

# Can We Speak of African Agency?: APRM and Africa's Agenda 2063

**Roseline M. Achieng'**

*The Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute*

*University of South Africa (UNISA)*

*E-mail: Emeraldachieng2009@gmail.com*

## Abstract

*In marking the golden jubilee of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) now the African Union (AU), the African Union Commission announced its intended objective of having a document that would be a vision for Africa's integration, peace and development in the coming 50 years. Currently, a draft AU Agenda 2063 is in circulation with an invitation to key stakeholders to input into its objectives of outlining a broad framework of transformation of the continent.*

*This paper is borne with this in mind. The main argument that is advanced is that the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), adopted as a programme of the African Union in March 2003, demonstrates African agency in tackling political, economic, corporate and social-economic governance deficiencies. Through exploring 'best practices' in certain select countries the main thrust of the paper will be to showcase this African agency. It is argued that the AU's Agenda 2063 would certainly hold greater legitimacy in strategically positioning itself in global geopolitics by demonstrating that existing African initiated institutions aimed at the transformation of society, for example the APRM, have indeed provided African solutions to Africa's problems'. The processes that have brought about progress thus far should not only be reflected in the AU's Agenda 2063, these should further be supported both regionally and internationally as Africa continues to pursue its vision of an African Renaissance and showcasing African agency in regional and global transformations.*

**Key words** *African Renaissance, African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), African Union (AU) Agenda 2063, best practices, African agency, governance, Afro-centricity*

## Résumé

*En marquant le jubilé d'or de l'Organisation de l'unité africaine (OUA) maintenant l'Union africaine (UA), la Commission de l'Union africaine a annoncé son objectif prévu de disposer d'un document qui serait une vision pour l'intégration, la paix et le développement de l'Afrique dans l'entrée 50 ans. Actuellement, un projet de l'ordre du jour de l'UA 2063 est en circulation avec une invitation aux intervenants clés à l'entrée dans ses objectifs. Le Mode Plan d'un large cadre de la transformation du continent.*

*Ce document est à la charge avec cela à l'esprit. Le principal argument avancé C'est Est-ce que le Mécanisme d'évaluation par les pairs (MAEP), adopté en tant que programme de l'Union africaine en Mars 2003, démontre agence africaine dans la lutte contre politiques, les carences en matière de gouvernance économique, sociale et d'entreprise-économiques En explorant les «meilleures pratiques «dans certains pays, sélectionnez l'essentiel du document sera de mettre en valeur cette agence africaine. Il est soutenu que l'ordre du jour de l'UA 2063 serait certainement tenir une plus grande légitimité stratégique de se positionner dans la géopolitique mondiale en démontrant que existant dans les institutions a été lancé africains visant à la transformation de la société, par exemple le MAEP, ont en effet fourni «des solutions africaines aux problèmes africains». Les processus thathave brought sur les progrès que jusqu'à présent ne doit pas seulement se refléter dans l'ordre du jour de l'UA 2063, ceux-ci doivent en outre être pris en charge Bothan régional et international que l'Afrique poursuit sa vision d'une renaissance africaine et montrer boitier de l'agence de l'Afrique dans les transformations régionales et mondiales .*

**Mots clés** Renaissance africaine, African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), l'Union africaine (UA), l'ordre du jour 2063, les meilleures pratiques, l'agence de l'Afrique, la gouvernance, Afro-Centricity

## Introduction

In this paper, I posit that the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) demonstrates African agency in changing political, economic, corporate and social economic structures that were repressing the people of Africa. I argue that as the continent continues to grapple with its developmental trajectory, it is imperative to continue to utilize this African agency in interlinking emerging policy to already existing ones and in this manner continuously restructure societal institutions for effective structural transformation.

The paper is organised as follows: I first start with a brief conceptual explanation of the term agency, wherein I argue that African agency cannot be removed from the general theoretical thrust of the notion of agency. What distinguishes African agency, I posit, is the *positionality* of the subject and object of investigation. This *positionality* does not only include the narrow confines of territory/geography, it goes beyond the aforementioned to explore the mind-set in handling social problems emergent of the context- Africa. I problematize my assertion by offering a brief presentation of the APRM, where I argue a case of appreciating the mechanism as an illustration of African agency. The paper then goes on to give a synopsis of AU's Agenda 2063 as the current policy document aimed at addressing some of the structural challenges facing the African continent and the proposals that have been put across to bring about change to the impending situation. I thereafter build a case for interlinking the APRM in the current discussions on the AU's agenda for the transformation of the continent. I argue that the AU's Agenda 2063 can benefit from understanding some of the best practices that the APRM has enabled in the four pillars of governance. Such a stance will serve the purpose of not only

preventing a reinvention of the wheel but more so it will build on practices and processes that have brought about change in certain contexts. This is with the aim of transferring this knowledge to other contexts that are still struggling to play catch up and rectify the discrepancies that they face.

I conclude by positing that such an adoption and adaptation of policy/policies will not only bring about the much needed policy coherency for structural transformation, it will also greatly enhance AU's strategic legitimacy in articulating common positions for the continent in the global geopolitics through showcasing that Africans, through their agency, have instituted processes and mechanisms that can well be appreciated as African solutions to Africa's problems. Indeed, such an articulation of African agency is what the Afrocentric paradigm (Asante: 2007) has long been advocating for.

## **Explaining African Agency**

In a provocative article that challenges the status quo of several standpoint positions on agency as a concept, Hitlin and Elder, Jr. (2007:170) note that whereas the term agency has been central to theorists throughout sociology's history, it is used differently depending on the epistemological roots and goals of the sociological scholars who employ it. The authors, albeit dismissingly, provide the different strands in sociology that utilise the concept agency and the way they use it. They contend that the concept is grounded in the western conception of the actor where individuals are the locus of social action in traditions focused on individual freedom (Hitlin and Elder, Jr. 2007:171). In this conception, individual freedoms and how they interact with the social structure is key. For some sociologists, the authors posit, the temporal-relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination and judgement, both reproduces and transforms structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations, is privileged (Hitlin and Elder, Jr. 2007:171). For others, it is rules and resources that hold the central interest in agency-structure discussions, whilst for many more, actions and intentions and/or life course studies become their foci of analysis (Hitlin and Elder, Jr. 2007:172). The study of the self and identity, a phenomenon that allows for both choice and constraint, individual spontaneity and social patterning, individuality and group and social identification, the authors contend, is fundamental to but missing from debates about the nature of agency (Hitlin and Elder, Jr. 2007:173). They continue their discussion by providing a theoretical model of the social-psychological reading of agency through an analysis of four types of agency, that is, existential, identity, pragmatic and life course (Hitlin and Elder, Jr. 2007: 173 -191).

Interestingly, Clegg (2006), another author who problematizes the concept of agency as it is read in feminism, asserts that agency straddles different divides depending on the school of thought that adapts it. Presenting her arguments in the form of a debate,

Clegg (2006:317- 322) explores the different paradigmatic positions – from humanism, structuralism, post-structuralism and critical realism that the concept has found usage. For the purposes of our discussion, I have adopted a sociological understanding of the concept of agency that refers to an individual's ability to make choices and change the structure of society (Giddens 2009: 89). What is significant to point out is that such a change in structure, what Giddens (2009: 89) calls structuration of society, is the work of an individual in interaction with other individuals, especially in African societies (*my own emphasis*).

In adopting such a definition of the concept of agency, I argue that African agency cannot be removed from the general understanding of the concept. However, the uniqueness of African agency lies in its qualification 'African' which is both self and place bound. African agency is how people, who identify themselves as African (the self and identity), have managed, through making conscious choices, to change their structures. These are especially contextual structures that confine/oppress them.

Perhaps the most convincing conceptualization of African agency thus far are the writings of Mazama (2003) and Asante (2007). Couched in what he (Asante 2007) calls the Afrocentric paradigm, the author states that Afrocentricity is:

‘...a consciousness, quality of thought, mode of analysis and an actionable perspective where Africans seek, from agency, to assert subject place within the context of African history.’ (Asante 2007, p15)

Quoting Mazama (2003), Asante (2007, p8) attunes that the Afrocentric paradigm is not merely a worldview nor even a theory as such. He contends that the afro-centric paradigm results in the reconceptualization of the social and historical reality of African people. The afro-centric paradigm is a revolutionary shift in thinking and constructural adjustment to black disorientation, de-centeredness and lack of agency. Furthermore, the Afrocentric paradigm or Afrocentricity is revolutionary because it casts ideas, concepts, events, personalities, political and economic processes in the context of black people as subjects and not as objects (Asante 2007, p15).

What is critical in Asante's definition of Afrocentricity is the view that African people must see themselves as agents rather than spectators to historical revolution and change. Afrocentricity emerges as a methodology that consciously operates within African ways of knowing and existence and results in the implementation of principles, methods, concepts and ideas that are derived from our own African cultural experiences (Mazama 2003, p5). It is on this score, I argue, that the African Peer Review Mechanism captures the very essence of the Afrocentric methodology by showcasing not only 'epistemic centeredness' but also African agency

Incidentally, Landsberg (2013) provides another illustration of African agency. Writing on what he terms the golden decade (1998-2008) of former President's Thabo Mbeki's South Africa's foreign policy as Pan-African agency in world affairs, he neatly summarized a similar view of African agency as demonstrated in what he calls Afro-centric diplomacy thus:

*'...the idea of Afro-centric diplomacy is borrowed from the theory of Afro-centricity and is based on the notion that "Africa cannot (,the author could have meant can – my own emphasis) advance intellectually or spiritually from the colonial legacy that it has been given", and is described by the high-priest of the concept, Molefe Asante as "the theory of African agency"'*... Landsberg ( 2013:3)

This theory of African agency, the author asserts, is demonstrated by the decade 1998-2008, which the author attunes:

*'...The decade 1998-2008 will go down as the golden decade of African agency and diplomacy in world affairs, a period that was certainly on par with the height of decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s. A combination of moral imperatives- decolonisation, apartheid, genocide- and strategic aims- political and economic- and Afrocentric diplomatic stratagems, propelled the case for a new continental regime in Africans, crafted in the main by Africans...'* Landsberg (2013:3)

The author concludes his paragraph by stating that

*'...During this decade (of African agency in continental and world affairs-my own emphasis) we saw a revival of African attempts to strengthen their voice, greater influence and attention, and a world order that would be more favourable to them...'* Landsberg (2013:3)

With certitude, one of the stratagems that placed Africa on a different pedestal in its developmental path was the institutionalization of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) with its governance instrument, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM).

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM): An Example of African Agency

The idea that drove the birth of the APRM was that Africans and African leaders had for a long time relied on Western donors to dictate their development priorities, to fund their own transformation and to sustain such transformed institutions. Busia

1 The author quotes from Asante, Molefe (2013), *Afro-centricity: Imagination and Action, Dissenting knowledges Pamphlet Series, NO.12, Multiversity, Malaysia*

(2010:37) notes that against this background, the most pressing issue on African leaders' minds in formulating NEPAD/APRM was Africa's long and painful experience with the donor community, both in terms of economic and political conditionality. This was expressed in two decades of structural adjustment and stabilisation policies inclusive of poverty reduction strategies, which hardly benefitted the continent but rather drove it deeper into an abyss of squalor, disease, violent conflicts, environmental degradation, unemployment and brain drain. He (Busia) quotes the former South African president and one of the architects of the NEPAD initiative thus:

*"...NEPAD reflected a consensus and a common determination among African leaders and peoples to change the destiny of the continent and redefine the paradigms of their relationships with the outside world in a positive and mutually beneficial way..."* (Mbeki 2002, NEPAD 2001, Paragraphs 148-149) in Busia 2010:37

The aim was to realise an African rebirth commonly known as the African Renaissance or the golden age of Africa's social economic and political institution building through good governance and improved state-society relations (Busia 2010:37).

The APRM is a mutually agreed-upon instrument for self-monitoring by participating member States of the African Union (AU). The primary purpose of the APRM is to foster the adoption of policies, standards and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated sub-regional and continental economic integration through the sharing of experiences and reinforcement of successful and best practices, including identifying deficiencies and assessing the needs for capacity building (APRM Base Document Paragraph 6)

Déme (2005:16) explains that the APRM is a tool designed to help reinforce good governance in Africa and assess member States' level of socio-economic development. This tool, he explicates, sets out the framework for continuous reviews of the four pillars of governance that have been identified as forming the key areas for analysis. These core themes are democratic governance, economic governance, corporate governance and socio-economic governance. It is mandatory that a review is followed by an action plan that engages the countries in a dynamic way to resolve the problems that have been identified. These action plans are named National Plans of Action (NPOA).

## **The Critical Structures of the APRM**

The function of the APRM is managed and administered at four critical levels. The overall body is the APR Forum. The forum is a committee comprising of participating Heads of State of the African Union who have voluntarily chosen to accede to the

mechanism<sup>2</sup>. There is a panel of eminent person with an oversight role of the APR process ensuring its independence, professionalism and credibility. This structure is called the APR Panel. The National APRM focal Points is a structure at the national level comprised of the Ministers of high level government ministries who report directly to the Head of State or Government. The structure is supposed to liaise with the National Governing Councils (NGCs). The last structure is the APRM Secretariat, which is responsible for the day to day running of the mechanism. Source: <http://new.uneca.org/aprm/StagesAPRM.aspx> and [http://saiia.org.za/aprmtoolkit/docs/APRM\\_basics/atkt\\_herbert\\_apr\\_overview\\_2007\\_en.pdf](http://saiia.org.za/aprmtoolkit/docs/APRM_basics/atkt_herbert_apr_overview_2007_en.pdf).

## The Process

The APR process is divided into five broad phases or stages of activity

**Stage One** involves a study of the political, economic, corporate governance and socio- development, environment in the country to be reviewed (initial consultation). This preliminary consultation is based principally on an up-to-date background documentation prepared by the APRM Secretariat and material provided by national, sub-regional, regional and international institutions. The country under review is required to create an APR Focal Point to co-ordinate with the APR Secretariat. The focal points gather relevant laws, treaty ratifications, budgets and development plans and forward these to the APR Secretariat. At the same time, the country must complete the APR self-assessment questionnaire and gather broad input from civil society. In addition, the government must also draft a paper outlining the nation's big issues and draft a National Programme of Action that should contain clear steps and deadlines for how the country intends to bring itself into conformance.

**Stage Two** is when the Review Team visits the country concerned; its priority order of business is to carry out the widest possible range of consultations with the Government, officials, political parties, parliamentarians and representatives of civil society organizations (including the media, academia, trade unions, business and professional bodies). The country visit lasts three weeks. The visiting team consists of one member of the panel of eminent persons, one administrative person and four experts drawn from partner institutions, including the UN Development Programme, UN Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank and African Union bodies.

**Stage Three** is the preparation of the Team's report. The report is prepared on the basis of the briefing material prepared by the APRM Secretariat and the information provided in-country by official and unofficial sources during the wide-ranging consultations and interactions with all stakeholders. The report must be measured against the applicable

<sup>2</sup> *At the time of writing this paper, the Chairperson of the APR forum was H.E. President Ellen Sirleaf Johnson whilst the chairperson of the panel of eminent persons was Barrister Akere Tabeng Muna. Both assumed office in 2013.*

political, economic, corporate and socio-economic governance commitments made and the Programme of Action.

The Team's draft report is first discussed with the Government concerned. Those discussions are designed to ensure the accuracy of the information and to provide the Government with an opportunity both to react to the Team's findings and to put forward its own views on how the identified shortcomings may be addressed. These responses of the Government are appended to the Team's report.

The Team's report needs to be clear in instances where problems are identified. For example, is there the will on the part of the Government to take the necessary decisions and measures to put right what is identified to be amiss? What resources are necessary to take corrective measures? How much of these can the Government itself provide and how much is to come from external sources? Given the necessary resources, how long will the process of rectification take?

The **Fourth Stage** begins when the Team's report is submitted to the participating Heads of State and Government through the APRM Secretariat. The consideration and adoption of the final report by the participating Heads of State and Government, including their decision in this regard, marks the end of this stage. If the Government of the country in question shows a demonstrable will to rectify the identified shortcomings, then it will be incumbent upon participating Governments to provide the assistance that they can, as well as to urge donor governments and agencies to come to the assistance of the country reviewed. However, if the necessary political will is not forthcoming from the Government, the participating States are required to do everything practicable to engage the 'unwilling government' in constructive dialogue, offering in the process technical and other appropriate assistance. *This is the process of peering and peer advice (my own emphasis)*. If dialogue proves unavailing, the participating Heads of State and Government may wish to put the Government on notice of their collective intention to proceed with appropriate measures by a given date. The interval is supposed to afford the 'unwilling government' opportunity for addressing the identified shortcomings under a process of constructive dialogue.

Six months after the report has been considered by the Heads of State and Government of the participating member countries, it should be formally and publicly tabled in key regional and sub-regional structures such as the Pan- African Parliament, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Peace and Security Council and the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) of the African Union. This constitutes the Fifth and final stage of the process (Adapted from <http://new.uneca.org/aprm/StagesAPRM.aspx>).

The process outlined above leads to the production of three important documents:

The *Country Self-assessment Report (CSAR)* prepared by the country concerned on the basis of the APRM questionnaire. The CSAR is only published at the discretion of the State concerned.



The independent *Country Review Report* (CRR) is prepared by the APRM secretariat and its technical partners, under the supervision of the APRM panel. It is finalised in consultation with the respective government. The eminent person assigned responsibility for the country review presents the report to the APR forum. The *National Programme of Action* (NPOA) is prepared at country level based on the self-assessment report. It addresses the problems identified.

**The most important instrument of the African Peer Review is the questionnaire.**

The APR questionnaire is divided into four sections: Democracy and Good Political Governance, Economic Governance and Management, Corporate Governance and Socio-Economic Governance. Each section of the draft questionnaire includes a list of relevant standards, major objectives, questions under each objective and indicators, which help flesh out the intent of the questions. Broadly the questionnaire looks at five areas:

- a. The extent of ratification and compliance with agreements, treaties and declarations adopted by the African Union or internationally accepted standards and declarations endorsed by the AU.
- b. Weaknesses in systems, laws and institutions.
- c. Compliance with such systems, laws or institutional requirements.
- d. Early warning indicators that point toward areas requiring action.
- e. The extent to which the country has implemented its agreed action plans.

The questionnaire, borne out of the need to gather information from a wide range of different stakeholder, provides an invaluable data base for the search of 'solutions' to the identified problems in the four pillars of governance. Indeed, the 'solutions' flowing out from several processes of consultation are captured in the Country Review Reports (CRRs) replete with National Programmes of Action (NPOA). Most of the CRRs showcase some of the 'best practices' a country has been involved in, in addressing some of the political, social or economic discrepancies a country faces. It is to these that I now turn, taking the examples of a select countries in the West, East, South and North Africa. Conclusively, however, one can authoritatively assert that a uniquely African agency is exemplified by the APRM process.

## **Further Notes on African Agency: Discussing Some APRM Practices**

As already indicated, whereas the primary purpose of the APRM is to foster appropriate adoption of laws, policies, standards and practices that lead to good political, economic, social and corporate governance, the mechanism also places emphasis on sharing of experiences and reinforcing best practices. It is on this latter point that many countries that have acceded to the APRM, have had their countries reviewed and made proposals in the form of national programmes of action, have dismally failed! Apart from Ghana and Uganda that have managed to pay each other country visits with the

aim of learning from each other (APRM 2011:8), hardly any other APRM country has demonstrated the will to learn from the other. This could partly be due to a lack of information, limited capacity to think and act strategically, yet again ignoring the rich context specific evidence for forlorn and unworkable solutions, not fully appreciating the wealth of knowledge that the APRM has generated and how this knowledge can be put to use, unwillingness to appreciate African agency in finding African solutions for Africa's problems. The profoundness of these assertions is summarized in the APRM write up on best practices: evidence from Thirteen Countries (2011) thus:

*'... The sharing of these achievements is the most effective way of fast-tracking economic, social and political development as it enables countries to apply new ideas and technologies that have proven to be successful on the continent. The principle of best-practice sharing also reinforces the APRM principle of ownership because it allows for Africans to take pride in their home-grown ideas and solutions, share these innovative feats with the world and showcase positive aspects of good governance in Africa, which are seldom publicised in the international arena...'*  
(APRM 2011:7)

Indeed, the emphasis of this paper is to highlight some of these best practices as an appreciation of workable solutions that the APRM process has brought to the fore. The point is to investigate how these solutions can be integrated into current policy options being discussed at a continental level, that is, Africa's Agenda 2063.

'Best Practice' is defined in the APRM write-up on evidence from Thirteen African Countries (2011) as

*'... A best practice is a technique, method, process, or activity that has proven to be most effective at delivering a particular outcome. Best practices can also be defined as the most efficient (least amount of effort) and effective (best results) way of accomplishing an objective. In the APRM reports, best practices are identified by first and foremost by the outcome of a process (es) to address serious challenges in democracy and political governance, economic governance and management, corporate governance and socio-economic development. These outcomes must be outstanding and offer lessons for the continent. In successfully addressing this challenge, the country's achievement can serve as a model to be emulated by other countries in Africa and world-wide...'*  
(APRM 2011:7)

The APRM report identifies 107<sup>3</sup> good governance practices in the four pillars of

<sup>3</sup> I have made a technical correction in this regard. The report has identified 104 good practices, whilst the

governance. Thirty-Nine (39) of these are in the Democracy and Political Governance, Twenty-Five (25) are in Economic Governance and Management, Fifteen (15) are in Corporate Governance, whilst Twenty- Eight (28) are in Socio-Economic Development (APRM 2011:68). The document highlights some of the very best practices in the four pillars of governance and the countries that have exercised these practices. These are as follows.

In Democracy and Political Governance, the write-up points out the best practice in curbing down threats in intrastate and interstate conflicts that countries such as Mozambique, Mali, South Africa and Benin have demonstrated. In the Economic and management pillar of governance, mention is made of South Africa and its outstanding record of continued independence from multilateral and bilateral loans and donations. The report points out that the country receives only 0.4% of its development expenditure from foreign donors (APRM 2011:68). Kenya, has also been highlighted as one of the countries that is doing well in domestic revenue collection. The field of Corporate Governance did not record as many best practices; however, the King Reports<sup>4</sup> that South Africa pioneered and concertededly worked on, was the most attractive (APRM 2011:68). In the area of socio-economic development, the write-up highlights best practices in free primary and secondary education that almost all of the APRM countries have adopted, best practices in the fight against HIV/Aids that Kenya and Uganda have demonstrated the promotion of gender equality and affirmative action that Rwanda and South Africa, respectively, have instituted. (APRM 2011: 68 – 69).

For the purposes of the topic at hand, I will zero in on best practices in the fourth pillar of governance, that is, socio-economic governance. This is especially for the reason that whereas Africa's Agenda 2063 has emphasised the importance of political governance, the document underscores the need for concerted thinking on the socio-economic and developmental trajectory of the continent that will place it on another pedestal 50 years to come.

Lessons from the APRM for AGENDA 2063 – Socio-economic Development

Closely linked to the APRM in demonstrating African agency for structural transformation is AU's Agenda 2063. As its introduction, Agenda 2063 states that

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*calculations of the practices outlined adds-up to 107.*

<sup>4</sup> *The King report is a code of corporate governance issued by a committee called the King committee after its leader retired judge Mervyn E. King. The code is based on principles and practices of leadership, sustainability and good corporate citizenship. Compliance with the King Reports is a requirement for companies listed on the Johannesburg stock exchange.*

*“... Agenda 2063 provides the opportunity for Africa to break away from the syndrome of “always coming up with new ideas but no significant achievements” and set in motion high levels of productivity, growth, entrepreneurship and transformation. Agenda 2063 is an approach to how the continent should effectively learn from the lessons of the past, build on the progress now underway and strategically exploit all possible opportunities available in the immediate and medium term, so as to ensure positive socioeconomic transformation within the next 50 years. Agenda 2063 is both a Vision and an Action Plan to achieve the African Union’s vision of an Integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena. It is a call for action to all segments of African society to work together to build a prosperous and united Africa based on shared values and a common destiny. Agenda 2063 will put in place a results-based approach with concrete targets that are measurable and can be tracked and monitored. This is with a view to capacitating Africa to do things differently and take advantage of the current momentum towards 2063.....” (www.agenda2063.au.int)*

It is on this commitment to a results-based approach with concrete targets that are measurable, and can be tracked and monitored as it pertains to social- economic development, that I argue a case for learning from the APRM best practices on social-economic development. I present the study on Benin’s Songhai Project as is articulated in the APRM report on evidence of best practices from thirteen (13) select countries (APRM 2011: 63). The aim of such a presentation is to draw lessons that can feed into some of the milestones related to prosperity and to science, innovation and technology that Agenda 2063 outlines (Draft Agenda 2063: 24). The assertion is that in developing the monitoring and evaluation instrument, some of the lessons outlined could form the basis for targets and outcomes based on these.

### **Benin: Songhai – an Alternative Model of Development**

The APRM report on best practices singles out Benin’s Songhai Centre. This is a Non- Governmental Organisation (NGO) that promotes home grown alternatives for a holistic sustainable development that is based on a careful interface of environmental, human organisational technical/informational and financial components.

The report states

*...The Songhai Centre, created in 1985, aims at improving the standard of living of the people of Africa. Its objective is to ensure the organisation of networks of excellence, competitiveness and growth for the balanced economic development of the provinces... (APRM 2011:63)*

The Songhai centre is mainly an agricultural centre. It is unique in its alternative logic of action that encourages science and innovation based on local knowledge with an openness but careful selection of outside resources, utilisation of local resources, encouragement of entrepreneurship through skills training and augmenting on technical and organisational capacities of the people. The logic is that of combining industry and trade. This is through strengthening capacities by creating space to popularise the entrepreneurial culture as a catalyst for economic initiatives. It has models of agro-biological production systems (for environmental sustainability), popularising a culture of success (human development), making agriculture attractive to young people (human development) through the promotion of agri-business and entrepreneurial activities around agricultural production (social-economic development). Adapted from Benin Country Review Report 2008: 231

As the report underscores

*'...Songhai works to change mentalities and see a new breed of development entrepreneurs emerge. This is achieved by promoting social-economic development mechanisms, which have, as ultimate goals, the creation of a reservoir of human resources, capable of taking charge of, and leading lives...'* (APRM 2011:63)

Africa's Agenda 2063 has set forth certain milestones related to integration, prosperity, and African ownership of its development programmes. Further milestones are related to structural transformation, human development, good governance and on innovation and technology transfer. For the purposes of the discussion at hand, I have singled out milestones in prosperity and on innovation and technology transfer that the Agenda postulates. The milestones on prosperity directly pertaining to the issues being explored herein include a highly productive and profitable agricultural sector based on value chains by 2020, the modernization and transformation of agriculture into a highly diversified and productive sector by 2023. Meanwhile, the milestones on innovation and technology transfer that are of significance to our paper are building a better infrastructure, engineering and manufacturing base that shows significant increase in local content and input, increased science, technology and innovation (STI) output at national and regional levels and increased human capacity for science and technology and stimulating entrepreneurship through an increased number of added value products and services.

Reading through these select milestones and comparing the outcomes to what Benin's Songhai project has managed to achieve, one cannot help but remark that Agenda 2063 will be ill served if it did not draw lessons from the best practice in social-economic development that the Songhai project has managed to institute. This is especially taking into account that the Agenda not only positions itself as Africa's vision and action plan for the next 50 years, the document wants to set out measurable outcomes to indeed showcase to the rest of the world that Africa has made a gradual transformation in its political, economic and social development through adopting common positions, attaining policy coherency and implementing ideas and innovations that have brought success within the continent.

In this regard and in setting forth its monitoring and evaluation logical framework, Agenda 2063 can borrow lessons from Benin's Songhai project in terms of articulating a. the issues to be addressed in monitoring the implementation of Agenda 2063. For example, the Agenda speaks of turning the demographic shift into a demographic dividend. An issue that should clearly be pointed out is how young people are to be integrated into the developmental discourse. Taking lessons from Benin's Songhai project, one could single out the mechanisms through which young people's mind-sets towards agriculture were changed. The point here is to draw on concrete ways of doing that could be adopted to other contexts and thereafter monitoring the implementation, successes and draw-backs against an outlined set of desired outcomes

The aforementioned also holds in the clear identification of problems to be handled. As Benin's Songhai project manifests, the problems to be handled were manifold but intertwined or their interconnectedness logically thought through. These included making agriculture attractive and an enterprising project, using local skills and innovations, carving out a market not only locally but also regionally and in this manner making the activities around agriculture productive and the deliberate inscription of a particular group in society. The main lesson that Agenda 2063 could draw from the Songhai project is the *embeddedness* in the identification of problems and outlining their interconnectedness. That is, Songhai outlined problems that were being faced on a day to day basis and changed this situation to an advantage using solutions that local (young) people came up with. This meant that local people owned the processes as they could identify with these. Thus in drawing up the monitoring and evaluation framework of the Agenda, contexts should be identified, concrete problems outlined and people within those contexts who are to put forward processes for change identified. Agenda 2063 could also borrow lessons from the Songhai project on how indicators of success that feed into each other (i.e. offer solutions to a set of interrelated problems) are to be drawn up, the setting up of outcomes against a time frame and medium term remedial measures as one goes along in the achievement of set goals. The Agenda, and especially the monitoring and evaluation component, it is proposed, should be a logically, well thought out document that is embedded in people's everyday realities

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have argued that the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), adopted as a programme of the African Union, demonstrates African agency. Through exploring 'best practices' in social economic development and privileging Benin's Songhai project, I have shown this African agency. I have, in the write-up, posited that AU's Agenda 2063 to be adopted as Africa's vision and action plan for economic emancipation in the next 50 years has a lot of lessons to learn from APRM's best practices. These, I posit, hold greater currency in the development of a monitoring and evaluation logical framework to track the implementation of the Agenda and the progress recorded over time. Consequently, the underlying thesis that I have defended in this treatise is that AU's Agenda 2063 would hold greater legitimacy in not only offering common positions and policy coherency but more so in strategically positioning itself in regional and global geopolitics by demonstrating that existing African initiated institutions aimed at the transformation of society, for example the APRM, show case a uniquely African agency in the sharing of best practices. Indeed, peer learning as a distinctive component of this African agency is underscored and should form a research agenda item in the near future.

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- Benin Country Review Report. 2008. (6) 231. The African Peer Review Mechanism Secretariat. Midrand: Johannesburg
- Agenda 2063 Draft Framework Document. 2013. The African Union Commission. Addis Ababa: Ethiopia

## WEB RESOURCES

- The APRM Base Document, [www.aprm.org](http://www.aprm.org) accessed on a continuous basis
- NEPAD base document [http://www.dfa.gov.za/au.nepad/nepad\\_overview.htm](http://www.dfa.gov.za/au.nepad/nepad_overview.htm) accessed on 30/08/2012
- <http://new.uneca.org/aprm/StagesAPRM.aspx> accessed on a continuous basis - February 2013
- [http://saiia.org.za/aprmtoolkit/docs/APRM\\_basics/atkt\\_herbert\\_apr\\_overview\\_2007\\_en.pdf](http://saiia.org.za/aprmtoolkit/docs/APRM_basics/atkt_herbert_apr_overview_2007_en.pdf) accessed on a continuous basis - February 2013