



It's Time for the National Programme of Action

Roseline M. Achieng¹

As the APRM celebrates 10 years of its existence, it is important to highlight the immense achievements of the mechanism. Profound and central to the APRM is the country self-assessment process with its elaborate methodology encompassing nation-wide consultations with various stakeholders in political, economic, corporate and socio-economic governance. The product of this exercise is a critical document named the National Programme of Action (NPOA). NPOAs identify and highlight discrepancies in a nation's socio-economic, political, economic and corporate governance. However, the aim is not only to bring to the fore the various deficiencies in these governance areas, NPOAs also seek to provide clear commitments that are realisable within a specific time period by the responsible ministry or focal point for implementing the outlined recommendations. The objectives, which are captured in a matrix, are aimed at guiding and mobilising efforts from the requisite institutions to implement the necessary changes that should witness improvements in socio-economic development, political governance, economic and corporate management and governance. NPOAs also outline the necessary capacities to be put in place both in terms of monetary injection and expertise to achieve the objectives targeted. NPOAs are envisaged to be the guiding document of actions towards a country's holistic national development. The conspicuous difference

between NPOAs and National Development Plans is that whereas the former are programmes of action strategically articulating tangible changes in the four pillars of governance, the latter are elaborate policies that primarily guide the socio-economic developmental path of a country.

THE NEGLECT AND DEMISE OF NPOAs

Despite their potential to bring about change, NPOAs have been neglected, have not garnered enough momentum and in some instances have been shelved. The lack of support for and authority of NPOAs has been exacerbated by the declining role of the National Governing Councils and the overall lethargy and loss of interest in the APRM process.

THE ADVANTAGES OF NPOAs

- 1 NPOAs as measurable indicators: NPOAs clearly show governments and their citizenry where progress has been realised and where efforts need to be galvanised to bring about transformation.
- 2 NPOAs showcase best practices: Different country level best practices that have worked to bring about transformation are outlined in a country's NPOAs. This showcasing is a strong tool for sharing of

experiences and best practices that have worked in certain contexts and which can be replicated, albeit with adjustments in other contexts.

- 3 NPOAs as a process to facilitate participatory development: NPOAs provide for a broad framework of participatory development, where both governments and citizenry feel included in matters that affect their lives and well-being.
 - 4 NPOAs as a learning tool: Apart from participating in development, citizens are exposed to the process of national planning. Citizens begin to understand how governments allocate both finances and expertise/skills to the different development objectives of a nation.
 - 5 NPOAs as a powerful instrument of transparency and accountability: Given the intense consultative exercise, NPOAs lay bare different socio-economic, political and economic management priorities that need to be addressed, as well as the change to be realised by involving different actors. Given this transparency, NPOAs are a powerful instrument to hold governments accountable and/or demand accountability for action/non action from the different focal points and agencies of implementation.
 - 6 NPOAs as an advocacy tool: Meeting the governance standards and realising the changes outlined in the NPOAs can be a strong advocacy tool especially in the global and international governance arena. Countries can basically show through both qualitative and quantitative measures how they have improved and transformed the various governance challenges facing them in the political, socio-economic, corporate and economic management fields.
- Finding Champions – here the NGCs are of profound importance in taking up the baton of holding different implementation agencies accountable. In the same light, it is important to recognise efforts, goals and objectives that have been accomplished. The APRM secretariat and its various strategic partners could provide technical skills and provide other forms of support to the NGCs
 - Creating Channels of Influence – finding socio-economic and political space and using this space creatively and effectively
 - Finding synergies – especially with other governance structures at the African Union level, for example NEPAD², PAP³, the PSC⁴ Council, ECOSOCC⁵ and the RECs⁶. Such synergies will boost the convening power of NPOAs.
 - Managing diversity – through integration with other national programmes for example national development plans, millennium development goals and national budgets. In this respect, the NPOA becomes the overarching framework under which all other national development initiatives find niches.

REVIVING NPOAs

It is apparent that NPOAs are extremely important for a government's overall development. Given this critical interlocation, the question that begs our analysis is how NPOAs can be revived and given the place of prominence that they deserve

in national development plans. The following are ways in which advocacy for the revival of NPOAs could proceed:

ENDNOTES

- 1 Roseline M. Achieng' is the programme head of the South Africa Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) Governance and APRM Programme. She wishes to thank Jeggan Grey Johnson of the Open Society Institute – African Governance and Monitoring Project (AfriMAP) and Grant Masterson of the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) for their valuable inputs. The Governance and APRM programme is grateful to the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) for their generous support.
- 2 The New Partnership for Africa's Development.
- 3 Pan African Parliament.
- 4 Peace and Security Council.
- 5 The Economic, Social and Cultural Council.
- 6 The Regional Economic Communities.