

## BOOK REVIEW

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# Good for Government

THE AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM: LESSONS FROM THE PIONEERS, BY ROSS HERBERT AND STEVEN GRUZD, THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, JOHANNESBURG, 2008, [WWW.SAIIA.ORG.ZA](http://WWW.SAIIA.ORG.ZA)

**a**T THE HEIGHT OF THE KENYA POST-ELECTION crisis early this year, I reread the 2006 African Peer Review Mechanism report on that troubled country. It stated that: 'There is a need for a healing of the nation. The process of national healing and reconciliation is unlikely to proceed as long as society is still polarised. In addition, without also addressing past crimes, corruption, marginalisation and poverty, it is unlikely that reconciliation can be achieved'.

The report was presented to African heads of state two years ago by the panel of eminent people who wrote it and defended by President Mwai Kibaki himself at the July 2006 African Union summit. A frank assessment of Kenya's problems, it went on to consider previous violence there, making observations that are just as valid today.

Remember that a couple of years back Kenya was lauded as one of the first countries to complete the African Peer Review process and its decision to sign up was seen as a commitment to good governance. Had the problems highlighted by the report been tackled, it is possible that this year's violence could have been avoided.

The report shows that Africans can easily identify their own problems and that the mechanism can act as an early warning system. Twenty-nine countries have signed this innovative approach to improving African governance. Mauritania is the most recent, joining at the January African Union summit. The process has exceeded the expectations of many observers, offering opportunities for public dialogue, but has proved logistically and politically challenging.

## RESISTING PRESSURE

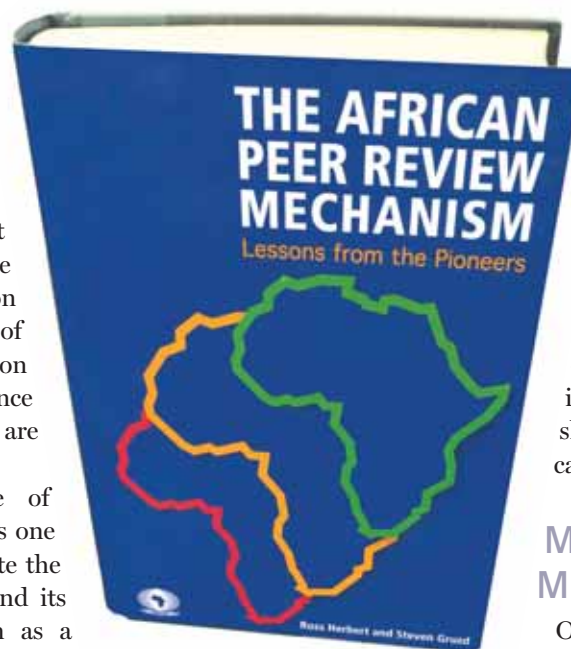
Ross Herbert and Stevan Gruzd's new book is the first in-depth study of the mechanism with analysis of the

evolving peer review process in the first five countries – Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Mauritius and South Africa.

Publication is well timed as new members of the panel are to be appointed soon and they could benefit from the lessons highlighted. They will also need to be strong enough to resist executive pressure to conform. As they select the next members and agree the secretariat budget, African heads of state themselves also need to stick to their original commitment that the process be independent and effective.

The book is also timely because, following Kenya, multiparty and presidential elections are scheduled in Ghana later this year and in South Africa next year. The Ghana case study is important as a statement of the country's quest for democratic, accountable and transparent government and appears to have some depth.

In contrast, the South Africa experience shows a government that feared the process and wanted to ensure particular outcomes and avoid criticism. The Kenya report also had weaknesses, such as failing to identify the independence of the Electoral Commission as vital for legitimate elections. As in Kenya, the silence of Zimbabwe's election commission over the violence in the run-up to its presidential poll shows how important this institution can be for fair elections.



## MISSING MONITORING

Overall, the authors show that quality reports are produced by eminent Africans, but national executives lack the will to implement the recommendations. There is no clear follow-up or action against poor performers. Although each country that has undergone the process is supposed to report back on progress to the Africa Peer Review Forum, there is no serious monitoring of how effectively this is done.

Thank goodness that the South African Institute of International Affairs is closely following the African Peer Review Mechanism.

Whereas the New Partnership for Africa's Development is wilting as President Thabo Mbeki's presidency draws to a close, and he is confronted with xenophobic unrest against African migrants at home – the mechanism has shown its value as an approach to improving African governance. It should be taken seriously by us all.

