

# Special Report

September 2025

## Governance in Southern Africa: Insights from Civil Society

TASNEEM VANIA

African perspectives  
Global insights

# Executive summary

This report presents a synthesis of insights from seven submissions to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) from coalitions of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

The chapter on ‘Democracy and political governance’ contextualises democracy and governance in Africa. It examines the transition towards multiparty democracy (highlighting both progress and limitations), explores the role of the military in undermining democratic systems, assesses democratic resilience and the value of civic engagement and analyses the application of the ‘separation of powers’ doctrine in practice.

The chapter on ‘Economic and corporate governance in the APRM context’ addresses corruption and accountability in economic governance, economic empowerment and inequality, corporate governance and the role of the private sector. It concludes by exploring strategies to strengthen governance for inclusive development.

This is followed by a chapter on ‘State resilience, sustainable development and the environment’, which explores climate change, sustainable development, environmental practices and socio-economic development, concluding with a sustainable path forward.

This report offers a comparative analysis of governance concerns and successes across the seven countries from the perspective of civil society. While CSOs are crucial intermediaries between governments and communities – and critical to a country’s long-term well-being – they are increasingly under political and financial threat.

The findings indicate that although significant progress has been made in developing frameworks and policies, implementation and delivery often remain weak. The report underscores the importance of strong democratic institutions, regional cooperation and inclusive governance that prioritises citizens’ needs and engages all sectors of society.

Finally, this report affirms the value of the APRM as both a tool for peer learning and a means for civil society to hold governments accountable in a participatory and sustainable manner. More broadly, it emphasises that freedom of expression is essential not only for individual liberty but also for advancing national governance and long-term stability.

# Abbreviations & acronyms

APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
AU	African Union
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
CSO	civil society organisation
DCEC	Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime
KAS	Konrad Adenauer Stiftung
SAIIA	South African Institute of International Affairs

# Author

## Tasneem Vania

is a KAS-SAIIA scholar in the African Governance and Diplomacy Programme at SAIIA, currently completing her Master's in International Relations at the University of the Witwatersrand.

# Acknowledgement

SAIIA gratefully acknowledges the generous support from the Government of Sweden for this work.

# About SAIIA

SAIIA is an independent, non-government think tank whose key strategic objectives are to make effective input into public policy, and to encourage wider and more informed debate on international affairs, with particular emphasis on African issues and concerns.

SAIIA'S special reports are fairly lengthy analytical papers, usually reflecting on and analysing the findings of field research.

## Cover image

Eoneren via Getty Images

All rights reserved. Copyright is vested in the South African Institute of International Affairs and the authors, and no part may be reproduced in whole or in part without the express permission, in writing, of the publisher.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author/s and do not necessarily reflect the views of SAIIA.

Please note that all currencies are in US\$ unless otherwise indicated.

# Contents

Executive summary	2
Abbreviations & acronyms	3
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	<b>6</b>
Introduction	6
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	<b>8</b>
Democracy and political governance	8
Contextualising democracy and governance in Africa	8
Transitions to multiparty democracy: Progress and limitations	8
Democracy undermined: The role of instability and military power	9
Democratic resilience and the importance of engagement	10
Separation of powers in practice: Executive dominance and judicial vulnerability	11
Upholding constitutionalism and democratic practice	13
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	<b>14</b>
Economic governance and management and corporate governance	14
Economic and corporate governance in the APRM context	14
Corruption and accountability in economic governance	14
Economic empowerment and inequality	16
Corporate governance and the role of the private sector	18
Strengthening governance for inclusive development	19
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	<b>21</b>
State resilience, sustainable development and the environment	21
Climate change	21
Sustainable development	22
Environmental practices	23
Socio-economic development	24
Looking forward	25
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	<b>26</b>
Conclusion	26

# Introduction

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) was initiated in 2002 and established in 2003 as a governance monitoring and promotion instrument of the AU.<sup>1</sup> It aims to improve governance across Africa by assessing the state in its entirety.<sup>2</sup> The APRM process requires meaningful engagement between the private, public and civil society sectors to identify the strengths and weaknesses of governments and governance structures.<sup>3</sup>

This report has been compiled based on civil society organisation (CSO) submissions to the APRM from seven countries in Southern Africa: Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. These submissions were co-created by CSOs guided by the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) between 2019 and 2025. These CSOs did not attempt to respond to the full APRM questionnaire but selected the issues they deemed most relevant and important. Likewise, this report does not consider all the issues discussed in the submissions. It takes into consideration the six key thematic areas of the APRM:<sup>4</sup>

- democracy and political governance;
- economic governance and management;
- corporate governance;
- socio-economic governance;
- state resilience to shocks and disasters; and
- e-governance.

The methodology used in this report involved identifying common challenges faced by African countries using the APRM CSO submissions. After careful consideration and with deliberate intent to limit the scope of the report, the material was divided into three chapters. The first of these, 'Democracy and political governance', focuses on democracy in post-colonial Africa, political stability and the separation of powers doctrine. The second, 'Economic governance and management and corporate governance', examines economic and corporate governance across the private and public sphere, corruption, economic empowerment policy and sustainability. The third, 'State resilience, sustainable

---

1 APRM, "Africa's Self-Assessment for Good Governance", accessed August 12, 2025, <https://au.int/en/organs/aprm>.

2 Ross Herbert and Steven Gruz, "The African Peer Review Mechanism Lessons from the Pioneers", *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 2008.

3 Steven Gruz and Yarik Turianskyi, *Implementing the APRM: Views from Civil Society*, Report (South African Institute of International Affairs, June 2011).

4 APRM, "Thematic Areas", accessed August 12, 2025, <https://aprm.au.int/en/focus>.

development and the environment', focuses on climate change, environmental practices, sustainable development and what resilience means in the context of broader environmental governance.

Africa, while facing many challenges, is also a continent of ambition, resilience and the ability to thrive

What will be demonstrated is that Africa, while facing many challenges, is also a continent of ambition, resilience and the ability to thrive.

Looking ahead, it remains a place of hope: a sentiment captured in the West-African Wolof proverb 'Garap lo tbia gadbia mou sajati' – 'The split tree still grows.'<sup>5</sup>

---

5 Angie Okul, "[4 African Quotes to Keep You Going in Tough Times](#)", *Medium*, August 18, 2020.

# Democracy and political governance

## Contextualising democracy and governance in Africa

Democracy and political governance in the African context are no less challenging to analyse today than they were half a century ago. While the era of decolonisation after the 1950s symbolised a new beginning for the continent, governance structures remain poor and democracy is increasingly under threat. Democracy is, of course, a loaded term. The Greeks defined democracy as the ‘rule of the demos’, ie, the rule of the majority.<sup>6</sup> Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address produced a more sophisticated idea of democracy as a ‘government of the people, by the people, for the people’.<sup>7</sup> Yet much of the discourse surrounding democracy is criticised as being Western-centric. The Global South, including its African members, has had unique experiences. Charles Tilly argued that ‘war made the state, and the state made war’, which is potentially true in the European context.<sup>8</sup> Africa’s history is different, however. African states did not form organically, nor did their governance structures. Regardless, political governance in Africa is significant. It directly affects over 1.5 billion people and, in an increasingly interconnected world, both shapes and is shaped by the Global South and the Global North.

## Transitions to multiparty democracy: Progress and limitations

The CSO submissions to the APRM demonstrate that, as a theme, democracy and good political governance remain an integral aspect of Africa’s development. A useful starting point for understanding contemporary political governance on the continent is to examine how different countries transitioned from single-party systems to multiparty democracies, mostly in the 1990s. It is also important to note the extent to which those transitions have led to substantive change in the operation of politics and governance in the respective countries.

As occurred in much of the world in the 1980s and 1990s, numerous countries in Africa made the move from authoritarian or otherwise closed government systems to at least nominally competitive multiparty ones. This was the so-called ‘third wave of democratisation’.

---

6 Joseph P. Maguire, “Some Greek Views of Democracy and Totalitarianism”, *Ethics* 56, no. 2 (January 1946): 136–43.

7 Abraham Lincoln, “Gettysburg Address, delivered at Gettysburg Pa. Nov. 19th, 1863. [n.p., n.d.]”, US Library of Congress, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.24404500/?st=text>.

8 Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States: AD 990–1992* (Basil Blackwell, 1992), 67.



Tanzania has a unique history of political governance, as it was formed out of the union of the Republic of Tanganyika and the People's Republic of Zanzibar.<sup>9</sup> The reasons for the unification are debated but they include arguments of socio-economic and political benefit, as well as alleviating the risk of political instability that affected many African countries following decolonisation.<sup>10</sup> What is important to note in this case is that Tanzania was a single-party socialist state until the 1990s, under the control of the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (the Revolutionary Party [CCM]).<sup>11</sup> While multiparty democracy is now the order of the day, mono-party politics still dominate the political discourse, as the CCM retains its dominance.

At the same time that Tanzania transitioned from a single-party system to a multiparty democracy in the 1990s, so did Malawi.<sup>12</sup> While Tanzania faces challenges related to the structure of the union itself and Zanzibar's autonomy,<sup>13</sup> Malawi's governance is plagued with issues related to nepotism, tribal politics, intra-party issues and a lack of transparency.<sup>14</sup> Intra-party conflict is driven by a lack of internal democracy and power struggles over leadership positions, leading to division and weakened governance structures.<sup>15</sup> This reflects a broader trend: while multiparty democracy is a positive step, it alone is insufficient to address deeper governance challenges. This is especially the case when the issues run deep, such as questioning the foundations of a country, as is the case in Tanzania,<sup>16</sup> and tribal politics in Malawi.<sup>17</sup> It also ties into a lack of organic state formation and demonstrates the continuing absence of strong national identification.

## Democracy undermined: The role of instability and military power

While some states made peaceful transitions to multiparty democracy, others experienced persistent instability, power struggles and military interference, which separately or cumulatively threaten the foundations of democratic governance.

Independence marked the formal birth of African states and symbolised national liberation, yet struggles around power-sharing and representation persist. Lesotho, for example, has seen repeated military interventions in civilian politics.<sup>18</sup> Post-colonial Lesotho has been marred by power-hungry factions, military coups and even SADC interventions, despite its democratic ambitions.<sup>19</sup> The constant upheaval reflects a broader trend of nations struggling to develop as political turmoil threatens the stability needed to thrive.

---

9 Civil Society Submission, "[Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project](#)" (SAIIA, June 2025).

10 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

11 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

12 SAIIA, "[Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project](#)" (SAIIA, June 2024).

13 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

14 "Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project".

15 "Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project".

16 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

17 "Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project".

18 SAIIA and Governance Institute for Sustainable Development, "[Lesotho Civil Society Submission to the APRM](#)", (SAIIA, July 2022).

19 "Lesotho Civil Society Submission to the APRM".

## Independence marked the formal birth of African states and symbolised national liberation, yet struggles around power-sharing and representation persist

Zimbabwe similarly has faced an uphill battle since its independence, as it has gone from being the 'breadbasket' of Africa to becoming one of the continent's most unstable countries, in every sense of the term.<sup>20</sup> In a process begun under president Robert Mugabe's decades-long rule, and with little improvement under current President Emmerson Mnangagwa, its governance has evolved towards what is in effect a military state.<sup>21</sup> The military has captured the media, judiciary, legislature and electoral processes.<sup>22</sup> Lesotho and Zimbabwe (particularly Zimbabwe) serve as cautionary examples of governments that both rely on the military to maintain their power while simultaneously being at the mercy of said military.

### Democratic resilience and the importance of engagement

In contrast, several countries offer relatively more stable examples of democratic governance, even if challenges such as executive dominance or democratic disengagement remain. These cases provide insights into how democratic values, constitutional norms and civic engagement can help build resilience.

Botswana, South Africa and Namibia appear to have fared somewhat better in terms of political governance. Botswana is well regarded globally for its multiparty democracy, constitutional freedom and rights – all of which are generally upheld, even if more can be done to protect vital human rights.<sup>23</sup>

While Namibia is a democracy with a relatively stable government, executive dominance is problematic, as it limits the extent of democratic practice.<sup>24</sup> In South Africa's case, despite democracy being a core national value and practice, youth participation in the democratic process is not what it should be.<sup>25</sup> Given South Africa's youthful demographic,<sup>26</sup> young people can meaningfully influence political governance through electoral participation and active engagement in civic and advocacy initiatives.<sup>27</sup>

---

20 Zimbabwean APRM Civil Society Working Group, "Civil Society Submission to the APRM in Zimbabwe 2020/2021" (SAIIA, October 2021).

21 "Civil Society Submission to the APRM in Zimbabwe".

22 "Civil Society Submission to the APRM in Zimbabwe".

23 Civil Society Submission, "The Big Governance Issues in Botswana: A Civil Society Submission to the APRM" (SAIIA, March 2021).

24 Civil Society Submission, "Call for Action: A Review of Critical Issues for the APRM Process in Namibia" (SAIIA, June 2019).

25 SA Civil Society Submission, "Youth Submission to the APRM in South Africa" (SAIIA, May 2021).

26 Stats SA, "The Social Profile of South African Youth: A Decade in Review", February 27, 2025.

27 Stats SA, "Social Profile of South African Youth".

The noticeable trend is that while these countries have issues that need to be tackled, their democratic and constitutional values alleviate some of these challenges or at least provide a plausible pathway to do so. Representative governance structures that focus on upholding the rule of law make for more stable African states, which lowers the risk – without fully eliminating it – of political and security turmoil such as coups d'état.

## Separation of powers in practice: Executive dominance and judicial vulnerability

The 'separation of powers' doctrine is a critical feature of constitutional democracy. However, across the African continent, executive dominance remains a recurring theme, weakening the intended checks and balances of governance. This section examines how it plays out in practice.

Executive dominance remains a recurring theme, weakening the intended checks and balances of governance

Separation of powers is an essential element of constitutional governance, yet it remains an elusive goal for many African countries. The idea is that the judicial, legislative and executive branches of government are separated and independent to ensure oversight, accountability and transparency. The separation of powers doctrine in the African context is studied by examining the CSO APRM submissions of Malawi, Tanzania, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia.

These CSO submissions demonstrate that, while the principle of separation of powers is present, in practice the branches of government are often unbalanced, usually in favour of the executive. In Malawi, the executive branch holds more sway than the other two despite the president's pledge to review this.<sup>28</sup> This is troubling, as is the fact that political parties feel comfortable enough to have a contentious relationship with the judiciary, as was seen after the 2019 election.<sup>29</sup> The courts had annulled this election after finding significant irregularities, leading to attempts to bribe the judges.<sup>30</sup> This set a dangerous precedent, despite the judiciary's being strong enough to resist.<sup>31</sup>

---

28 "Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project".

29 "Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project".

30 "Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project".

31 "Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project".

In Tanzania a similar challenge persists with regard to the judiciary, as the executive has a history of disregarding judicial decisions,<sup>32</sup> even nullifying a judicial decision in 2018.<sup>33</sup> Once again, this demonstrates that in countries that do not uphold the principle of separation of powers, the judiciary is often bullied and its exercise of power is limited.

Lesotho is a more complex case, given that the executive and legislative branches are essentially fused.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the country is a constitutional monarchy with the king exercising power over the judiciary, including appointing the chief justice with the advice of the prime minister.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the Lesotho APRM civil society submission provides an interesting backdrop to explore an African state balancing democratic ideals with a monarchy.<sup>36</sup> To an extent, it has fared well, but – as is evident with the judiciary – it is difficult to remain democratically consistent when so much power is vested in the king.<sup>37</sup>

Botswana, despite being a constitutional democracy, has yet to fully implement the doctrine of separation of powers.<sup>38</sup> As in Lesotho, the lines between the legislature and the executive are blurred.<sup>39</sup> The executive has an immense amount of power and Parliament falls under the Office of the President.<sup>40</sup> This opens the system to a concentration and an abuse of power, with Parliament accused of being an executive ‘puppet’.<sup>41</sup> Despite some efforts to reform the system, no effective steps have been taken to bring about actual change.<sup>42</sup> This demonstrates the need for countries to be proactive when it comes to protecting their democratic ideals. Complacency allows undemocratic practices to become entrenched, and their consequences – while entirely predictable – are often ignored until it is too late.

Namibia appears to share in this phenomenon of the executive holding more power than Parliament, as well as the fusion of the executive and legislative branches.<sup>43</sup> The imbalance stems from the fact that, following independence in 1990, the executive branch was more fully established and empowered than the legislature, which has struggled to exercise meaningful oversight.<sup>44</sup> While the judiciary remains stable, institutional elements of Parliament need to be reconsidered.<sup>45</sup> This points to the importance of being able to identify structural flaws when setting up a political system, as it is easier to correct these issues in the beginning rather than when they have become deeply entrenched in the political culture of a nation.

---

32 “Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project”.

33 “Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project”.

34 “Lesotho Civil Society Submission to the APRM”.

35 “Lesotho Civil Society Submission to the APRM”.

36 “Lesotho Civil Society Submission to the APRM”.

37 “Lesotho Civil Society Submission to the APRM”.

38 “The Big Governance Issues in Botswana”.

39 “The Big Governance Issues in Botswana”.

40 “The Big Governance Issues in Botswana”.

41 “The Big Governance Issues in Botswana”.

42 “The Big Governance Issues in Botswana”.

43 “A Review of Critical Issues for the APRM Process in Namibia”.

44 “A Review of Critical Issues for the APRM Process in Namibia”.

45 “A Review of Critical Issues for the APRM Process in Namibia”.

In Zimbabwe, despite the end of Mugabe's rule, the constitutional provisions intended to ensure that the separation of powers is respected have not been effective.<sup>46</sup> The executive maintains firm control over the legislature and the judiciary, with the lines between these branches blurred.<sup>47</sup> Parliament is said to have little control over the executive and is limited in exercising any oversight.<sup>48</sup> Zimbabwe shows that, even with constitutional provisions in place alongside new leadership, a culture of political impunity results in little progress being made.

## Upholding constitutionalism and democratic practice

The APRM CSO submissions reveal a nuanced picture of political governance and development across the continent. While many countries have made strides in adopting democratic frameworks, significant implementation gaps persist – not only in meeting international standards but also in fulfilling Africa's own norms and codes. Adherence to these internal benchmarks is a core principle of the APRM process. It is apparent from the constitutional frameworks examined here that democratic values and good governance are important to these countries, at least on paper. Going forward, the question is how to implement these standards and how to ensure that constitutional frameworks are upheld. The solutions vary by country, but what is generally true across the case studies is that multiparty democracies governed by constitutions that uphold the separation of power doctrine are more stable. Ensuring that people are well represented and that the executive branch is held accountable for its actions lowers the risk of political upheaval. Furthermore, the role of the public, civic society and media cannot be underestimated – ultimately, they are the ones responsible for holding those in power to account. As the character 'V' in the 2005 film *V for Vendetta* famously put it: 'People should not be afraid of their government. Governments should be afraid of their people.'<sup>49</sup>

While many countries have made strides in adopting democratic frameworks, significant implementation gaps persist

---

46 "Civil Society Submission to the APRM in Zimbabwe".

47 "Civil Society Submission to the APRM in Zimbabwe".

48 "Civil Society Submission to the APRM in Zimbabwe".

49 James McTeigue, director, *V for Vendetta*, Silver Pictures, Virtual Studios, Studio Babelsberg, Vertigo DC Comics and Anarchos Productions, Inc., March 2005.

# Economic governance and management and corporate governance

## Economic and corporate governance in the APRM context

Economic governance and management and corporate governance are two thematic areas of the APRM Self-Assessment Questionnaire, illustrating the importance of these topics when assessing governance in African states. Examining economic governance and management along with corporate governance in Africa not only provides an understanding of national economic performance but also reveals how policies and institutions affect the daily lives, opportunities and wellbeing of ordinary people. This section explores the public and private spheres of economic governance and management and their respective influences on national development. This entails examining the CSO APRM submissions of Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

## Corruption and accountability in economic governance

One of the most persistent governance challenges in the APRM CSO submissions is corruption, which cuts across institutions and policy areas. As a cross-cutting issue, corruption undermines institutional effectiveness and directly impacts citizens by weakening service delivery, fuelling inequality and eroding public trust. This results in a loss of faith in the government and other societal institutions. While the CSO submissions show that states have been taking steps to eliminate corruption, these efforts have yet to produce consistent or transformative results.

Corruption is defined as the use of public resources for personal gain.<sup>50</sup> It often manifests at the intersection of government and the private sector, with politically connected individuals exploiting their position for enrichment.<sup>51</sup>

What these countries demonstrate is that, while anti-corruption instruments are valuable tools in the fight against corruption, they are not enough if implementation remains poor. Lesotho, for instance, has ratified international anti-corruption instruments through the UN, SADC and the AU and has designed domestic protocols to assist in its anti-corruption campaigns.<sup>52</sup> Lesotho, it should be noted, performs better than most countries on the

---

50 "The Big Governance Issues in Botswana".

51 UN Office on Drugs and Crime, "Corruption: A Baseline Definition", accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.unodc.org/en/anti-corruption/module-1/key-issues/corruption---baseline-definition.html>.

52 "Lesotho Civil Society Submission to the APRM".

continent in this area and has a somewhat favourable record globally in terms of the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI).<sup>53</sup> However, it remains a contentious issue, as there is some disparity between the perception of corruption in Lesotho (as elsewhere) and its actual extent.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, despite a ‘moderately positive’ corruption perception record over the years, 2024 has delivered one of the lowest CPI scores yet for Lesotho with a score of 37 (the lower the score, the higher the perception of corruption).<sup>55</sup> For context, South Africa and Tanzania were each given a CPI score of 41.<sup>56</sup>

One of the key elements of good governance is accountability, which allows governments to be held responsible for their actions.<sup>57</sup> Lesotho has not been able to implement good governance protocols, which includes accountability in the context of corruption.<sup>58</sup> The Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences, which is intended to serve as a line of defence against corruption, faces political subjugation.<sup>59</sup> The political elite are accused of actively leveraging their power to prevent the prosecution of high-profile figures.<sup>60</sup>

Botswana also faces challenges in making use of anti-corruption institutions.<sup>61</sup> The Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime (DCEC), similar to Lesotho’s anti-corruption instruments, is struggling to gain autonomy.<sup>62</sup> The DCEC is not an independent unit, which limits its ability to pursue high-profile corruption cases and hold powerful individuals truly accountable.<sup>63</sup> These limitations include a lack of resources, as well as a lack of constitutional protection for its director general.<sup>64</sup> Botswana is relatively fortunate in that the nation is regarded as less corrupt than others with a CPI score of 57, ranking it higher than Spain.<sup>65</sup> However, a favourable CPI score does not necessarily indicate low levels of actual corruption. If the instruments that are meant to protect against corruption are incapable of being independent and insulated from political influence, their long-term effectiveness will be severely compromised.

The Tanzania civil society submission points out that corruption ‘weakens public entities and renders them incapable of delivering services to citizens’.<sup>66</sup> Although corruption in Tanzania is not perceived as widespread – it ranks 82<sup>nd</sup> in the world (out of 180 countries),<sup>67</sup> with a CPI score of 41 – there are still issues regarding transparency.<sup>68</sup> When concerns

---

53 “Lesotho Civil Society Submission to the APRM”.

54 “Lesotho Civil Society Submission to the APRM”.

55 Transparency International, “Transparency International Corruption Index: 2024”, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024>.

56 Transparency International, “Corruption Index”.

57 “Lesotho Civil Society Submission to the APRM”.

58 “Lesotho Civil Society Submission to the APRM”.

59 “Lesotho Civil Society Submission to the APRM”.

60 “Lesotho Civil Society Submission to the APRM”.

61 “The Big Governance Issues in Botswana”.

62 “The Big Governance Issues in Botswana”.

63 “The Big Governance Issues in Botswana”.

64 “The Big Governance Issues in Botswana”.

65 Transparency International, “Corruption Perception Index”.

66 “Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project”.

67 Transparency International, “Corruption Perception Index”.

68 “Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project”.

around corruption are raised, the procedures to deal with it take time and the public does not receive feedback.<sup>69</sup>

These APRM submissions illustrate the necessity for anti-corruption tools to have the full support of the law, institutional independence and protection from interference by the political elite. In addition, they show that corruption not just damages a nation's economy but also erodes public trust in government and institutions. An example of this is in Zimbabwe during the COVID-19 crisis, when the then minister of health was embroiled in a scandal that involved profiteering from vital medical supplies and an illicit multi-million-dollar contract.<sup>70</sup> Across Africa, there were many similar cases of corruption and abuse of COVID-19 funding. This illustrates how unchecked corruption can rapidly escalate and have far-reaching, tangible consequences that directly impact the lives of millions of people.

## Economic empowerment and inequality

Beyond corruption, structural inequality and economic exclusion are also concerns for the APRM, undermining governance and development outcomes across the continent.

Structural inequality and economic exclusion are also concerns for the APRM, undermining governance and development outcomes across the continent

Development requires economic empowerment, which the South African APRM civil society submission – using the OECD definition – defines as<sup>71</sup>

the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth.

There are obstacles to achieving economic empowerment, some of which are more specific to the African context.

In South Africa the barriers include what has been called the 'triple challenge' of inequality, poverty and unemployment.<sup>72</sup> South Africa is one of the most unequal

---

69 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

70 "Civil Society Submission to the APRM in Zimbabwe".

71 "Youth Submission to the APRM in South Africa".

72 "Youth Submission to the APRM in South Africa".



countries in the world and has a 'dual economy'.<sup>73</sup> This refers to the fact that the majority of South Africans are extremely poor while a small minority is extremely wealthy.<sup>74</sup> The middle class is dwindling and makes up a small portion of the population.<sup>75</sup> South Africa's Gini coefficient was 0.63 in 2014 (last available data)<sup>76</sup> – the Gini coefficient is measured between 0 and 1, with scores closer to 1 indicating greater unequalness.<sup>77</sup> While the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment Act aims to close the racial element of the inequality gap, it has been criticised as being largely unsuccessful.<sup>78</sup> A 2025 Parliament report states that 50% of South Africans receive just over 5% of the country's income, demonstrating the extent of inequality.<sup>79</sup>

Malawi faces income, land, healthcare and educational inequality.<sup>80</sup> This is partially blamed on corruption and public resource abuse.<sup>81</sup> Namibia has similar inequality challenges, with the National Planning Commission stating that poor health, inadequate education and remote locations have exacerbated the problem, as Namibians are unable to fully partake in the modern economy.<sup>82</sup> The country has a bifurcated economy, meaning that part of the economy is modern and adds great value while the other is rural and does not provide much in terms of social mobility.<sup>83</sup>

The question remains, however: how do we go about solving such inequality given its varied causes and widespread nature? It is vital that practical solutions are offered. As the Namibia submission points out, 'Improving the quality of life of ordinary people and alleviating social ills under which they suffer is intrinsic to the APRM, and central to public policy since independence.'<sup>84</sup>

The Tanzania submission refers to a World Bank report highlighting the mechanisms that have helped to reduce inequality in the country.<sup>85</sup> While the report is country specific, the solutions laid out are valid across borders. The World Bank reports that the efforts most likely to reduce inequality include improved access to social services, better infrastructure and the enforcement of policies and laws that promote the participation of marginalised people.<sup>86</sup> While these solutions are broad and challenging to implement, they have proven to be effective.

---

73 "Youth Submission to the APRM in South Africa".

74 "Youth Submission to the APRM in South Africa".

75 "Youth Submission to the APRM in South Africa".

76 World Bank, "Gini Index", accessed September 1, 2025, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI>.

77 OECD, "Income Inequality", accessed September 1, 2025, <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/indicators/income-inequality.html>.

78 "Youth Submission to the APRM in South Africa".

79 Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, *Inclusive Economic Growth: Restructure the Economy, Addressing Oligopolies and Concentration*, Report (Parliamentary Research Unit, June 11, 2025).

80 "Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project".

81 "Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project".

82 "A Review of Critical Issues for the APRM Process in Namibia".

83 "A Review of Critical Issues for the APRM Process in Namibia".

84 "A Review of Critical Issues for the APRM Process in Namibia", 23.

85 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

86 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

## Case study: Zimbabwe's humanitarian and economic crisis

Poverty and unemployment are other issues that form a barrier to African economic empowerment. The country submission worth examining to understand the human cost of poor economic policies is that of Zimbabwe, as its situation is particularly severe.<sup>87</sup> It is referred to as a 'humanitarian crisis' that has resulted in millions of people becoming poverty stricken and unemployed.<sup>88</sup> It has also significantly worsened over the past two decades.<sup>89</sup> The end of Mugabe's rule brought about the hope that the worst was over and that Mnangagwa would have a positive impact on the economy.<sup>90</sup> This unfortunately has not happened – the political and socio-economic situation has worsened significantly to include a hunger crisis, with more than 7 million people being food insecure.<sup>91</sup> It is worth noting that while Zimbabwe has faced environmental misfortunes, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food confirmed that the crisis was 'man-made'.<sup>92</sup> This is a notable statement that underscores the extent to which the crisis is the result of governance failures, highlighting the urgent need for structural reform and improved state capacity. Zimbabwe exhibits many characteristics of state failure.<sup>93</sup> It serves both as a cautionary tale from which other states can learn and as a case study in potential recovery and state-building – if it is able to recover. To address the situation, Zimbabwe would have to make drastic changes, which include implementing frameworks to reduce inflation, improving confidence in its currency and strengthening financial institutions.<sup>94</sup>

The private sector plays a vital role in shaping economic outcomes, particularly in resource-dependent African economies

## Corporate governance and the role of the private sector

Governance challenges are not limited to the state. The private sector plays a vital role in shaping economic outcomes, particularly in resource-dependent African economies.

While the failures and successes of governments play out in the public sphere, it is also necessary to look at the private sphere in terms of corporate governance. The private sector is a non-negotiable player in any country's development and in Africa, given its natural and human resources, it is worth taking a deeper look.

---

87 "Civil Society Submission to the APRM in Zimbabwe".

88 "Civil Society Submission to the APRM in Zimbabwe".

89 "Civil Society Submission to the APRM in Zimbabwe".

90 "Civil Society Submission to the APRM in Zimbabwe".

91 "Civil Society Submission to the APRM in Zimbabwe".

92 "Civil Society Submission to the APRM in Zimbabwe".

93 "Civil Society Submission to the APRM in Zimbabwe".

94 "Civil Society Submission to the APRM in Zimbabwe".

In Malawi, as in many African countries, livelihoods are largely dependent on natural resources<sup>95</sup> and it is practically impossible to separate the environment and climate from the economy.<sup>96</sup> This means that corporate organisations need to take environmental protection governance seriously.<sup>97</sup> The fourth King Code on Corporate Governance (King IV) highlights that ethical and effective leadership includes anticipating and mitigating the environmental consequences of organisational activities.<sup>98</sup> It places environmental concerns firmly within the broader ‘environmental, social and governance’ responsibilities of corporate leadership.<sup>99</sup>

South Africa’s APRM Country Review Report also demonstrates the need to strengthen corporate governance<sup>100</sup> – for example, it highlights a disturbing trend of mis-invoicing gold exports.<sup>101</sup> A discrepancy between official gold export statistics and trading partners’ reports<sup>102</sup> amounted to \$113.6 billion over a 15-year period.<sup>103</sup> This is largely due to smuggling.<sup>104</sup>

Corporate governance is therefore not something that can be overlooked. The private sector also has responsibilities, which have evidently been neglected. Going forward, as states attempt to improve the public sector, corporate governance needs to be prioritised through frameworks, legislation and the raising of public awareness.

## Strengthening governance for inclusive development

In conclusion, the APRM CSO submissions offer valuable insights into economic and corporate governance landscapes across Southern Africa. A greater understanding of economic management and corporate governance would have a positive impact on the livelihoods and quality of life of millions of people. Furthermore, if Africa is to have a prosperous future, good governance is not negotiable. While institutional frameworks to combat corruption and promote inclusivity exist, their effectiveness is often undermined by political interference, capacity constraints and weak implementation. Better

If Africa is to have a prosperous future, good governance is not negotiable

95 “Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project”.

96 “Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project”.

97 “Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project”.

98 National Home Builders Registration Council, *The King Report on Corporate Governance*, November 2016.

99 NHBRC, *The King Report*.

100 “South Africa Second-Generation Country Review Report”.

101 “South Africa Second-Generation Country Review Report”.

102 “South Africa Second-Generation Country Review Report”.

103 “South Africa Second-Generation Country Review Report”.

104 “South Africa Second-Generation Country Review Report”.

development outcomes require institutional independence, transparency, accountability and the participation of the private, public and civil society spheres. Africa is fortunate (at least potentially) to have a youthful demographic, as well as an abundance of resources. In theory, African countries have the potential to lift themselves out of poverty and support one another in doing so. The evolving global order presents new opportunities for the Global South, but Africa's role in shaping that order remains to be seen.

# State resilience, sustainable development and the environment

## Climate change

In 2014, US president Barack Obama said, ‘We are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation that can do something about it.’<sup>105</sup> This is particularly true for Africa, which remains the region most vulnerable to climate change under all major scenarios, despite contributing the least to global emissions.<sup>106</sup> For example, Malawi has experienced more than 19 floods and five droughts over the past 50 years.<sup>107</sup> Tanzania is expected to lose as much as 2% of its annual GDP to climate change-related events.<sup>108</sup> The APRM CSO submissions<sup>5</sup> show that environmental governance, climate change and disaster management are vital elements of African development and cannot be ignored. Climate issues cut across themes and objectives and are largely focused on broad-based sustainable socio-economic development. By their nature, climate issues affect multiple countries. The countries that appear to be particularly impacted include Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa and Tanzania.

By their nature, climate issues affect multiple countries

Tanzania, for instance, has a population that is dependent on rainfed agriculture, which is now threatened by drought as well as heavy rainfall.<sup>109</sup> Given rising temperatures, coastal and inland fisheries are also under threat.<sup>110</sup> Floods account for about two-thirds of natural disasters – a number that has risen over the past 40 years.<sup>111</sup> The cost of natural disasters amounts to hundreds of millions of dollars.<sup>112</sup> What this demonstrates is a broader trend across Africa in which climate change is negatively impacting upon lives and livelihoods.

105 The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by the President at UN Climate Change Summit”, September 23, 2014.

106 African Development Bank, “Climate Change in Africa”, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.afdb.org/en/cop25/climate-change-africa>.

107 “Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project”.

108 “Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project”.

109 “Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project”.

110 “Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project”.

111 “Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project”.

112 “Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project”.

Botswana, an already semi-arid country, is facing increasing rates of water scarcity exacerbated by climate change, drought and evaporation.<sup>113</sup>

We see similar patterns in Malawi, South Africa and Namibia, where climate change is adversely influencing rainfall patterns, affecting social and economic development. In Malawi, both natural and man-made disasters (including deforestation) are recurring, disrupting investment and worsening poverty and socio-economic underdevelopment.<sup>114</sup> The Tanzania submission points out that ‘the richest 1% of the world’s population produce more carbon emissions than the poorest 66%’ and yet Africa, the poorest continent, is most affected.<sup>115</sup> What is also true, however, is that environmental governance influences how severely nations are affected by climate change and other environmental factors. This includes the policy frameworks and legislation that are in place to govern environmental practice, as well as disaster preparedness. State resilience is therefore vital and the only sustainable way forward.

## Sustainable development

The Botswana submission defines sustainable development as a way that ‘allows the current generation to satisfy its needs, without making it difficult for future generations to do the same’ as regards the allocation of natural resources.<sup>116</sup> Sustainable development requires good governance. This means implementing legislation and programmes to alleviate and mitigate climate and environmental challenges. In Botswana, despite some success, policy coherence and alignment are lacking in terms of natural resources management, raising questions about the country’s commitment to sustainable development.<sup>117</sup> In South Africa, a similar trend is seen, with the idea of a ‘green economy’ having been introduced without there being meaningful policy engagement or implementation, according to the submission.<sup>118</sup> This is due to ‘a mix of institutional, bureaucratic and financial barriers’.<sup>119</sup>

Tanzania faces similar issues in implementing environmental policy frameworks, including inadequate coordination between stakeholders as it attempts to address climate and environmental challenges.<sup>120</sup> Namibia, one of the world’s driest countries, similarly struggles with policy and regulation implementation as it deals with water contamination.<sup>121</sup> Both the South African and Tanzanian submissions highlight the importance of empowering the youth to drive change. The Tanzania report cites a UNICEF survey showing that most young people do not believe that they know enough

---

113 “The Big Governance Issues in Botswana”.

114 “Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project”.

115 “Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project”.

116 “The Big Governance Issues in Botswana”.

117 “The Big Governance Issues in Botswana”.

118 “Youth Submission to the APRM in South Africa”.

119 “Youth Submission to the APRM in South Africa”, 105.

120 “Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project”.

121 “A Review of Critical Issues for the APRM Process in Namibia”.

about the climate crisis or that they can influence climate policy.<sup>122</sup> Africa has a youthful population – in Malawi, for instance, 43.2% of the population is under the age of 14.<sup>123</sup> Given the necessary resources and opportunities, African youth have the capacity to drive sustainable and transformative change.

## Environmental practices

As Africa grapples with climate challenges, poor environmental practices aggravate the situation. There is a risk of cross-border conflict, as resources such as water are scarce commodities that historically led to conflict due to overconsumption or pollution.<sup>124</sup> In Namibia, mining has led to the contamination of groundwater, demonstrating the importance of institutional capacity to manage environmental concerns.<sup>125</sup> Further, the country also faces illegal logging, which is damaging forests,<sup>126</sup> while its ocean is being degraded and its marine life threatened.<sup>127</sup> This illustrates the importance of environmental governance – while climate change is certainly having an effect, proper institutional mechanisms can mitigate many of the worst practices that negatively impact livelihoods and the country's socio-economic wellbeing.

As Africa grapples with climate challenges, poor environmental practices aggravate the situation

In 2010, for instance, it was estimated that 46% of purified water in Botswana was unaccounted for, highlighting unsatisfactory environmental and resource management.<sup>128</sup> The Lesotho report points out that encroachment by settlements has resulted in the loss of arable land.<sup>129</sup> Further, the report argues, had land appropriation been properly implemented, this could have been avoided.<sup>130</sup> The Tanzania report raises the important point of a lack of distinction between climate change and environmental issues.<sup>131</sup> Conventional environmental protection focuses on ensuring that the environment is healthy, unpolluted and safe.<sup>132</sup> On the other hand, climate

---

122 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

123 "Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project".

124 "A Review of Critical Issues for the APRM Process in Namibia".

125 "A Review of Critical Issues for the APRM Process in Namibia".

126 "A Review of Critical Issues for the APRM Process in Namibia".

127 "A Review of Critical Issues for the APRM Process in Namibia".

128 "The Big Governance Issues in Botswana".

129 "Lesotho Civil Society Submission to the APRM".

130 "Lesotho Civil Society Submission to the APRM".

131 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

132 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

change presents a new set of challenges brought on by rising global temperatures.<sup>133</sup> Institutionally, it is assumed that the mechanisms for solving both issues are the same.<sup>134</sup> However, there is a risk that the conventional structures that govern environmental issues may not work as well for climate change.<sup>135</sup> The Malawi report argues that there needs to be a shift in environmental governance from focusing on extractive processes and construction to a more broad-based approach.<sup>136</sup> Such a broad-based approach requires government oversight over resource and environmental governance institutions and greater environmental and natural resources lobbying efforts.<sup>137</sup>

## Socio-economic development

Africa, it must be noted, more than other continents, is particularly dependent on natural resources, given the extensive reach of its primary sector-based economy and widespread poverty. One of the more significant aspects is food security. In Tanzania, agricultural yields are in decline, particularly maize and beans.<sup>138</sup> Climate disruptions affect both agriculture and marine life, which in turn affect people's livelihoods. As there is less crop variety, the risk of malnutrition and other health conditions increases.<sup>139</sup> This has a disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations, including children.<sup>140</sup> There has also been a shift towards 'monoculture' farming practices – cultivating single crops – which limit the nutritional value of food.<sup>141</sup> The Tanzania report highlights that there need to be strategies in place to diversify farming practices.<sup>142</sup>

In Malawi, environmental degradation is also impacting food security.<sup>143</sup> This trend is, perhaps unsurprisingly, echoed throughout the APRM submission reports, given Africa's vulnerable climate position, which is exacerbated by poor agricultural practices. As the South Africa report highlights, one of the key solutions is implementing climate education in the school curriculum, as the youth play a vital role in improving environmental practices.<sup>144</sup>

As regards a primary sector-based economy, the bulk of Botswana's GDP comes from the mining industry.<sup>145</sup> This has had both positive and negative results. The country has avoided the resource curse largely because of its expenditure and reserve policy, and

---

133 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

134 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

135 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

136 "Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project".

137 "Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project".

138 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

139 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

140 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

141 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

142 "Tanzania APRM Sensitisation Project".

143 "Malawi African Peer Review Mechanism Popular Sensitisation Project".

144 "Youth Submission to the APRM in South Africa".

145 "The Big Governance Issues in Botswana".



by prudently managing its resources.<sup>146</sup> In doing so, Botswana serves as a case study of successful development economics. Yet this does not mean that it has necessarily placed itself in a considerably better position, despite avoiding this phenomenon. Its primary sector-based economy has largely left local communities unable to reap the benefits of the mining sector and there is still not enough investment in socio-economic development.<sup>147</sup> This is solvable if the government can create policies that demand the mining sector contribute meaningfully to tax revenue, employment opportunities and infrastructure development.<sup>148</sup>

## Looking forward

The CSO APRM submission reports overwhelmingly demonstrate that climate change, environmental governance and sustainable development are of great importance to Africa and cannot be ignored. It is also a key concern of 'Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want', the continent's long-term development blueprint.<sup>149</sup> Throughout this chapter it has been noted that while Africa is the poorest continent, it is also most vulnerable to environmental challenges. It is vital that the public and private sector come together alongside the youth and work together if positive changes are to be made. Furthermore, countries must recognise that the effects of climate change do not stop at borders and so it is worth investing in transnational strategies to limit these effects.

---

146 "The Big Governance Issues in Botswana".

147 "The Big Governance Issues in Botswana".

148 "The Big Governance Issues in Botswana".

149 AU, "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want", <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>.

# Conclusion

This report has demonstrated, through the analysis of CSO submissions, that across the themes of democracy and political governance, economic governance and management, corporate governance, state resilience, sustainable development and the environment, a consistent reality emerges: Africa's governance challenges are deeply interconnected and cannot be addressed in isolation.

### Poor political governance and weak democratic practices undermine policy implementation

Poor political governance and weak democratic practices undermine policy implementation. Economic inequality and irresponsible corporate behaviour erode trust in both the public and private sectors, leading to instability. Environmental degradation and a lack of climate consciousness threaten livelihoods – especially those of the most vulnerable, including women and children – further fuelling political and socio-economic instability.

Given the interconnected nature of these challenges, solutions may seem complex. However, viable opportunities exist to bring about meaningful change. These include strengthening the APRM and investing in, as well as empowering, CSOs.

Such efforts would enable African states to build more responsive, accountable, transparent and holistic governance systems that serve not only the elite but all citizens. CSOs occupy a unique position, being able to engage both the highest levels of government and grassroots communities. Their understanding of local realities alongside broader socio-economic and political contexts makes them indispensable partners in shaping a more inclusive development agenda, something Africa desperately needs.

Looking ahead, Africa's future depends not only on institutional reforms but also on the willingness to invest sustainably in its people – particularly its youth – and its natural resources, with a long-term vision and clear plan of action. The continent's true wealth lies in its resilience, diversity and ambition. With support from an empowered civil society, the APRM has the potential to lead this transformation. Africa faces immense challenges, but it also possesses abundant solutions, courage and, above all, the spirit of ubuntu: community.



*African perspectives.  
Global insights.*

Jan Smuts House, East Campus, University of the Witwatersrand  
PO Box 31596, Braamfontein 2017, Johannesburg, South Africa  
Tel +27 (0)11 339-2021 • Fax +27 (0)11 339-2154  
[www.saiia.org.za](http://www.saiia.org.za) • [info@saiia.org.za](mailto:info@saiia.org.za)