

AFRIMAP: ON NOT USING INDICATORS TO SCORE PROGRESS IN GOVERNANCE*

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Abstract

This article describes the methodology and experience of AfriMAP, a project of the Open Society Institute's network of African foundations, in working with civil society organisations in different African countries to carry out audits of government performance. It explains why AfriMAP has decided not to use its questionnaires as the basis for scoring countries on their performance, but rather focused on qualitative analysis. Finally it indicates which quantitative indicators are useful to AfriMAP, and what other indicators would be useful.

The origins & working methods of AfriMAP

AfriMAP, the Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project, was established in 2004 as an initiative of the Open Society Institute network's four African foundations to monitor the compliance of member states of the African Union (AU) with the standards that the AU has adopted in relation to good governance, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. In particular, AfriMAP is a response to the AU's adoption of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and its associated African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). AfriMAP aims both to promote engagement in a coherent way with these standard-setting exercises by the continental institutions and contribute to their implementation at national level.

NEPAD and the African Peer Review Mechanism

The New Partnership for Africa's Development is a strategic framework setting out a 'vision for Africa's renewal', initially adopted by African heads of state in 2001. Though it had independent origins and has its own secretariat based in South Africa, NEPAD is a programme of the AU.

In July 2002, the AU summit supplemented NEPAD with a Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance. According to the Declaration, states participating in NEPAD 'believe in just, honest, transparent, accountable and participatory government and probity in public life'. The Declaration committed participating states to establish an African Peer Review Mechanism, by which heads of state and government would themselves assess adherence to and fulfilment of its commitments by their fellow leaders.

In March 2003, the NEPAD heads of state and government implementation committee adopted a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on the APRM. This MOU effectively operates as a treaty, and states that do not sign it are not subject to peer review. As of February 2007, 27 countries had done so, just over half the member states of the AU. The meeting agreed to the establishment of a secretariat for the APRM, also based in South Africa, and the appointment of a seven-person 'panel of eminent persons' to oversee the conduct of the APRM process and ensure its integrity.

The APR Secretariat, functioning by late 2003, developed a questionnaire based on a wide range of African and international human rights treaties and standards to guide the assessment of participating states' compliance with the principles of NEPAD. Its questions are grouped under four broad thematic headings: democracy and political

* Paper presented at the Second World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy: Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies, organised by the OECD in Istanbul, Turkey, 27-30 June 2007.

governance, economic governance and management, corporate governance, and socio-economic development. The questionnaire was formally adopted in February 2004, in Kigali, Rwanda, by the first meeting of the APR Forum, made up of the heads of state or government of all states participating in the APRM.

The APRM process in each country results in three important documents. The first is a 'self assessment' by the country concerned against the APRM questionnaire. The development of this self-assessment is supposed to be highly participatory and not controlled by the government; a 'national dialogue' about the challenges the country faces. The eminent persons and the APR Secretariat review this self-assessment, and develop a separate 'country review report' that takes into account the self-assessment but also independently collected information. Based on the self-assessment and the draft country review report, a programme of action (PoA) is developed by the government concerned in consultation with the eminent persons. The PoA includes a detailed log frame presentation of costed activities and targets to achieve. The country review report and PoA are ultimately presented and approved by the APR Forum, at which point they are made public. Three reports have been published so far: Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda. The country review reports of South Africa and Algeria are due for consideration in the margins of the AU summit in mid-2007.

Aid-for-governance? The APRM and development assistance

The APRM was, at least in part, adopted as a result of a deal between African leaders and the G8: the G8 promised in its 2002 Africa Action Plan that more development assistance would be made available, in return for African action to improve domestic governance to ensure that the new aid would not be wasted. This promise was elaborated and repeated at successive summits, most importantly in 2005 at Gleneagles, which followed the publication of the report of the Commission for Africa appointed by British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

The APRM has, since it really began its work in 2004, taken on its own life in Africa and operates not necessarily with reference to development assistance. But insofar as the quid pro quo of action on governance for increased aid is still operational, there appear to be distinctly different interpretations from the G8 and African sides of what the APRM should achieve.

From the G8 (and OECD more generally), the view seems to be prevalent that the purpose of the APRM and similar assessments should be to score African countries on their governance performance: if a country achieves a certain standard, then it should be rewarded with additional aid. This approach is made explicit in the European Commission's governance profiles, which are intended to generate scores against a set of criteria developed by the Commission. (However, both the UK and France appear to be taking somewhat different, less score-based directions.) From the side of African governments, meanwhile, the understanding is rather that the purpose of the APRM is for each country to decide for itself what its main challenges are, and that whatever the challenges identified, development assistance should be awarded to support the process of addressing them. There is a very strong resistance to scores that rank countries on the basis of rich country experts' opinions, whatever the strength or otherwise of the methodology used.

In the context of this (perhaps overstated) dichotomy, AfriMAP has taken the view that the African analysis of the most useful role for the APRM is likely to be more productive. Its methodology was developed accordingly.

AfriMAP methodology

AfriMAP works with the Open Society Institute's Africa foundations – the Open Society Foundation for South Africa and the multi-country Open Society Initiatives for

Southern, West and East Africa (OSISA, OSIWA and OSIEA) – and national civil society organizations to conduct systematic questionnaire-based audits of government performance that can feed into or complement the APRM process.

AfriMAP's methodology was developed while the APRM was itself being set up, and evolved during a period of discussion over two years among both OSI staff and external experts that among other things considered and rejected the idea of developing 'shadow reports' based on the APRM's questionnaire. Instead, it was decided to focus on areas of particular interest to OSI. The three AfriMAP reporting themes ultimately crystallised as: justice sector and the rule of law; political participation and democracy; and effective delivery of public services. These three themes very broadly cover the classically described three arms or functions of government: the judiciary, courts and access to justice; electoral processes, citizen participation in government and the functioning of the legislature; and the effectiveness of the executive in delivering what should be the fruits of democracy to citizens.

In each case, we are focusing on institutions and processes rather than outcomes: in this, we are broadly following the UNDP definition of 'governance' as 'the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels. Governance is a neutral concept comprising the complex mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences' (UNDP, 1997).

Detailed research questionnaires for each theme were developed through extensive background research on appropriate standards and existing efforts to monitor their implementation, and in a series of dedicated two-day expert meetings. In terms of general methodology, one of the more important sources drawn on was the questionnaire used for the International IDEA 'State of Democracy' reports.

The justice sector questionnaire was the first completed, followed by political participation and democracy, and then effective delivery of public services. The justice sector questionnaire was the easiest to develop, since the relevant standards are the most clearly established at international and African levels (including for example, the exhaustive Guidelines and Principles on the Right to a Fair Trial and Legal Assistance in Africa, adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights), and many other surveys have already examined the relevant issues, even if not with exactly the same focus. The second theme is also well-established in relation to election standards in particular, and functioning of the legislature to a lesser degree (where there tend to be more best practices than established standards), and we tried to extend it to the wider question of participation in decision-making processes endorsed at the African level by the Charter on Popular Participation in Development (which is quite fuzzy, but establishes the principles clearly). This includes respect for freedom of expression and association, as well as wider opportunities for public engagement in policy debate. The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance adopted in January 2007 adds greater force to these standards.

The third theme, on delivery of public services, was the most difficult to develop and is perhaps the most innovative. The questionnaire goes beyond the relatively well-trodden path of reporting on the implementation of the measures provided in the UN and AU anti-corruption treaties, to draw, among other documents, on the Charter for the Public Service in Africa, which sets out comprehensive guidelines on merit-based recruitment and promotion, declaration of assets, professionalism and courtesy etc; on the work of such organisations as the International Budget Project, which has led the way in developing standards of transparency and accountability in budget-making; on

developing norms in relation to decentralisation; and – of most interest to this meeting – on the initiatives of PARIS21, UNSTATS, UNECA and others in relation to strengthening African statistical capacity. We have written the questionnaire with the intention that researchers may use it to assess the performance of the set of institutions involved, from the national ministry down, in delivering one particular public service – in most cases we expect this to be education or health – rather than the whole executive arm of government. In this way, we hope to prompt more focused research that could be used for effective advocacy on one key service which government should be ensuring that citizens can access. The questionnaire thus does not look at outcomes in education or health (literacy, disease prevalence etc) but rather at the capability of government machinery to take steps to improve poor outcomes. (And one of the basic functions of government that must work in order for politicians or citizens to plan and monitor public service delivery effectively is the production of reliable national statistics.)

All three questionnaires include a focus on development assistance and relations with foreign countries or international institutions, and all three have already been revised on the basis of feedback from the users.

We started work in five ‘pilot’ countries: South Africa, Malawi, Mozambique, Ghana and Senegal. The choice was determined by the OSI foundations. Work on an AfriMAP survey in Kenya was launched in April 2007. We also anticipate beginning work in Lesotho, DRC, Zambia, Benin, and Sierra Leone during 2007 and 2008. The AfriMAP countries have all signed up for the APRM (though we do not exclude the possibility of working on non-APRM countries in future), and are countries where there is a certain level of democratic openness so that the methodology is more likely to be able to have an advocacy impact in affecting the actual practice of government.

All the research for the AfriMAP reports is carried out by national partners, usually existing grantees of the OSI Africa foundations, and AfriMAP and the foundations have put a great deal of effort into ensuring that the research and reporting process has included a wide range of voices at national level. We have engaged in many preliminary meetings with important national stakeholders during the preparatory phase, and then held round table workshops at which the reports’ findings have been discussed with relevant stakeholders. Several of the reports have also had technical advisory teams who have commented on findings during the research process. This commitment to process means that the time frame for production of our reports is at least 18 months to two years per country; longer than we expected at the outset.

Through these surveys we are trying to mobilise (and provide financial and technical support resources for) national civil society organisations and experts to produce high quality research products that analyse the workings of government in a qualitative way and – critically – provide recommendations on how to address the problems, around which civil society can mobilise. One of the key audiences for this research is the APRM, African governments’ own model of audit, which we hope to strengthen both by example of quality research and by enabling more effective citizen participation in its processes. In this respect, our interaction with the OSI foundations funding in each country is crucial for successful follow-up advocacy based on the AfriMAP reports. In both Malawi and Mozambique, for example, AfriMAP research on the justice sector has been twinned with a grant to the university faculty of law by OSISA, and distribution of the AfriMAP reports among both academics and justice system staff will form a key information resource.

In some areas, AfriMAP’s work has clear commonalities with surveys of sector performance by other institutions: the World Bank’s assessments of the justice sector

in different countries, for example. However, AfriMAP is trying both to get into more overtly ‘political’ areas, including by focusing on democracy, and in relation to public service delivery to cross the usual divide between health or education specialists and the governance and democracy organisations.

The intention is to repeat the surveys at intervals, though as updates on new developments rather than fully detailed assessments; the periodicity will depend also on decisions relating to numbers of additional countries that are added to the AfriMAP portfolio. As the number of reports builds up, AfriMAP will also start producing comparative analysis across countries – and we will be establishing a useful database of information on these issues that others can use for the same purpose.

The merits and demerits of scores or analytical reports

Although the idea is that the AfriMAP audits will all follow a standard template that will enable countries to compare their experiences and learn from each other, we are not giving countries a score or ranking them against each other – and we have resisted suggestions that we should do so.

Why does AfriMAP not generate numerical governance indicators from its surveys?

AfriMAP made a very early decision that it would not seek to develop a scoring method to use its questionnaires to create a governance ranking based on the opinions of international or national experts, or even focus groups of ‘ordinary people’. We came to this decision for the following reasons:

- Our experience as activists working on the African continent is that the reaction to the Freedom House rankings (in particular) is generally to treat them as comic, and our knowledge of how the rankings were generated did not encourage us to challenge this view.
- Some civil society rankings do have a certain immediate advocacy impact – for example, Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index – but rarely take you beyond the obvious in terms of indicating which countries are doing well or badly. It is impossible to draw any real distinctions between countries that rank close together on the list.
- Although governance rankings with a more systematic, carefully constructed and transparent methodology – such as the Global Integrity Index of the Center for Public Integrity – could over time possibly provide a competitive incentive for improvement among neighbouring countries, this would require the creation of an all-Africa dataset, repeated annually or biannually, with a very major input of resources for an output of unproven usefulness. One of the most difficult aspects of constructing such an index is the challenge of avoiding an almost inevitable ideological bias in the questions chosen.
- One of the main objectives of the AfriMAP audits was to provide an analysis of government systems that could help Africa address the crisis of implementation that it currently faces. A generalised governance ranking system based on indicators does not provide recommendations on reform measures.
- In particular, the AfriMAP surveys aim to inform the grant-making carried out by the OSI foundations in Africa. The foundations require qualitative analytical research to inform useful allocation of resources, rather than one-line rankings.
- It made most sense to construct a system of governance audit that meshed with the surveys being conducted by the APRM, since our aim was to provide constructive input into the APRM process and provide the sort of quality information that could strengthen the APRM’s country review reports. (We did

not adopt the APRM questionnaire itself as the basis for research, on the grounds both that it has significant deficiencies – for example, it does not request information on the state of media freedom – and that it ranges so widely that it would be difficult to provide quality inputs across the issues covered, while some areas went beyond the core interests of OSI.)

- We wanted to retain flexibility to vary the questionnaires and their application over time and in each country, in order to take account of our own learning processes and changing contexts: a scoring system valid over time requires complete consistency in the questions asked and a rigid set of rules to guide the calibration of responses.
- Governance rankings generated by intergovernmental institutions such as the World Bank's Country Policy and Institutional Assessments (CPIAs) that consider the inner workings of government in quite some detail – though they have their own faults (see for example OECD, 2006) – also depend on privileged access to government information, which as a civil society initiative we would not have.

What quantitative governance indicators are useful?

This is not to say that some score-based information sources and rankings are not useful – and we use them in our reports. AfriMAP uses both qualitative and quantitative information to prepare its audits of governance performance. The issue is therefore not so much the concept of governance indicators but the ways they are generated and how they are used.

In addition to the outcome indicators for poverty reduction, education and health for the Millennium Development Goals and similar international targets, the indicators that AfriMAP has used include, in the governance field:

- The index of press freedom prepared by Reporters sans Frontières;
- The comparative questionnaire-based surveys by the International Budget Project on budget transparency;
- The reports on government responsiveness to requests for information produced by the Open Society Justice Initiative; and in particular
- The opinion poll results tracking public opinion in Africa on a range of issues related to democracy and governance published by Afrobarometer and DIAL.

The usefulness of these surveys is that they are based on indicators that provide 'real' information in a very clearly defined field. In the case of the press freedom, IBP and OSJI reports, the focused format is transparent in what it is measuring, the questions being asked have clear yes/no or quantifiable responses, and it is obvious both how to obtain an improved ranking and why (if you agree with the basic premise that citizen access to information is a good thing) it would be desirable to do so.

In the case of Afrobarometer and DIAL, the questions are more open-ended, without quantifiable responses on an individual basis, but the reports they produce do not claim to be providing a 'true' picture of respect for democracy, the level of corruption etc, but are rather a snapshot of citizen views based on a demonstrable and standard methodology. Importantly, the information they provide is kept disaggregated, so that what you learn are separate stand-alone reports on what percentage of citizens think (for example) that multi-party elections are a better way of choosing a government than military coups or inheritance; or that corruption is widespread; or that the police are helpful. These percentages tell you interesting detailed information about the interaction of a broad range of citizens (and not just an

elite) with government, rather than being wrapped into one aggregate score that provides a superficially attractive simplicity but no information that could actually be used by policy makers or activists to guide work on specific reforms. The World Bank's country Governance Diagnostic Surveys fit in this same more useful category.

We also think that indicators that are context-specific rather than universal are more likely to be useful. While there is no doubt that the more established western democracies have contributed a great deal to theories and best practices regarding governance, universal indicators have tended to emphasize the value systems and norms of organisation that are dominant in those more established democracies. For example, in measuring a specific aspect of governance such as electoral systems there is need to take into account a country's electoral and political history. A numerical index purporting to reflect the independence of a country's electoral body may fail to capture the normative framework within which governance institutions are constructed. Similarly, indicators relating to the media too often assume that the economic context is unproblematic, yet the economics of information differ greatly among countries and provide very different challenges: from the cost of newsprint or broadcasting equipment to domination by private sector conglomerates that drown out independent voices.

For this reason, AfriMAP has attempted to work in a way that moves away from the perception that measurement of governance is often externally driven and a cousin of the conditions that are often imposed as part of aid packages. To the extent possible, measurement of progress is thus linked to the value systems (including AU treaties, NEPAD, APRM, etc) that have been explicitly endorsed by countries that are being assessed.

What other indicators does AfriMAP use?

AfriMAP's reports use other relevant numerical indicators when we can find them – and indeed national researchers are often generating useful primary information on indicators of various types, or collating it from disparate and hard-to-access sources (including interviews with government officials), especially in less-well documented countries (that is, most places in Africa apart from South Africa).

In addition to the commonly used statistics on the criminal justice system or conduct of elections, these include, for example, data on the gender breakdown of judges; on the average time to bring a case to court; on what percentage of courts have access to a complete set of legislation; on how many laws are passed by a national legislature each year; on the number of civil servants disciplined or prosecuted for corruption offences; on (under)staffing of technical positions in key ministries. Even if these data are available in-country, in annual reports of ministries for example, the reports are often not online, and the data are not collated and analysed in such a way that allows cross country comparison. AfriMAP is not, however, able to collect exactly the same information in each country, since there does usually have to be at least some basic collection of statistics by a national authority for us to report.

What quantitative indicators are missing that would be useful for AfriMAP?

AfriMAP does not have the human, financial or technical resources to carry out on our own account major national information-collection activities nor detailed opinion poll research. In some areas of interest to us, this has meant that our national partners have had to respond to questions in the questionnaire with the response that information is not available to enable an effective response to the question asked. Areas on which we would like to report and have found that quantitative information is lacking in at least some countries, and which would provide important levers for civil society to use to put pressure on government to improve performance, include:



- Statistics about the functioning of the justice system that could be (and in some cases are) easily collected by the courts, such as the percentage of cases in court where litigants or accused don't have legal representation; the number of cases that are adjourned for absence of court officials (judges, registrars, interpreters etc); or the attrition rate from number of reported crimes, through arrests, prosecutions and convictions.
- Systematic monitoring of issues related to the right to information and equitable access to broadcast media, beyond the existence of legislation supporting such principles (percentage responses to requests for information; percentage airtime given to different parties, etc).
- Improved indicators about compliance with best practices in public financial management (PFM), including clear reports on budget execution figures, the percentage of procurement contracts that are advertised, etc. The World Bank does use its CPIAs to monitor PFM against a range of indicators, and produces scores on this basis that it shares with governments, but these scores have only very recently been made public, still lack transparency in their construction, and are very poorly publicised or understood at national level. It is hard for the non-technical-expert to tell from the scores why and where in particular the country has fallen down; and some of the scores do not seem to be based on fact, but rather opinion. The IMF's Reports on Standards and Codes (ROSCs) also provide useful information but are highly technical and not available for most African countries – and their publication is at the discretion of the government concerned. Moreover, it is not possible for civil society to replicate the assessments since much of the information on which they are based are only accessible to government or institutions such as the World Bank that have privileged access. There is a need for much greater publicity and education about these measures, as well as serious consultation at national level on what should be included and how it should be applied: there is natural suspicion at the ideological content of assessments from the international financial institutions. In this regard, the recently established Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) joint program of a wide range of donors is encouraging, since it provides a framework of greater transparency.
- Indicators along the same lines as those applied to PFM relating to the funding of political parties: including the existence of legislation regulating party finance and its enforcement, requirements of transparency, auditing of party accounts, and the provision of equal access to state-funded benefits if any (including access to the broadcast media, use of state vehicles etc, as well as state funding of parties in itself).
- Similarly, reports on a check list of statistical capacity indicators, ideally carried out by government itself in conjunction with international agencies, would educate national civil society and legislators about the importance of this key government function. Statistical capacity indicators have been developed at international level, but are little known outside the specialist technical agencies, are available for few countries in Africa, and are not presented in a way that would allow engaged citizens to understand what exactly it is that needs to be done to improve the situation.
- In the area of general civil service reform, the information that would be useful is much less technical, but still hard to find. Monitoring government performance in improving public service delivery would be made easier by requirements to collect and publish information such as: current staffing complement for the



public service, disaggregated to the individual unit and with information on whether approved positions are vacant; the percentage of civil service positions filled through public advertisement; the pay rates in cash terms for all public employees; the percentage of public employees who are subject to and actually receive performance evaluations; the number of personnel days lost each year through strikes or absenteeism by category of employee, etc.

- In the context of surveys by Afrobarometer or others, a set of questions (in addition to those already included) around the attitude of African citizens to traditional leadership and justice structures and how they should best be integrated into the post-colonial state; and others on the usefulness of different mechanisms for seeking dispute resolution (including courts of various kinds, constitutional bodies such as national human rights institutions, street committees and similar, vigilante groups, police...).
- To take account of the realities of African countries' access to resources, an indication for each government department of the amount requested by the department for its budget, and the funds actually available. (In many cases this is technically available, but not in a commonly reported way.)
- There is a need for much more effective monitoring (and policing) from the OECD side of donor compliance with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Notoriously, OECD member states have resisted disaggregation by country of information collected by the Development Cooperation Directorate (DAC) on implementation of the Paris Declaration. The joint document published in 2005 by the UN Economic Commission on Africa and the OECD DAC on Development Effectiveness in Africa is notably fuzzy in the indicators set, and needs further elaboration and monitoring to turn it into a more useful instrument – in particular, clearer standards on untying aid. However, even if the OECD produced regular and detailed reports on the degree to which the existing commitments have been met by each OECD country, it would be a demonstration of seriousness from the donor side.

Conclusion

In general, it seems to us that assessments of institutional performance (for example, the degree to which the judiciary is independent, the strength of legislative oversight of the executive, or the effectiveness of the national audit institution) are extremely important, but not easily reducible to quantitative indicators. Nor is it apparent what attaching a number to an assessment of this type – for example, that parliamentary committees are weak – would achieve.

Governance indicators are used for different purposes and different users will have different priorities. An investor who wants to assess the level of risk in several countries may find that scoring and ranking provides a good basis for decision making. For most development agencies, the professed goal is to make significant contribution to improving governance so it is in this regard that a more in-depth assessment of progress or lack thereof is warranted. Governments – the focus of all this attention and ultimately responsible for implementing the insights these measures are supposed to provide – will have yet more specific requirements to inform their decisions.

Rather than wrestling with the methodological problems of providing numbers for things that cannot in reality be counted, it would make more sense to invest time and resources in ensuring that the things that can usefully be counted are done so according to the best methodologies. And that this information is made public. If quantitative indicators are to be established, they are much more useful when they are based on information that naturally lends itself to numerical reporting, and shows

clearly where the deficit is and how it can be improved. If aggregated scores are generated from these indicators, then the disaggregated numbers must also be freely available.

Where quantitative indicators are not appropriate, qualitative analysis will be necessary and can make a much more useful contribution to policy reform. Even where quantitative indicators are completely appropriate, they will need qualitative interpretation and analysis to lead to useable recommendations.

Finally, in regard to all such governance measurement initiatives, there is a great need for much wider outreach and consultation by the relevant institutions on what the appropriate measures are and how to apply them. This is especially true when it comes to areas that are traditionally the realm of 'experts' – especially public financial management, statistics etc. In addition to national governments, this includes, most obviously, parliaments: the role of national legislatures is too often overlooked, both as an institution that should be included in measures of governance quality, but also as a forum for explaining and seeking the input of the citizens' representatives on how their government's performance should be rated. The input of civil society organizations, especially those working on human rights and democracy, will also be needed if the evaluation of government performance is to bite at national level. No governance measurement system is likely to be effective or useful for internal as well as external actors unless it is devised and informed by a process that involves those same actors in its development.

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