maladministration.

According to Oyeshile (2019), the functionality of democracy across the world cannot be contested. This argument is premised on the fact of the usual claims and the platitudes of democratic rule in defining other systems of government, which also lack democratic expressions. By his understanding, democratic rule is defined by the

level at which citizens are involved in their government, and by the level of accountability displayed by those who rule over the affairs of the state. By the participation or engagement of the citizens in government, this connotes the level at which the ruling elites make the governing space much available for the participation of the citizens through their involvement in the affairs of the society, irrespective of the social class of the citizens.

On the other hand, the concept of accountability is also explained by the extent of responsiveness and responsibility of the government towards the citizens. This can further be connoted as the degree of the ruling elites' acceptance of their positions as the avenues by which they offer themselves in the services of the society and of the citizens. Adherence to the rule of law in conformity with the law of the land, is also identified as part of the binding creeds which serve as the connecting links between the citizens and the ruling elites. Oyeshile (2019) however, attributed the failure of democracy in African to some primordial considerations which perhaps, have made democratic project in Africa illusory of its intended benefits to the African citizens at large. The inability of the African ruling elites to demarcate between the state and their personal pursuits, which most times too, prompts the unbridled culture of impunity, leading to abuse of offices, is of concern to political analysts and experts. Other factors such as the ethnic configurations of states in Africa, and their consequences for ethnic consciousness and loyalty rather than national cohesion, poorly organized electoral systems and political instability among other considerations, remain the major impediments to democracy and its promises in Africa. The question of the renewed efforts of the African ruling elites through the alternative platforms of AUDA-NEPAD and the APRM might also be far from being realized, if those moral burdens as highlighted above are not removed from the African governance space.

For Hyden (2019), in a report on democracy and governance in Africa, he opines that, there are three lessons that have been learned from the African democratic project. First, is that democracy in Africa is far from being the "only game in town". In this context, Hyden (2019) argues that democracy in Africa is a contestation between acceptance and legitimacy in relations to other ways of organizing governance, notably the "developmental state". He contends that, the latter has strong appeal in a region where poverty prevails, and leaders know that promising public goods that improve the livelihoods of people earns them legitimacy and power. The second lesson lies within the African institutions which help them understand the world. He reiterates further argues that, efforts have been made ever since colonial days to mould Africa in the image of Europe, but the indigenous institutions have made resilience, relying on the age-long efforts of donor-initiated reforms and their failure to change the narratives due to the African underlying value structure. This argument also rests on the fact that, it is easy to change the manner by which humans

are organized to achieve a specific goal but much more difficult to make them change their behaviour.

The third lesson is predicated on the contention that democracy aids do not easily lend itself to the same kind of logical framework that may apply to assessing results of projects dealing with tangible goods. This infers that, in as much as donor-assisted democratic projects have their intended frameworks, the local contents of the recipient-nations are equally necessary in their implementations, as the intentions of the donors might not necessarily align with the local needs of the recipients. In the context of AUDA-NEPAD and APRM regulatory mechanism for democracy and good governance, the necessity to generate the alternative home-grown approach in this direction is not only compelling, but remains the only paradigm towards creating a pragmatic roadmap for good governance and sustainable development on the African continent.

Mattes and Bratton (2003) also offer that, the continued economic crisis in Africa should not be a major limiting factor for the attainment of an enduring stability in the Africa's nascent democracies. The Africa's democracies do not necessarily require economic prosperity to subsist in providing the right governing ambience for good governance. In their words, the only prerequisites for the consolidation of democratic project on the African continent lie within two considerations.

1. First, there is the need to enlarge the pool of cognitively sophisticated citizens with new orientation for changing their mindsets, from the apathetic tendencies and general lack of interest in the affairs of the society. Apparently, it is not debatable that many societies in Africa are still battling with high rate of illiteracy, as much as, with the lack of interest in the affairs of the society by the citizens, possibly due to the growing uninspiring performances of the ruling elites in the conduct of the affairs of their states. The need therefore, for increasing the level of literacy through formal education and other necessary measures of citizens' awareness should be enhanced in the much of Africa. The need to improve governance profiles and quality of delivery by the ruling elites are also part of the required ingredients for enliven the citizens and attune their interests towards the general wellbeing and the affairs of the society.

2. Secondly, the measure by which the ruling elites also recognize the tenets of the rule of law and the rights of the citizens could go a long way in expressing the genuine willingness of the African leaders to entrench democracy and good governance on the African continent.

Obah-Akpowoghaha (2013), while undertaking the theoretical explorations of the African politics and the challenges of development argues that, the principal impediment to democratic consolidation in Africa has its roots in the attitudinal orientation of the African leaders, especially, their conflicting attitudes towards democracy and human rights. The African leaders only relish the powers and authority of democracy, revel in its glory but loathe its restraints, particularly its adherence to the rule of law, accountability and respect for citizens' rights.

On the economic development plane, he offers that, the rising debt profile in most African countries is attributed to government extra-budgetary spending, which most times are not utilized for the benefits of the society, but rather for the sheer profligate accommodation and maintenance of the leaders' personal lifestyles. Other factors as unbridled corrupt tendencies are also explained to define the problem of African political and economic challenges.

In a more historical perspective to Africa's democratic project and its trajectory, Akporari (2004) also corroborated the argument of the embedded contradictions and the many paradoxes of political governance in Africa. In this instance, Akporari agrees with the positions and the platitudes of the proponents of the institution of NEPAD and APRM, believing in their inability to generate and entrench the requisite frameworks for the promotion of good governance in Africa. There is also a further argument that democratic systems and practices in Africa have been characterized largely by deficits than the expected dividends (Oche, 2004). Additionally, the practice of democracy in Africa is viewed in exhibitory manner with those tendencies which are inimical to the process of governance and the desired economic benefits for the African nations.

In view of the above observations, democracy in Africa is challenged by many crises of governance and the inherent contradictions which have continued to vitiate the initiative of the regulatory mechanism of APRM conceived to mitigate burdens of political governance. For instance, the recent resurgences of military coup d'états with the disruption of governance in some countries of Africa have provided some validations to the question of the growing discontentment and poor governance delivery in the much of Africa. The interventions of the military witnessed in countries like Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, and the failed attempts in Niger and Sudan are some of the instances of the possible demonstrations of such growing discontentment. The existence of APRM as a regulatory institution remains questionable in the face of its inability to benchmark and evolve an appropriate template for the promotion of good governance and even, ensure its compliance where and when necessary. Understandably, the challenge is not about the existence of the APRM, but more of the absence of the common cliché of political will, on the part of African leaders, and their complicit supporters, in reality with the need for responsible and selfless leadership. While it is also agreed that, the practice of democracy and its associated elements of good governance, is still much at its fledgling stage, it is important to suggest that, the African policy elites and the citizens must act in concert for the committed actualization of the desired goals overcoming the challenges of democracy and development on the continent.

APRM and the Agenda for Democracy and Good Governance in Africa

In a more of renewed effort to strengthen the home-

grown initiative by the African leaders particularly, within the realities of the contemporary international system, the AUDA-NEPAD agenda for sustaining constitutional democracy and good governance appears well meaning. The institution of the regulatory mechanism of APRM is not only a pointer to that well intended agenda, but a clear testimony of the African leaders' commitment to possibly place the continent on a path of development. The need to also correct some of the ills of the legacy-continental body of the OAU, with the many uninspiring images of Africa as the enclave of authoritarian rules and a den of despots, due to the prevailing socio-political ecology of the African governance space prior to now.

As observed by Grimm and Mashele (2006), the concern that governance deficits have become major hindrances for African development is no doubt, a driving catalyst for the initiative of NEPAD (now AUDA-NEPAD). The concomitant establishment of the APRM, as a peer pressure mechanism, within the framework of NEPAD, can be viewed as a thoughtful attempt to improve Africa's governance profile, with positive implications for the economies of the member-states, through increased foreign direct investment and the improvement in infrastructure and social services. The APRM as a system of voluntary self-assessment, constructive peer-dialogue and persuasion, is conceived to operationally rely on the interactions and the exchange of experiences by the Heads of States of member states. The initiative of the APRM, beyond other institutional considerations of its objectives, has the potential to reawaken the African civic spaces, making such possible through the commitment of the member-states. The tendencies for the improved civil society groups' activities serving as vehicles for the continuous engagement of the citizens, as well as, domestic mechanisms for reviewing policies and actions of their governments in line with the agenda of the APRM.

Fundamentally, the APRM as a self-regulatory instrument for improved governance in Africa is anchored on NEPAD Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance which was appropriately put into effect in June, 2002. As carefully conceived, it is also predicated on the following four thematic governance issues as:

1. Democracy and Political Governance.
2. Economic Governance.
3. Corporate Governance, and
4. Socio-Economic Development.

(Grimm and Mashele, 2006).

In furtherance of the above thematic agenda, the NEPAD's commitment to good governance, through the resort to peer assessment came under the declaration and adoption by the AU at its July, 22 Summit held in Durban, South Africa. The Durban declaration, as noted was also in line with the African leaders' age-long vision and agenda on peace, human rights and good governance, though rhetorically, which also have their roots in the 1980 Lagos Plan of Action. The pursuance of the four thematic agenda of APRM as highlighted

above, became embracing of other subsidiary governance issues bordering on human rights, the separation of powers, regular free and fair elections, freedom of press, protection for vulnerable groups, prudent management of the economy, and the role of businesses in society (Gruzd, 2009).

The APRM base document, as adopted during the AU's inaugural Summit in Durban on 8 July, 2002, clearly stated the following as guiding operational principles:

1. Mandate of the APRM: That is, the policies and practices of participating states conform to the thematic focus areas in terms of political governance, economic, and corporate governance values, codes and standards as contained in the Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance.

2. Purpose of the APRM: That is, the philosophical underpinnings of the APRM is to foster the adoption of policies, standards and practices that promote and sustain political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated sub-regional and continental integration through peer review and cross-fertilization of policy experiences and the commitment to best practices, including measures for identifying deficiency-gaps and the need for human capital development.

3. Principles of the APRM: This upholds the notion that, for every review exercise embarked upon under the APRM arrangement must be carried out with the hindsight and considerations of technical competence, credibility and devoid of political manipulation.(Gruzd, 2009).

In our careful examination of the above APRM thematic areas of focus within the larger AUDA-NEPAD agenda for the enthronement of good governance and enlarging the civic spaces for engagement in Africa, there are lot of concerns which could be raised as regard the sincerity or otherwise of the African leaders in that direction. The agenda of the APRM though, lofty, could also be taken from that point of the political will and the authoritative backings it enjoys, considering the unstable temperament of the African leaders in the conduct of the affairs of their respective countries. Though, the agenda on democratization and good governance remains the foci point of APRM as could be found in the Democracy and Governance Initiative of the compact of NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD). Expectedly, the initiative of NEPAD is on the assumptions that good governance and all other accoutrements of democracy are essentially necessary for sowing the seeds of development on the African continent. However, and as rightly noted earlier, overcoming the challenges of democratization project in Africa will depend largely too, on the level of temperament and the political will of the leadership of the participating member-nations.

Responses to Study Research Questions

As pointedly observed by Oche (2004), Article 81 of the Democracy and Political Governance Initiative explicitly highlighted the following necessary conditions in line with the expected adherence to the best practices towards

promoting democracy and good governance in Africa:

1. A series of commitments by participating countries to create or consolidate basic governance processes and practices.

2. An undertaking by participating countries to take the lead in supporting initiatives that foster good governance.

3. The institutionalization of commitments through the New Partnership for Africa's Development to ensure that the core values of the initiative are abided by. (Oche, 2004). However, on a precautionary note, Article 83 of the same Democracy and Political Governance Initiative also offered a caveat in the case of the inability of NEPAD document to address where necessary, the adherence to democratic and good governance ethos and agenda; the resort to institutionalist approach, as an alternative pathway for building enduring institutional frameworks capable of supporting and sustaining democratic and good governance agenda of participating countries. Such institutionalist approach includes:

1. Administrative and civil services.
 2. Strengthening parliamentary oversight.
 3. Promoting participatory decision-making.
 4. Adopting effective measures to combat corruption and embezzlement.
 5. Undertaking judicial reform.
- (Oche, 2004).

Unequivocally, some of the shortcomings of these institutionalist measures are part of the major debilitating factors which have marked many African nations within the web of democratic and governance deficits in the total negation of the NEPAD and the APRM agenda. Presumably too, these institutionalist measures are not also germane to enhancing the democratic profiles of member-nations, but in strengthening their domestic institutions for effective and efficient delivery of governance to the benefits of their citizens. For instance, the need for the institutional reforms of member-nations public services could certainly go a long way in ensuring the enhancement of their mandates to the citizens, and serve to complement the executive roles in the implementation of the functional state duties for effective and smooth running of the affairs of the state (Tukur, 2022). The need to change the philosophical orientation of the African public services largely away from their inept and inefficient outlook, and meeting up with their expected service delivery mandates is also crucial to development in Africa.

Again, the need by the African legislative bodies in the respective member-nations of the AUDA-NEPAD in providing the enabling and necessary legislative-cum-legal environment to enable the mechanism realise its objectives. This is quite essential as it is capable of supporting the agenda of good governance, which is not only desirable for the economic prosperity of the African development, but also an inevitable legal framework required for such a multilateral body. The legislative bodies in African, like other legislative arms of government elsewhere, have their primary mandates

predicated on law making and in the provision of effective oversight functions on the state institutions particularly, for governance equilibrium and compliance to budgetary systems of the state. This also presupposes that the role of the legislatures in providing adequate legislations and strengthening the overall agenda of the APRM in African could be examined beyond domestic legislative expectations of the parliaments in Africa. Many governance challenges faced in Africa have however, been traced to the compromised nature of the legislatures with many of such law-making arms of government only play rubber stamp role and become manipulative to the whims and caprices of the executive arms.

On participatory decision-making processes as a necessary measure for promoting democracy and good governance, African leaders must also cultivate the need for the enhancement of open policy and decision-making processes whereby, the considerations of critical stakeholders are put into the processes and the inputs in the course of policy-decisions. By giving the open government initiative a wider acceptance within AUDA-NEPAD member-states, participatory decision-making becomes the most plausible measure of attaining such within the framework of the APRM. For instance, the active engagement of non-state actors most especially, the civil society groups within the participating member-states in their changing roles as agents of mobilization and supportive agenda for good governance can be provided with the right environment to sustain the agenda for good governance. Providing a veritable ground for civil society groups in Africa to operate and render citizen-centred agenda can serve as part of the positive ways towards strengthening the state and its institutions, as well as, and in promoting democratic values and good governance within the context of AUDA-NEPAD/APRM agenda.

Added to the above thematic areas of focus is the necessity to accept the challenges of corruption and its vices as impediments to democracy and good governance in Africa. This assumption rests on the argument that the rising cases of official grafts require much of institutional attention by the African leaders in their collective agenda for the promotion of good governance in line with the APRM mission and agenda. There is also no doubt that, the growing cases of official corruption have become endemic within the African countries to the glaring detriment of development, and the wellbeing of the larger proportions of the citizens. Though, many countries in African have established institutional mechanisms for tackling the scourge of official corruption, but in spite of the many shortcomings associated with the existence of those anti-graft agencies, their impact has yet to be felt significantly. By and large, the efforts towards ridding the African countries off corruption and all its vices are germane to stimulate development. The existence of the institutional mechanisms for fighting corruptions also remains part of the institution building measures in the direction towards laying the foundation for democracy and good governance in Africa.

Similarly, it could also be argued that, as one of the major deficits noted with democratization and good governance project in Africa, the place of the judiciary has been identified not only in its interpretive role of the laws within the tripod arrangement of the state, but also in its important place of upholding and protecting the rights of the citizens. Far beyond the adjudicating mandate of the judiciary, it also plays vital roles in strengthening democracy and good governance given its natural role in the governance equilibrium. More critically, the judiciary is fundamental to the promotion of rule of law, and the liberty of the citizens at large, and this therefore also implies that, as an institution of the state, its condition must be put to some evaluations with a view to examining its performances in the context of those roles it is expected to perform in upholding the tenets of democracy and good governance (Tukur, 2022). The call for the reform of the judicial system in the participating member states therefore, not to be limited to the courts' system only, but such reforms should also include the overhauling of the administrative mechanisms that make up the entire judicial system which could uphold its true independence as a vital organ of the state (Tukur, 2022). The APRM as an innovative mechanism for benchmarking democracy and good governance in Africa remains largely within the control of the African leaders. Oche (2004), however, offers that the entire process of peer review could appear more frivolous and bogus, due to non-existence of the enforcement and compliance mechanism. The available option is the resort to the idea of peer pressure, which renders APRM as an instrument within the closet of NEPAD agenda. The idea of peer pressure only presupposes the resort to formal recommendations, informal dialogue by fellow leaders, comparisons, public scrutiny, and ranking among countries (Oche, 2004). Accordingly, Paragraph 24 of the APRM document proffers assistance to the reviewed country in the course of its inability to comply with the recommendations of the outcomes of the APRM review teams as necessary. The offers come in providing soft landings for the erring participating state through moral suasions, and other diplomatic measures in subtle approach.

Regrettably, and as a fall out of the precedence associated with international conventions, the APRM document is also marked with its voluntary participation and adherence and therefore, its provisions and outcomes are not enforceable nor binding on participating member-nations. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the APRM as a mechanism for benchmarking democracy and good governance, and by extension, the promotion of African economic prosperity and development project therefore, also depends largely on the political will put behind it by the African leaders.

CONCLUSION

So far, attempts have been made in this study to reflect on the mandate of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), as a tool by member states of the African Union,

that have voluntarily acceded to the programme, for sharing experiences, reinforcing best practices, identifying deficiencies, and assessing capacity-building needs to foster policies, standards and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated sub-regional and continental economic integration. The study sought to spotlight Nigeria, in particular, while reflecting on similar conditions in the African environment, in the lens of the mechanism, to determine how the country has fared in its commitment to the objectives of the APRM. The study applied the relevant theoretical framework suggested to underpin the research, and carried out considerable survey of literature, germane to contextualize and underpin the focus of the discourse. From the foregoing information and analysis of same, it is acknowledged that the pursuit of good governance and democracy in Africa is generally a herculean task within the prevailing ecosystem with which many African nations have been conditioned. The post colonial posture, owing to the African colonial heritage is without any doubt, has dominated much of debates on Africa's dialectics. However, the study did not fail to also argue that, the postcolonial leadership experience in Africa, of which Nigeria is a part, has been characterised by absence of pragmatic instinct and orientation, which requires absolute commitment to evolving the right policy measures for good governance. In this regard, Nigeria's leadership over the years has had to contend with policy inconsistencies, which mostly are borne out of conflicting groups' interests and even dithering in implementing policy recommendations on the basis of primordial considerations. With the two peer review exercises by Nigeria, the authors of this study are of the opinion that, a little more can be done to improve this report, but for the phenomenon of lack of political will. It is interesting that this trend may be changing as attested to by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Nigeria APRM, National Secretariat, Princess Gloria Akobundu, with the acknowledgement of the positive response of the Nigeria's President, Muhammadu Buhari to the recommendations arising from the First peer review report. According to Akobundu, President Buhari has graciously directed the immediate implementation of the African Peer Review Country Report, in relation to the revitalization of a National Secretariat and effective implementation of the National Programme of Action; domestication of APRM at the state and local government levels and repositioning of APRM Nigeria for effective service delivery; composition and inauguration of the National governing Council structure as well as the digitalization of the National Secretariat, among other considerations for the effective domestication of the APRM in Nigeria. The implications of all these actions by the Nigerian government are such that, the four thematic areas which include - Democracy and Political Governance; Economic Governance and Management; Corporate Governance; and Socio-economic Development and Governance, are gradually being addressed, given the practical steps that

have been taken in that regard. This is not to suggest that, the desired level of success in relation to the objectives of the Programme has been attained. The point must be made that the issues of good governance and genuine democratic practices, and all its concomitant variables are of a continuous nature, and not static. They are not just limited to constitutional responsibility, but they are also ethically and morally obligatory on the part of those who are either elected or appointed to manage and supervise the affairs of the society. The report also has it that the APRM National secretariat in Nigeria had embarked on several anti-corruption crusades in collaboration with relevant law enforcement agencies in addition to a series of nationwide sensitization campaigns on violence free election and voters education activities; election monitoring and evaluation, among other efforts in line with the mandates of APRM. These well meaning efforts must therefore be encouraged with a sustainable plan of actions to ensure the ceaseless implementation for the overall growth and development of Nigeria, and the serving as a model for other member states.

RECOMMENDATION

Conclusively, this study recommends as follows –

1. That the APRM is a laudable continent-wide agenda with the potential and capability to stimulate member states of the African Union into towards realizing the objectives of the agenda, and hence, member states are encouraged to demonstrate strong political will for its sustainability;

2. That Nigeria has demonstrated the required political will in its acceptance of the report from the Peer Review Panel, and in its willingness to act on same. This can be corroborated by the Nigeria's APRM Secretariat Chief Executive Officer, Princess Gloria Akobundu's interview report. According to Akobundu, "the Nigerian government has also demonstrated the political will and commitment to the APRM process. This, she noted was reflected in the establishment of all the structures for the review process and conduct of second cycle review; composition and inauguration of the National governing Council structure as well as the digitalization of the National Secretariat", (Vanguard Newspaper, 2020). The implication of this is that, the African leaders must demonstrate strong will for the purposes of ensuring good governance, and the entrenchment of democratic values in their respective countries;

3. That the prevailing culture of impunity as much of norms in most African countries is critically addressed, while the need for increased sense of patriotism, discipline and responsible behavior among the larger population of the African societies is also stimulated. By implication, promotion of good governance and adherence to democratic ethos, as well as, commitment to high level of sound corporate and management practices could be well entrenched .

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