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# **APRM and the Media: Getting the Story Right**

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**South African Institute of International Affairs**

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SAIIA's Governance and African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) programme aims to place governance and African development at the centre of local and global discussions about the continent's future. Its overall goal is to improve the ability of the APRM to contribute to governance reforms, institutions and processes. The programme focuses on: Enhancing meaningful and authentic participation of non-state actors in Country Self-Assessment Review (CSAR) and National Programme of Action (NPOA) processes; increasing knowledge amongst key decision-makers of the need for Country Level Institutions to be functional, have political support and enjoy legitimacy; increasing the capacity and functionality of official APRM institutions; and contributing to the identification of critical issues for governance reform in Africa through the APRM.

SAIIA has been working on the APRM since its inception in 2003. The programme has previously undertaken work in 22 African countries, developed an online APRM Toolkit with vital information on the APRM process, produced an extensive body of innovative research on governance and the APRM and has frequently commented on African governance issues in South African and international media. The programme is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

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## ABSTRACT

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is a voluntary scheme established in 2003 to improve member states' governance collectively and individually through following best practices and examples set by others. To date 33 African states have signed up, 17 of which have completed their first review. Signatory states undertake to be reviewed internally and externally. Those two reviews are combined into one report and the country then begins to implement its National Programme of Action (NPOA). In general, country reports succeed in pointing out successes and failures and provide a thorough assessment of the state of governance. Although the APRM is innovative and potentially headline-generating, it has so far failed to attract significant media coverage. It is aimed at improving their lives but most of the people of Africa do not know about it.

This paper examines four factors that could account for the lack of APRM media coverage. They are, respectively, the unsatisfactory way reports are 'packaged' for the media; whether the technicalities of the APRM are explained and understood; inadequate attempts to reach the media by APRM structures; and an APRM process that until recently excluded questions on the media from its self-assessment questionnaire. A fundamental flaw is that the APRM process gives little attention to issues of media freedom, reforms in relevant legislation and access to information. The paper includes case studies that draw on the experience of the Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project and the South African Institute of International Affairs. Recommendations are offered on how media coverage of the APRM can be improved.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AfriMAP	Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
CPS	Centre for Policy Studies
CRR	Country Review Report
CSAR	Country Self-Assessment Report
CSO	Civil society organisation
Fodep	Foundation for Democratic Process
NGC	National Governing Council
NPoA	National Programme of Action

## INTRODUCTION

The notion of the press as watchdog is more than two centuries old. According to classical liberal theory, public disclosure of issues helps protect society from abuse of power by governments. As a result, the press traditionally has been seen as the 'Fourth Estate', an institution to provide checks on government to prevent it from overstepping boundaries in exercising power.<sup>1</sup> In modern times specifically, print and electronic media ('the media') operating in a watchdog role, hold the potential to deter corruption and maladministration. When they perform this role effectively, the media helps ensure that individuals and institutions which are supposed to serve the public act in a transparent manner and are held accountable.<sup>2</sup> In addition the media can also provide a civic forum for public debate and highlight problems that could inform policy.<sup>3</sup> Finally, and of paramount importance, the media can keep citizens informed on public issues, although obviously it is up to the citizenry to decide how to use this information.<sup>4</sup> Given these different roles, it is evident that a free and vigilant media presence is fundamental to democracy and good governance.<sup>5</sup>

It is therefore surprising that the APRM, innovative though it may be, has largely left the media out of its procedures and in turn has been ignored by them. The APRM was established in 2003 as the continent's premier instrument for improving governance in Africa. It seeks to do so through a series of voluntary national 'peer reviews'. During each of these reviews, internal and external assessments are produced which determine what positive and negative governance practices exist. These two review documents are then combined to form the final APRM Country Review Report (CRR). Once a country has been reviewed it commits itself to implementing its National Programme of Action (NPOA), a framework outlining the way forward on identified governance issues across four thematic areas: respectively democracy and political governance, economic governance and management, corporate governance, and socio-economic development. As of October 2013, 33 African states had signed up to the APRM.<sup>6</sup>

The APRM is intended to involve citizens and civil society in a frank assessment of their country's governance achievements and challenges.<sup>7</sup> Official APRM guidelines do not make it mandatory for countries to involve media in the preparation of the Country Self-Assessment Report (CSAR) that forms the basis of the peer review.<sup>8</sup> As Rachel Mukamunana of the Continental APRM Secretariat points out, however, '[the] media are [among] the stakeholders required to be consulted during self-assessments and external reviews. The APRM also encourages countries to include media representatives on National Governing Councils (NGCs)<sup>9</sup> as part of ensuring broad representation of key stakeholders'.<sup>10</sup> The APRM also stipulates the presence on NGCs of media representatives as critical stakeholders, which has not gone unnoticed by civil society organisations (CSOs). According to Ousmane Deme, a researcher at Partnership Africa Canada, 'for the APRM exercise to be a success, it is important to push for broader media involvement in the review process. In terms of making the APRM accessible to the public and encouraging their [*sic*] active participation, the press is an indispensable lever in the dissemination of information. It has the means to reach a wide audience as it can deliver information in various African languages'.<sup>11</sup> The guarantees of freedom of expression and information are recognised as a basic human right in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights

and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights; implicit in both documents are governance standards to which the APRM subscribes.

The following table shows Ratings on Press Freedom for APRM member states from the inception of the mechanism. States that have already been peer-reviewed are marked with an asterisk. The ratings are produced by the Washington-based non-governmental organisation Freedom House.

**Table 1: Freedom House Ratings on Press Freedom**

Member States of the APRM	2003		2013	
	Score	Status	Score	Status
Algeria*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Angola	27	Not Free	68	Not Free
Benin*	28	Free	34	Partly Free
Burkina Faso*	39	Partly Free	42	Partly Free
Cameroon	65	Not Free	66	Not Free
Cape Verde	30	Free	27	Free
Djibouti	65	Not Free	74	Not Free
Egypt	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Equatorial Guinea	81	Not Free	91	Not Free
Ethiopia*	64	Not Free	82	Not Free
Gabon	58	Partly Free	71	Not Free
Ghana*	30	Free	28	Free
Guinea	74	Not Free	62	Not Free
Kenya*	68	Not Free	53	Partly Free
Lesotho*	42	Partly Free	49	Partly Free
Liberia	79	Not Free	56	Partly Free
Malawi	57	Partly Free	53	Partly Free
Mali*	24	Free	46	Partly Free
Mauritania	61	Not Free	47	Partly Free
Mauritius*	24	Free	30	Free
Mozambique*	47	Partly Free	42	Partly Free
Niger	53	Partly Free	50	Partly Free
Nigeria*	53	Partly Free	51	Partly Free
Republic of Congo	55	Partly Free	56	Partly Free
Rwanda*	80	Not Free	80	Not Free
São Tomé and Príncipe	19	Free	28	Free
Senegal	38	Partly Free	52	Partly Free
Sierra Leone*	61	Not Free	49	Partly Free
South Africa*	25	Free	35	Partly Free
Sudan	84	Not Free	80	Not Free
Tanzania*	47	Partly Free	51	Partly Free

Member States of the APRM	2003		2013	
	Score	Status	Score	Status
Togo	74	Not Free	70	Not Free
Tunisia	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Uganda*	45	Partly Free	55	Partly Free
Zambia*	63	Not Free	60	Partly Free

Note: Each country receives a numerical rating from 0 (most free) to 100 (least free), which serves as the basis for a press-freedom status designation of Free, Partly Free or Not Free.

Source: Freedom House, 'Freedom of the Press', <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-press-date>, accessed 6 September 2013.

As can be seen from the table, the APRM has had little if any influence on improving press freedom in member states. Out of the 17 countries so far reviewed, improvement from Not Free to Partly Free occurred only in Kenya, Sierra Leone and Zambia. Two member states – South Africa and Mali – reverted to Partly Free from Free.

## THE APRM AND THE MEDIA

The APRM has struggled to attract the media attention it deserves in terms of continental developments and processes and governance issues identified at the national level. This section examines the reasons for low media coverage of the APRM and proposes solutions to the problem.

The first issue is that while the APRM CRRs are comprehensive in scope, they are also bulky: an average report is usually 400–500 pages. Journalists working on mainstream media do not have time to read through so much information in the course of producing a short article. Hence there is an overall lack of commitment to a process so lengthy, complex and cumbersome that it deters editors from paying due attention. The APRM tends to make news only when the 'hook' is either sensational or overtly alarming. A case in point was the South African APRM review process, during which one of the country's leading newspapers carried the headline 'South Africa tells Africa to go to hell' in respect of the government's disregard of some of the report's recommendations. Some countries, notably Lesotho, have made efforts to publish executive summaries of their CRRs in a separate booklet, a practice that should be made mandatory for all member states (the APRM Secretariat has begun a similar process but mainly in respect of APR Forum meetings). Such a record should be made available to the public, with both the full CRR and the accompanying executive summary sent to all major media through official APRM channels. This would ensure that a journalist is able to take in all the major issues at a glance while, if necessary, referring to the CRR for more exhaustive treatment. Packaging information in a media-friendly manner is also crucial. Another aspect of the problem is a lack of in-depth consultation with editors on the part of the APRM Secretariat, in order to explain the purposes of the APRM, the quality of the information that would emerge, and how it could be used to expand the media's watchdog role. Such consultation could

also be used to emphasise the desirability of giving journalists covering the APRM process a specialist (or 'beat') approach, assigned to the story on a routine basis.

Secondly, the APRM is a complex and highly technical process. It involves five stages, a lengthy questionnaire, and various complicated oversight systems at national and continental levels. As a result the media often misunderstand the nuances of the APRM and reportage tends to be shallow, frequently containing factual errors. In the case of the early APRM member states, media coverage focused on official events. As a result it was usually short and shallow and lacking in detail.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the information offered did not contain sufficient background to, or explanation of, the APRM and why it might matter for the public. Most journalists do not know enough about the APRM and how it works; the technicalities of the process therefore need to be adequately explained to them. One way to do this would be to create and distribute a concise briefing pack explaining APRM processes, stages and key bodies, including description and diagrams where relevant. Such a package could also include a list of frequently asked questions, notable achievements in the first decade, a record of the date of accession of all participating states and their current status, and biographies of members of the APRM Panel of Eminent Persons. The material should be easily accessible in print and electronic forms.

A third issue is that where media reporting has taken place it tends to focus on APRM events. At the time of the South African review, Brendan Boyle, who covered it for the Johannesburg *Sunday Times*, said that the media reported only sporadically on the APRM. What coverage there was consisted of mostly routine reports on news conferences marking major milestones, at which reporters with no background knowledge of the process took notes but asked few or no questions. After that, reporting faded away. This situation is by no means unique to South Africa; in most other member states journalists covered only the start of the process, the inauguration of the NGC, the visit of the Country Review Team and the launch of the report.<sup>13</sup> This is problematic because the APRM should be seen as a two-step implementation process. The first stage is to identify existing issues and challenges that affect good governance and economic development, and commit to resolving them through a NPoA; the second is to implement the NPoA. Reporting on the latter has been at best sporadic in many APRM member states.

The media seem unaware of the NPoA implementation process and even where they are aware, there is little interest in reporting on it. Given the high costs involved (of the early APRM states Ghana, Kenya and South Africa each allocated \$1–2 million to the Country Self-Assessment Review)<sup>14</sup> which only increase further once the NPoA implementation commences, it seems obvious that the media have an obligation to play watchdog, measuring the government's progress on NPoA implementation and holding it to account. At the core of the APRM lie governance issues that affect people's daily lives. Stories of governance improvements, or the lack of them, might be considered hot topics for journalists. Granted, they can be hidden away behind a shield of technical jargon, abbreviations and the structural complications of the APRM; but the media need to look past these impediments and report on the governance content of the mechanism. Although the functioning of the APRM, its processes and events are important, it is the governance issues raised during the review that are at the core of the issue and that need closer scrutiny in the public interest.

The fourth issue concerns efforts by national and continental APRM structures to reach the media in an attempt to popularise the process and its outcomes which have to be

improved. A different information management strategy needs to be adopted at a continental level and specific guidelines should be given to national APRM structures (eg Focal Points and NGCs). Working journalists often fail to appreciate what value is added by the APRM precisely because of a lack of communication and clear messaging from local APRM governing bodies. Positive developments arising out of the APRM are not popularised; and although a few countries, notably Ghana and Uganda, have succeeded in publicly branding their accomplishments through the APRM, others have struggled to do so.

The lack of effort to elevate the profile of the APRM through the media also stems from an absence of clear cross-continental guidelines and a coherent media strategy at every level – continental, regional and national. Until recently, the APRM’s website, a key factor in modern communications, was inadequate, infrequently updated, and missing key documents and information. It has only recently been improved and a social media presence added; nevertheless there is room for further improvement. It is, however, notable that the APRM Secretariat has made a commitment to communicate and collaborate better with media and non-state actors. For example, a sensitisation workshop was held in February 2013 for media, CSOs and NGCs ahead of the APRM’s tenth anniversary celebrations in March. Even so, capacity enhancement in the Secretariat<sup>15</sup> would allow it to reach out more effectively to the media: the appointment of a dedicated manager responsible for media and communications is essential.

Mukamunana comments, however, that the media’s lack of interest in reporting on the APRM is insufficiently acknowledged. ‘The APRM has opened up a space for engagement in governance and this opportunity should have been grabbed by the media to consolidate its watchdog mandate. But they haven’t!’ [sic].<sup>16</sup>

The last point is that, until recently, the APRM excluded explicit questions about the media from its self-assessment questionnaire.<sup>17</sup> This is puzzling, considering the international and continental norms and standards that African Union member states have committed to uphold (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Upholding media rights: selected APRM standards**

APRM Standard	Article
UN Declaration on Human Rights <sup>a</sup>	<b>Article 19</b> Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.
African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights <sup>b</sup>	<b>Article 9</b> 1. Every individual shall have the right to receive information. 2. Every individual shall have the right to express and disseminate his opinions within the law.
African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance <sup>c</sup>	<b>Article 27</b> 8. Promoting freedom of expression, in particular freedom of the press and fostering a professional media.

APRM Standard	Article
Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa <sup>d</sup>	<p><b>Article 1</b></p> <p>Freedom of expression and information, including the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other form of communication, including across frontiers, is a fundamental and inalienable human right and an indispensable component of democracy.</p> <p>2. Everyone shall have an equal opportunity to exercise the right to freedom of expression and to access information without discrimination.</p>
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights <sup>e</sup>	<p><b>Article 19</b></p> <p>1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.</p> <p>2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.</p>

Source:

a: UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a19>, accessed 16 October 2013.

b: OAU (Organisation of African Unity), 'African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights', [http://www1.chr.up.ac.za/images/files/documents/ahrdd/theme01/african\\_charter\\_81\\_86.pdf](http://www1.chr.up.ac.za/images/files/documents/ahrdd/theme01/african_charter_81_86.pdf), accessed 6 October 2013.

c: AU (African Union), 'African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance', <http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/text/Charter%20on%20Democracy.pdf>, accessed 21 October 2013.

d: African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 'Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa', <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/achpr/expressionfreedomdec.html>, accessed 6 October 2013.

e: UN, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>, accessed 21 October 2013.

According to Raymond Louw, former chairman of the Media Freedom Committee of the South African National Editors' Forum, when the APRM process was first developed 'journalists and institutions ... protested to [the New Partnership for Africa's Development] Nepad and APRM Secretariats that the criteria for assessing good governance [are] seriously deficient in that [they fail] to take any account of the important ... indeed ... essential role of a free and independent press in a country professing to be a democracy and to practice good governance'.<sup>18</sup> These protests proved fruitless until the APRM questionnaire was revised in 2011. Although the new questionnaire includes one additional question on the role of media, arguably much more attention should have been given to the Fourth Estate as one of the most important pillars of a modern democratic state. Table 3 shows differences between the APRM's original and revised questionnaires:

**Table 3: Treatment of media issues: original and revised questionnaires**

Item	Original	Revised
In the Democracy and Political Governance section, media are included in the definition of vibrant civil society, seen as a precondition for the existence of a democratic state: 'This includes the existence of free and pluralistic media and vibrant civil society organisations'	Included	Included
Democracy and Political Governance  Objective 4: Promotion and Protection of Civil and Political Rights as enshrined in African and International Human Rights Instruments.  Question 1: What measures have been put in place to promote and enforce civil rights?  Indicator: Identify legal provisions that recognise and guarantee basic civil rights, including but not limited to the following:  Freedom of expression and media freedom	Not included	Included after revision
Corporate Governance  Objective 3: Promoting Adoption of Codes of Good Business Ethics in Achieving the Objectives of the Corporation  Question 1: What is the overall assessment of the corporate integrity in the country?  Indicators: Role of the media and quality of investigative financial journalism in reporting on economic crimes and ethics violation	Included	Replaced with:  Objective 3: Ensuring Ethical Conduct Within Organisations  Question 1: What is the overall assessment of ethics within organisations in your country?  Indicators: Describe the role of the media and quality of investigative financial journalism in reporting on corporate governance practices and ethics violation and the challenges faced by the media in doing so

Item	Original	Revised
<p>Socio-economic development</p> <p>Question 1: What mechanisms have been put in place to promote and encourage effective participation in development processes by key stakeholders?</p> <p>Indicator: Provide evidence of legal, policy and institutional steps to ensure broadbased participation in the development process by all stakeholders including CSOs, private sector, media, rural communities, women groups, minorities and marginalised groups</p>	Included	Removed following revision

Source: Revised APRM questionnaire, adopted in 2012, <http://aprm-au.org/sites/default/files/Revised%20APRM%20Eng%20Questionnaire%206%20Aug%2012.pdf>, accessed 30 January 2014.

Original APRM Questionnaire, adopted in 2004, [http://aprmtoolkit.saiia.org.za/component/docman/doc\\_download/11-atkt-csa-questionnaire-2004-en](http://aprmtoolkit.saiia.org.za/component/docman/doc_download/11-atkt-csa-questionnaire-2004-en), accessed 30 January 2014.

As Table 3 shows, the original questionnaire contained scant coverage of media issues and placed questions relating to media under its corporate governance and socio-economic development sections. Although the importance of these sections is not in question, it can be argued that the freedom accorded journalists is often indicative of the larger democratic context within which society is permitted to operate. Authoritarian states usually suppress independent media through heavy censorship and intimidation while retaining a tight grip on state media paid for by public funds. At the same time, democratic states usually feature a larger number of independently-owned media houses that are free to run critical stories, including reports on such matters as corruption, poor public service delivery, high unemployment, police brutality, chronic economic failures or inadequate representation of constituents by parliamentarians. It is therefore commendable that a lacuna concerning legal provision for media freedom was remedied in the revised APRM questionnaire and a question relating to it was incorporated. Such a revision alone, however, is not sufficient; the importance of the role of the media should warrant a full, separate section or question in the next revision of the questionnaire.

Mukamunana comments:

In every society, you have a wide range of stakeholders and interest groups that feel strongly about issues that matter to them. Therefore, covering important issues in a comprehensive and balanced manner has been a challenge; but one that has been adequately addressed, we want to believe. It should also be noted that the APRM Questionnaire is only a guideline. Country [specifics] sometimes determine the emphasis of issues. Hence some CRRs have brought out more strongly issues of media freedom and right to information.<sup>19</sup>

### **Case Study: Zambia media and civil society training workshop**

In May 2013 the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) and the Foundation for Democratic Process (Fodep) held a regional training workshop in Lusaka, focusing on media coverage of the APRM in Zambia, Tanzania, Malawi and South Africa. A SAIIA guide, 'Engaging with the Media on APRM Issues', assisted participants in looking at ways of improving coverage of the APRM in the media, quantitatively and qualitatively.

Zambia and Tanzania were each peer-reviewed by the APR Forum in January 2013 and are therefore in a similar position as regards their creating a road-map for CSOs and media engagement in implementing and monitoring the NPoA. Although Malawi was one of the first to join the APRM in 2004, the process has barely moved since. The South African situation is discussed in detail in the case study that follows.

The impact of the media in reporting on the APRM in Zambia from its inception has been negligible. Workshop participants pointed out that there are larger issues affecting Zambia's media, such as under-staffing and a lack of specialisation. Furthermore, media stories often focus on descriptions of events, rather than analysis of their significance and the issues at hand. Lack of continuity is another problem; journalists are not assigned to cover the entire duration of specific projects and initiatives. Hence different journalists from the same newspaper may be covering APRM events and occurrences as they happen. Considering how technically complex the APRM process may seem to an outsider, this approach can result in superficial reporting – on events and not on content or significance.

Nevertheless, there is clear media interest in the APRM, made evident through the training workshop. Some 40 participants attended. Zambia's *Daily Mail* and *Times* newspapers published stories about the event, which was also covered on national TV and radio (Radio Phoenix, 5 FM, Christian Voice and Comet). Mwansa Kapeya, Zambia's deputy minister of information and broadcasting services, attended the workshop and delivered the keynote address.

This case study in part shows the need for a comprehensive continental media strategy on the APRM to be implemented at a national level in member states. Such a scheme would help alleviate the problems identified in coverage of the APRM in Zambia, which are by no means unique to that country: a lack of training and specialisation, focus, coverage and continuity.

The APRM Secretariat has a different view on the matter and notes that media engagement in Tanzania is robust. The latter's national APRM Secretariat keeps media abreast of APRM-related matters through a communications office which it contends has demonstrated its importance in keeping the APRM alive, not only in the news but also in the minds of citizens, and that other states could learn from this experience.<sup>20</sup>

**Case Study: APRM monitoring project in South Africa**

On 28 June 2011 South African civil society, represented by SAIIA, the Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project (AfriMAP) and the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) launched an independent report that tracked the status of the APRM in the Republic. The report ('Implementing the APRM: Views from Civil Society') aimed at assessing progress on the key issues identified in South Africa's NPoA. It did not look at all the problems identified in the 378-page CRR but concentrated on the most pressing ones. South Africa's Public Protector was the keynote speaker followed by the director of ActionAid South Africa as a respondent. The Mayor of Tshwane also spoke at the event. All spoke highly of the APRM as a governance initiative and praised CSOs' efforts to keep the process alive and relevant in South Africa.

In order to generate interest in the content of the report, a traffic light rating system was used to measure progress. Green signified success in handling the issue, orange indicated mixed performance and red flagged a serious challenge. This method proved successful and the report received significant media attention in South Africa and internationally, prompting miscellaneous public comment on governance matters through the prism of the APRM. Researchers from SAIIA and AfriMAP were interviewed by the BBC and local stations ETV and Talk Radio 702 among others, and on the day of the launch some 25 articles appeared on South African news websites such as Independent Online (IOL), News 24 and Eye Witness News. The report was also noted at government level, in particular by Minister of Police Nathi Mthethwa and Minister of Public Service and Administration Richard Baloyi, who commented publicly on its findings.

The APRM in South Africa has suffered from a low profile and lack of media attention. According to Boyle it is difficult for a journalist to stay with the APRM story because the country is 'jaded by a plethora of projects each with its own acronym and little evidence of real results. Foreign donor fatigue is matched in South Africa by social scepticism. The default position of most readers and viewers is to be interested in results rather than promises or even plans.'<sup>21</sup>

This case study shows, however, that if packaged in a media-friendly manner the APRM can attract significant attention from print, radio and TV journalists. Another important lesson was also learned. In order to educate journalists on the APRM, CSOs produced a media pack which outlined and explained the process. In spite of this, many journalists made serious factual mistakes in their articles and some even confused the CSO report with the official CRR. This relates to the point made earlier about the necessity of media houses' assigning journalists to work on the APRM continuously, so as to better understand the subject – much as do specialist reporters on court and crime beats, or on parliamentary affairs. Finally, a few months after the launch of the report, the media once again turned away from South Africa's APRM, indicating the need for continual engagement on the part of the APRM. Regular press conferences, briefings and press releases from the APRM's Focal Point and NGC, and CSOs, would certainly help in maintaining media attention.

**Case Study: Experience from Mozambique and Uganda**

AfriMAP conducted an independent review of the APRM process in 12 countries<sup>22</sup> over a four-year period. This research revealed that the APRM's visibility in the media has waned over time. The process has been reported on infrequently and has not generally received prominent coverage. AfriMAP's Mozambique report, launched by Dr Graça Machel, widow of the former president Samora Machel, attracted media attention due more to her personal prominence than because of the issues it highlighted. In Uganda, coverage of AfriMAP's report was high because researchers had stated publicly that the process had been hijacked by President Yoweri Museveni, and parliament was left unable to control it. Media picked up on this debate, especially when a local member of parliament spoke up against the perception that the country's legislature is a rubber stamp and has done little to promote APRM values. The MP promised to go through the right channels to ensure that one of the key recommendations for a domestic legal framework was implemented.

The launch also drew the attention of the media because the person presiding over proceedings, Reverend Zac Niringiye, a member of the NGC, interrogated the report and criticised some of its findings. He stated that the report on the value of the APRM was not thorough enough and that it should have assessed impact. The authors, in response, stated that the mandate of the study was to assess strengths and weaknesses in the APRM process and that although an impact assessment was included, it was limited in its promotion of national dialogue (among other issues). Clearly, domestic debate over the report made for good media coverage, although the main point – the report itself – was lost in transmission. Media coverage of the APRM in these two countries and in the other ten states covered over the period has been intermittent, inconsistent, disjointed and superficial. As a result the issues that needed to be promoted through the APRM were unclear, with research on them lacking in credibility, because journalists shied away from immersing themselves in the process. That situation is unlikely to change over time, unless CSOs fully engaged with the process devise a way of including media in their reach and take further steps to train the press corps on the APRM by getting journalists involved in all aspects of the process.

Journalists across the continent were sent an electronic survey, asking them about current coverage of the APRM and ways to improve it. Responses are listed below.

**Q: To what extent have you covered the APRM: both the continental processes and in-country developments?**

**A:** Coverage of the APRM is generally low. Although the APRM conducts a very detailed and highly credible process, it does not communicate directly with the media. When the APRM is mentioned it is usually shorn of political, social, cultural or economic criticisms. The result is not terribly exciting either for the media or its audiences. There are also no events such as rankings, prize-givings [sic] or other public symbols of success that might otherwise capture media attention.

*Iqbal Ahmed Khan, l'Express, Mauritius*

The APRM is a young process and therefore should emphasise communication and media exposure. One way of encouragement would be to train reporting teams. While we have always supported activities for development and promotion of good governance in Africa, we are limited by our means.

*Crepin Ngangha, Radio Africa No 1, Gabon*

In my country, no meeting or discussion on the APRM has ever been brought to my attention for possible media coverage. This clearly shows that the APRM is not sufficiently publicised [indeed] almost ignored in the press. The messages conveyed by the mechanism are therefore not being transmitted.

*Amadou Seck, La Calambe, Mauritania*

Coverage of the process in Malawi is still low due to the complexity of the APRM and lack of interest from the media. APRM-related issues are rarely carried in the newspapers, as many editors do not find them interesting. The complexity of the APRM also leaves some editors confused. Briefing of editors and training of reporters will be crucial if APRM issues are to be covered in the media.

*Michael Moses Phiri, The Nation, Malawi*

Sometimes sending press releases is not enough because there is always too much information on the release with no tangible evidence of what is happening on the ground. Having journalists covering the event has more impact. Capacity building is also very essential. Therefore media training is necessary so as to ensure that what is being reported on APRM is ... correct and this also ensures that there is consistency.

**Q: What, in your opinion, needs to be done to increase the coverage of the APRM in Africa and improve its quality?**

**A:** Create something equivalent to a series of awards revolving around the four thematic areas of the APRM to recognise states that have made most progress in each. The APRM already records the progress of members; all it needs is to give it more symbolic value. This need not be accompanied by monetary reward, but by the prestige associated with it. Countries would not be ranked, but rather singled out for praise and recognition.

*Iqbal Ahmed Khan*

The APRM should not become an exercise where leaders congratulate themselves. Peer-reviews should be broadened to include representatives from CSOs and journalists.

*Crepin Ngangha*

We must engage in a broad media campaign to raise awareness of the APRM. The media should be a valuable ally to anchor the principles of good governance in Africa. In fact, participatory mechanisms around the APRM should be broadened to give it a new dimension beyond the inner circle of leaders and experts.

*Amadou Seck*

APRM structures should understand that the process is for the good of African people.

These people have to be informed. APRM structures should take the media as partner in this process. It will be an expensive affair but the African people have a right to be informed about the APRM. Journalists should be trained to improve quality and to avoid confusing editors with APRM jargon.

*Michael Moses Phiri*

APRM structures must disseminate relevant information and also hold frequent meetings on the topic.

*Happiness Mnale, Tanzania Daima, Tanzania*

The APRM Secretariat needs to engage the media more for improved coverage. One way to do this would be to hold training for journalists from different countries. These journalists would then cover relevant APRM-related stories.

## CONCLUSION

What limited media coverage of the APRM there is on a national level tends to end as soon as the CRR is released. It is important to remember, however, that the APRM should be viewed as a two-step process. The first stage is the country review, identification of governance issues and the publication of the CRR. This is an important theoretical step by which to identify governance issues and methods of improvement. Once that has been completed, however, the country embarks on the second, practical matter of implementing the NPoA. As efforts to resolve governance issues identified in the CRR are stepped up, the media need to participate in the process by closely monitoring and reporting on progress – or lack of it. In most countries the APRM fades away once the review has been completed, and the government neglects implementation of the NPoA. This situation needs to be avoided if the APRM is to become a continuous governance assessment and improvement mechanism and not a once-off review. The media has a crucial role to play both in the APRM and the broader governance and democratic processes. News media are most effective in strengthening the process of democratisation, good governance and human development when journalists function as watchdogs over the abuse of power; when they serve as a civic forum for political debate; and when they set agendas for policy makers.<sup>23</sup> Through participation in the APRM the media could perform all these roles and strengthen the process as a result. They could also generate greater interest in the peer review process among the public at large.

Although the APRM can be highly specialised and technical, at the end of the day it is about governance issues which affect the citizenry. Unpacking these questions from a lengthy CRR on a regular basis, reporting on progress achieved, and charting the way forward is a challenge that relevant stakeholders must collectively address. The media is a catalyst for achieving this result but has thus far been underutilised. Given the number of stories competing for newsroom attention and the insatiable appetite for sensationalism within news cycles with shrinking lifespans, the APRM needs to find a niche within the complicated mix as it strives to remain relevant to the people it is meant to serve. Several recommendations arising from this line of argument follow.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Continental structures (APRM Forum, APRM Panel and APRM Secretariat)**

Design and implement media strategies:

- at continental level, to highlight overall progress, achievements and challenges; and
- at national level, to focus on identified governance issues and implementation of the NPoA.

### **NGCs**

Involve the media in the APRM process by:

- inviting them to national APRM events; and
- continually issuing media releases on progress achieved in implementing the NPoA.

### **CSOs and think tanks**

Ensure that the media can be involved in the process by:

- inviting them to events where discussion takes place on governance and APRM issues; and
- sharing research and publications on governance issues highlighted as a result of the APRM.

### **Media**

Become involved in the process through:

- assigning a dedicated journalist to cover APRM matters and therefore ensuring continual and informed reporting; and
- creating links with CSOs and think tanks working on the APRM to obtain information and analysis.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Coronel S, 'Corruption and the Watchdog Role of the News Media', in Norris P (ed.), *Public Sentinel: News Media & Governance Reform*. Washington DC: World Bank, p. 111.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 114.
- 3 Norris P, *Driving Democracy: do power-sharing institutions work?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 4.
- 4 Coronel S, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 114.
- 6 The 33 states are: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Congo (Brazzaville), Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, São Tomé & Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda and Zambia. Of these, 17 have been reviewed (in order of review) they are: Ghana, Rwanda, Kenya, South Africa, Algeria, Benin, Uganda, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mozambique, Lesotho, Mauritius, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Zambia. Kenya is currently undergoing its second review, while Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa are reportedly preparing to do the same.

- 7 Boyle B, 'Making the News: Why the African Peer Review Mechanism Didn't', Occasional Paper, 12. Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), September 2008, p. 1.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 9 NGCs (National Governing Councils) provide strategic policy direction to the implementation of the APRM in-country. The Country Guidelines provide that the National Commission (or NGC) established to manage the process at national level should be autonomous from government and inclusive of all key stakeholders, consisting of upstanding citizens who command the respect of the general public.
- 10 Correspondence with R Mukamunana, 27 November 2013.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 12 Herbert R, *Influencing the APRM: A Checklist for Civil Society*. Johannesburg: SAIIA, 2007.
- 13 Herbert R, *op. cit.*
- 14 Herbert R & S Gruzd, *The African Peer Review Mechanism: Lessons from the Pioneers*. Johannesburg: SAIIA, 2008.
- 15 Busia K, 'The APRM: Celebrating a decade of peer reviewing and learning while institutionalising democratic governance in Africa', *GREAT Insights*, 2, 6, September 2013.
- 16 Correspondence with R Mukamunana, *op. cit.*
- 17 The purpose of the Questionnaire is twofold. The first is to provide participating countries with a checklist to determine whether stakeholders have responded to their concerns. The second is to provide an overview of the results of their own self-assessment processes.
- 18 Boyle B, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
- 19 Correspondence with R Mukamunana, *op. cit.*
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 Boyle B, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
- 22 *The African Peer Review Mechanism: A compilation of studies of the process in nine African countries*. Johannesburg: Open Society Foundations Publications, 2010.
- 23 Norris P, *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

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