



Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa

# **AFRICA'S UNTAPPED RESOURCE**

Analysing Youth in the APRM

by **Melanie Meirotti**



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This paper is part of a series commissioned by the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) exploring the content of APRM Country Review Reports (CRRs) currently available on issues including gender, land, youth, extractive industries, elections and violence, and government responses to the APRM CRRs.

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Africa is the next frontier – a continent full of possibility, a market of untapped and underutilised natural and human resources. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the youth populations of African states. Africa in 2015 exists in a context in which global economic growth rates have slowed, as have global population growth rates. By contrast, sub-Saharan Africa is experiencing an average 6% annual economic growth rate. Africa also has the fastest-growing and most youthful population in the world. Over 40% of Africa's people are under the age of 15 and 20% are between the ages of 15 and 24 (African Development Bank 2012). This environment offers the potential for an increasing youth population to drive economic growth on the continent. The question is, however, are the youth being equipped for the task at hand?

Since 2003, 17 African countries have undergone an African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) country review. Of the 16 country review reports (CRRs) published in English, five – Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Kenya and Sierra Leone – specifically mention challenges relating to youth as a major 'cross-cutting issue'. Youth-related issues are, however, addressed to some extent in all the reports. While references to youth vary across the reports, the text-mining methodology applied in this research suggests that the overwhelming majority of references to youth are found in the 'Democracy and Good Political Governance' and 'Socio-Economic Governance' thematic chapters.

Issues around education and employment emerge as the two overarching youth-related challenges raised in the CRRs. The common youth education challenges outlined involve poor enrolment in secondary and tertiary level education institutions, the poor quality of

education available and a lack of coordination and synergy between the education system and the marketplace. The Algeria, Kenya and Sierra Leone reports emphasise youth employment as a concern, describing a twofold problem of supply and demand. Countries are experiencing escalating numbers of youth, often with inadequate and inappropriate education and skills to meet the demands of the economy. This situation is aggravated in many cases by the fact that the youth population growth rate has escalated faster than the economic growth rate. Furthermore, the conversation in the reports regarding both challenges reveals shared concerns of potential political and social instability as well as a failure to achieve sustainable economic development.

An overview of all the APRM CRRs reveals one general shortfall in the youth conversation. Despite youth education and employment being interrelated, there is no holistic approach to the questions raised in the APRM questionnaire and the subsequent conversations in the thematic chapters of the CRRs. The number of appropriately educated youth entering the labour market has profound implications for business and the economy more broadly, yet youth receive scant mention in the APRM reports' analysis of 'Economic Governance and Management' and 'Corporate Governance'.

Each of the 16 APRM reports included in this study cites unique experiences with regard to the youth population and various degrees of success and failure. This provides an opportunity for sharing best (and worst) practices and peer learning. This paper examines what the reports say about youth issues in the context of governance processes in APRM member states, and recommends a more

holistic and constructive approach to the youth conversation.

## METHODOLOGY

As at June 2015 a total of 17 African Union member countries had undergone an APRM country review and had produced country review reports. The structure of the APRM CRRs has evolved over time and the 17 reports vary slightly in structure, while following a standardised template. The reports do, however, share a similar general layout, comprised of seven to eight chapters, starting with a description of the APRM process and the historical context and current challenges that exist in the country under review.

The bulk of the report examines the state of governance in the country. The final sections are used to identify certain ‘cross-cutting issues’ that may exist, and draw conclusions on the overall findings of the report. This study will examine the 16 reports that have been published in English, excluding the Mali report, which has only been published in French. The information in these chapters is gathered from government and civil society, utilising an APRM Master Questionnaire (published in 2004) as a guideline. The questionnaire comprises a series of questions falling under various objectives outlined within the four thematic chapters:

1. Democracy and Good Political Governance
2. Economic Governance and Management
3. Corporate Governance
4. Socio-economic Development

The questionnaire is only intended as a guideline and parties involved in the review process are encouraged to add additional points that may not be covered in the questionnaire. It should, however, be noted that while this space is available for elaboration the points raised (and not raised) in the questionnaire to a large extent determine

the conversation in the reports. In 2013 a revised Master Questionnaire, with several amendments and additions, was issued. No reports to date have utilised the revised questionnaire and for this reason the findings of this paper are based on the original 2004 questionnaire.

This study utilises text-mining as a technique to identify youth-related trends across the reports. Text-mining involves compiling and analysing statistical data derived from text documents. The first step in this process is the conversion of the APRM CRRs into text files. The text is stripped from the reports and a word-frequency table is compiled, which displays how often each word appears in each chapter of each report. This study was specifically interested in whether certain words related to youth appeared more often in certain APRM CRRs and whether these words appeared more often in certain thematic chapters in these reports. These patterns reveal which countries are speaking more about youth than others and what kind of conversation they are having.

Each APRM CRR has a ‘Cross-cutting Issues’ section, be it as a separate chapter or part of the conclusion. The issues in this section are recognised as being ‘interconnected and requiring an integrated or holistic response’. Stakeholders are invited to identify cross-cutting issues they consider important from the perspective of the country (African Union 11-12). Youth was identified as a cross-cutting issue in five of the APRM reports. From these five reports two broad subjects emerged: youth education and youth employment. Based on the trends identified within the cross-cutting issues sections word clusters, composed of words associated with selected themes, were compiled – see Table 1. These words were cross-referenced with words in the word frequency table. The primary word cluster for this paper is youth, and education and employment are the secondary clusters. The word clusters are run through statistical software

which collates data into patterns, allowing a visual depiction of the frequency with which words are utilised in different chapters of the various CRRs.

**Table 1**  
**Word clusters related to youth trends**

YOUTH	EDUCATION	EMPLOYMENT
Youth	educate	employment
	educating	employed
	education	underemployment
	educational	unemployed
	school	unemployment
	schooling	job
	schools	jobs
	student	
	students	
	teach	

Based on the frequency of words in the youth, education and employment word clusters, ‘heatmaps’ were generated – Figures 1, 2 and 3 are discussed in more detail in the sections below. These heatmaps reveal patterns across the chapters and countries in this study, expressed as the average occurrence per ten thousand words of text. The countries (as well as the date of the report publication) are listed alphabetically in the horizontal rows and the far-right column contains the average word frequency for each country report. The thematic chapters are in the vertical columns, the bottom row contains the average frequency for each chapter and the bottom-right cell contains the average frequency across all reports. The internal cells of the heatmap are colour coded according to the word frequency – ranging from light yellow, representing the lowest word frequencies, to dark red, representing the highest word frequencies.

## YOUTH IN THE APRM REPORTS

Youth is defined differently by various international organisations and countries. Definitions, however, generally regard youth as

being between 15 and 35 years (African Union Commission 2006). It is important to emphasise that this group is distinct from ‘Children’ (0 to 15 years), thus the issues faced will be unique to the group. In recent years youth, and particularly youth in the developing world, have come under the spotlight in relation to what is referred to as the ‘youth bulge’. This phenomenon is defined as a peak in the share of the youth population (Ortiz & Cummins 2012, p6). Given the increasing prominence of youth, the United Nations declared 2011 the ‘International Year of Youth’, highlighting education, employment, health and participation in decision-making as major challenges facing youth today (UNECA and UNYP 2011).

### Trends

Two major youth-related issues were highlighted as cross-cutting issues. In the Benin and Burkina Faso reports the issue was youth education, skills development and integration (though both these reports also mention integration and employment as related concerns) and in Algeria, Kenya and Sierra Leone it was youth employment. Both these issues are consistent with abovementioned trends highlighted by the UN. The average number of references to the youth cluster across all the CRR was 6 words per ten thousand occurrences, see Figure 1. Three countries stand out as having relatively high word frequencies per ten thousand words in the ‘Cross-cutting Issues’ chapter: Algeria (46); Kenya (35) and Sierra Leone (37) – the three countries that specifically prioritised youth employment as a cross-cutting issue.

With regard to the thematic chapters, Figure 1 shows that the word frequency of the youth cluster is significantly higher in the ‘Political’ chapter, utilised 10 times per ten thousand words. The chapter with the second-highest word frequency is the ‘Development’ chapter, with six mentions. Youth issues are mentioned considerably less in the ‘Economic’ (1) and



‘Corporate’ (3) chapters. In contrast to the ‘Cross-cutting Issues’ chapter, the higher word frequencies in the thematic chapters relate to youth education issues. This trend can be traced back to the APRM questionnaire, which has several questions relating directly to education and only alludes to, and briefly discusses, youth employment. The ‘Political’ section of the questionnaire has an objective focusing specifically on ‘Promotion and protection of the rights of children and young persons’, one of which is the right to education. The section on ‘Development’ mentions the Millennium Development Goals and focuses on issues such as education which relate directly to children and youth. The ‘Economic’ and ‘Corporate’ sections allow space for a conversation about youth as it relates to other issues, but do not specifically mention youth in their line of questioning.

### Omissions and inconsistencies

There appears to be an inconsistency in the reports in that the ‘Cross-cutting Issues’ chapter highlights youth employment as an overwhelming concern, yet the issue is not raised clearly within the thematic chapters. This inconsistency in the questions related to youth may well undermine coordinated solutions to youth challenges.

Youth participation in decision-making processes is mentioned in some reports as it relates to cross-cutting issues of youth education, skills development and integration as well as unemployment. The Burkina Faso report (2008, p377), for example, mentions the establishment of ‘The National Youth Forum’ as an annual platform to involve youth in decision-making. Given the relative size of the youth population on the continent, and the scale of the problems they face with regard to education and employment, it would be valuable, through the APRM process, to determine how much space is given to youth in the decision-making processes in the countries under review.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

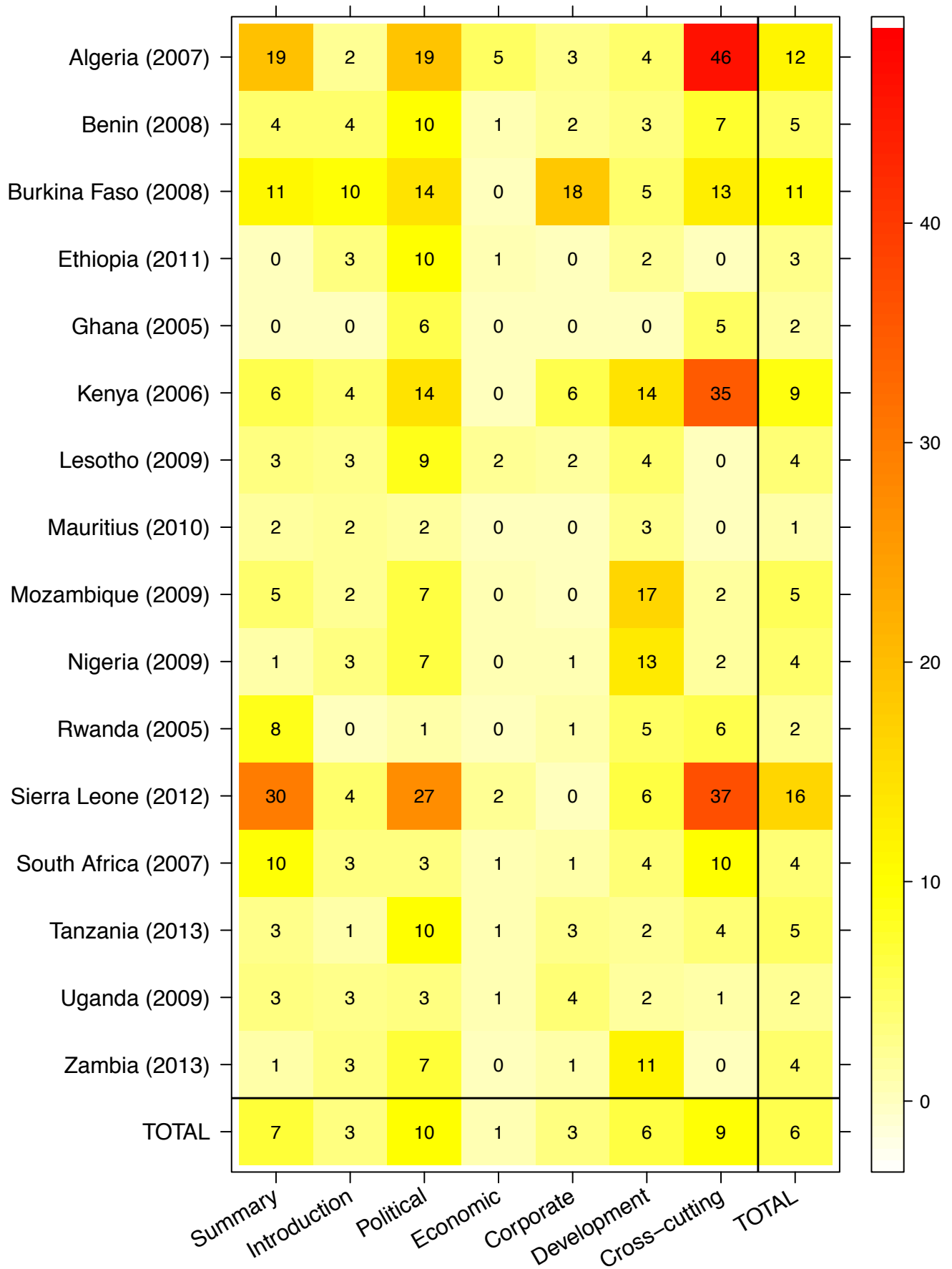
Education/skills development/integration and unemployment/underemployment, the two major sets of youth issues highlighted, are inextricably linked. In countries where education and skills development are a problem, eventually unemployment or underemployment are likely to follow. Correspondingly, in countries where unemployment and underemployment are highlighted as problems, it is at least in part due to insufficient, poor or inappropriate education or skills development. The section below discusses sequentially the various youth-related issues raised in the CRRs, drawing out examples from the reports themselves, with the objective of gaining a clearer understanding of the challenges that face youth as a whole.

### Education

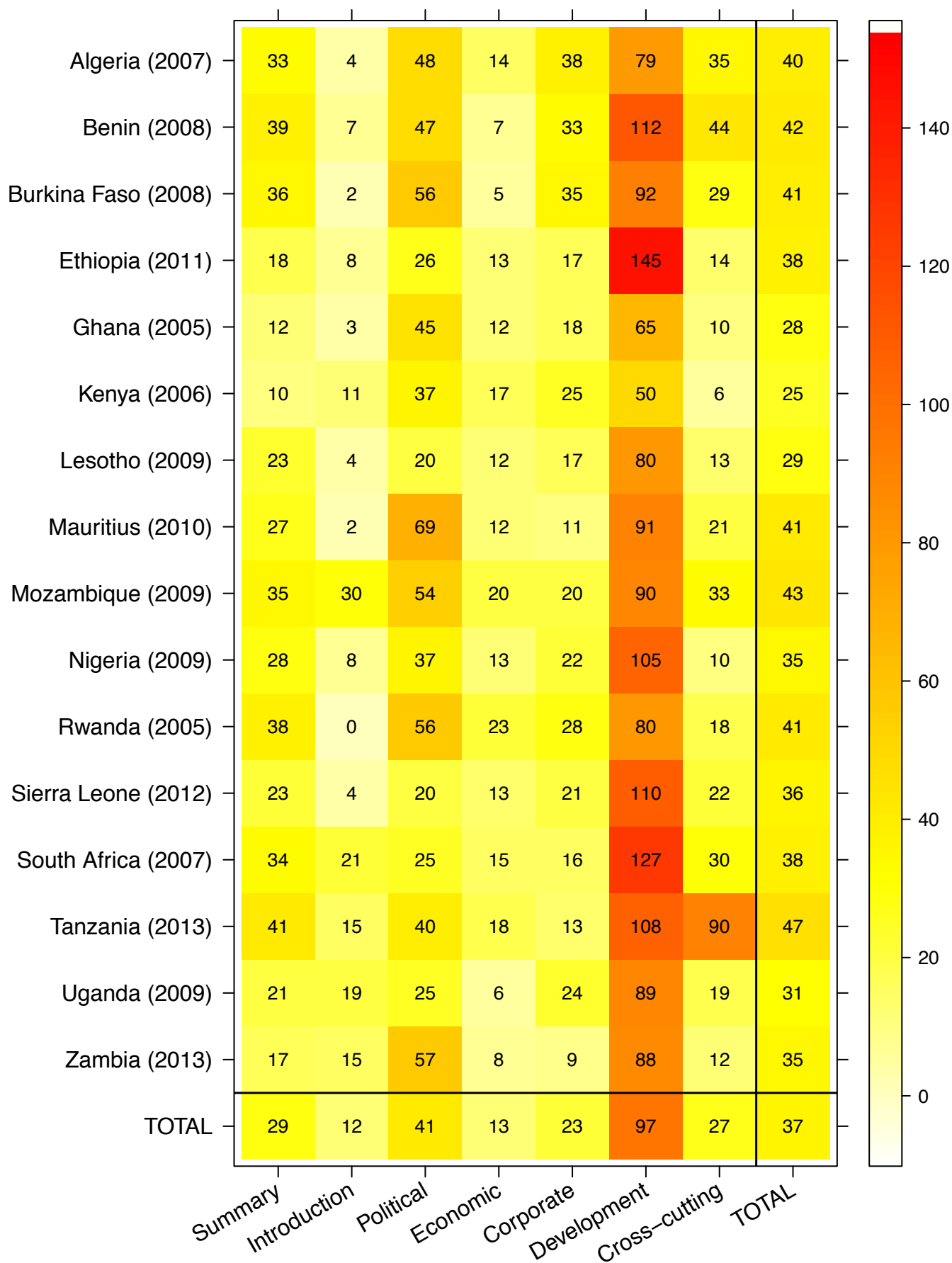
The conversation in the CRRs reveals three overarching education challenges: secondary and tertiary education enrolment, quality and coordination and synergy. ‘Youth’ education and skills development referred to in this section will focus on secondary education and university or technical and vocational training. However, it should be noted that in many countries across the continent the issue of achieving and, indeed, maintaining universal primary education remains a challenge, which continues to create serious ripple effects for youth wishing to move on to higher levels of education (UNDP 2014).

Figure 2 shows that the average number of references to the words in the ‘Education’ word cluster across the CRRs was 38 per ten thousand. Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda and Tanzania all exceeded this average and the Sierra Leone report contains the highest number of references to education (51). Two of the 16 countries, Benin and Burkina Faso, mention youth ‘education, skills development and

**Figure 1**  
**Frequency of youth word cluster by document (occurrences per ten thousand words)**



**Figure 2**  
**Frequency of education word cluster by document (occurrences per ten thousand words)**





integration’ as a cross cutting issue, while Tanzania mentions the quality (and inequality) of education as a broader issue.

Figure 2 shows that in most of the reports the frequency of words relating to education was particularly high in the ‘Development’ chapter, averaging 97 per ten thousand words – more than double the average in the next-highest chapter (41 in the ‘Political’ chapter). This is not surprising given that education, as outlined in the introduction to this chapter, is a key socio-economic objective and is dealt with in various ways within this section of the questionnaire. Objectives 1 and 2 in the ‘Political’ section deal with sustainable development and poverty eradication; Objective 3, Question 2 specifically examines the effect of policies and mechanisms on social indicators, one of which is the enrolment of youth in education institutions.

### **Secondary and tertiary education enrolment**

A reading of the reports suggests that the higher the level of education the lower the enrolment rate. Statistics from the World Bank (2012) support these findings, showing that the gross enrolment ratio at secondary school level in sub-Saharan Africa is 35% and at the tertiary level it is much lower – a mere 6%. It is noted in the Burkina Faso report (2008, p314) that only 36.4% of primary school children complete their education and within this ratio there is a gap between the completion rate of boys (40.3%) and that of girls (32.4%). Despite the high dropout levels, due to the high growth rates of the youth population, the number of secondary school leavers is increasing steadily. Similarly, the Benin report (2008, p 263) shows that between 1994 and 2005 the number of secondary school leavers grew from 9 964 to 34 415. At university level, however, statistics from 2002 suggest that there were only 478 students per 100 000 people – and of this number there were four times more male than female students (Benin CRR 2008, p260).

A study done by the International Growth Centre (ICG), which drew specifically on research from Ghana, found that several factors decrease the prospect of youth enrolment in secondary school in Africa, not least of which is a financial barrier, but factors also include being older than the average learner, performing worse than the average at primary school and having become sexually active (Duflo, Dupas & Kremer 2012). The Ghana report (2005, p28) notes that while the government has a commendable policy of providing free universal education, stakeholders in some regions complained that they were charged as much as USD50 per child for tuition in public schools, in addition to other costs, which most parents cannot afford. This situation illustrates some of the difficulty states may have in bridging the gap between creating policies and successfully implementing them. The ICG study, like the APRM CRRs, found that on the whole girls are less likely to pursue secondary education than boys. This is a crucial point, as the study also found that having a secondary education is likely to have ‘a much larger impact than primary education on long-run earnings, health, fertility, gender equality, and civic and political participation’ (Duflo, Dupas & Kremer 2012, p1).

### **Quality**

While enrolment of students in educational institutions has been a battle in itself, ensuring that they receive a standard of education that allows them to integrate successfully into social, economic and political life is an increasingly worrying challenge. In cases where the education infrastructure is currently weak, this is further exacerbated by the demand placed on the education system by the growing number of young people wanting to access education. The drive to increase secondary school enrolment needs to take place concurrently with enhanced quality of service provision. Winthrop (2011, p193) asserts that a young African who spends eight years in school but acquires only marginal literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking skills is

likely to fare worse in the economy than a peer who has six years of schooling but emerges with the ability to read with comprehension, perform basic maths calculations and problem-solve. Furthermore, cross-country data show a positive correlation between education coverage and average learning levels, suggesting that countries that improve the quality of their education systems will see an increase in enrolment (Winthrop 2011, p192). The logic, therefore, is that if increased enrolment and increased quality occur in tandem this will have a mutually reinforcing effect.

The APRM reports suggest, however, that the quality of secondary and tertiary education in Africa is defined by a general shortage of resources (human and material). In the case of Tanzania the CRR observes that the promotion of secondary education enrolment is not coordinated with an increase in the numbers of qualified teachers, learning and teaching materials and classrooms. The Tanzania report (2013, p231) notes that both curricula and methods of teaching are inappropriate and outdated – tending to focus on theory over practical knowledge, and memorisation rather than analysis and problem-solving. Burkina Faso (2008, p376) notes a similar problem at the post-secondary school level, where more than 150 000 young people work as apprentices, but lack coherent pedagogical methods and qualified trainers. These conditions result in a young population ill equipped to move forward. An African Economic Outlook (AEO) survey of experts in 36 countries in Africa revealed that 41% of respondents identified a general lack of skills among job seekers as a major obstacle to employment (AEO 2012).

### **Coordination and synergy**

Finally, if students are able to enrol in secondary and tertiary education institutions and do manage to receive a quality education, will this education enable them to integrate successfully into the society within which they find themselves?

The Benin report (2008, p251) observes that there is little synergy between education and workplace requirements and thus notes a need to coordinate efforts to build technical capacity in universities, specialised centres and institutes, on-the-job training and assistance from technical and financial partners (TFPs). Similarly, and more specifically, the Burkina Faso report (2008, p376) notes that ‘education does not mould the youth according to the skills required to succeed in the job market, particularly with regard to technical and vocational training in fields such as electricity and mechanics, new information technologies, cabinet making, tapestry work and woodworking’.

This lack of skills may, in part, be due to the ‘mind-set’ of young Africans, who believe they should be employed in white-collar jobs and regard vocational training as inferior to academic studies (UNECA & UNPY 2011, p4). In similar findings, research undertaken by African Economic Outlook (2012) showed that although agriculture contributes approximately 13% to Africa’s GDP, only 2% of students specialise in agriculture, thereby undermining the continent’s potential to tap into international markets for processed agricultural products. The study recommends that higher education systems in Africa become more diversified to meet the need for a variety of levels of skills and education. Interestingly, reports such as that of Burkina Faso are able to pinpoint precisely where skills are lacking in the economy, but this knowledge does not appear to filter down to the education sector (or possibly there is an issue with the implementation of suggested policy changes).

The mismatch between the education and skills with which youth are equipped and the needs of the economy of which they form part means that often youth are unable to integrate effectively into the job market. Research conducted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2012, p7) confirmed that high vacancy rates in the presence of large-scale unemployment confirm

the existence of skills mismatches. The study found that this situation was most acute in middle-income countries. Furthermore, it was found that mismatches between the skills young people have and what the education system offers are greater as countries grow wealthier (AEO 2012). Recent statistics from South Africa confirm this finding, noting that between 2008 and 2014 the level of educational attainment improved for youth, but that their labour market prospects deteriorated. This has been attributed to the labour markets' structural weaknesses, specifically the skills/employment mismatch – attributed, at least in part, to technological changes and the consequent demand for modern manufacturing skills that is currently not being met (Statistics South Africa 2014).

Education and skills development also affect the ability of youth to integrate successfully into society more broadly and become active citizens. Youth are often unable to be part of the legislative or budgetary processes related to the issues concerning them. The Algeria report (2007, p315) notes that youth organisations 'lack the human and material resources to enable them to be legitimate stakeholders in government institutions'.

### **Solutions proposed in the CRRs**

The various APRM reports make interesting proposals for overcoming education-related issues, based on the experiences of the countries under review. These proposals are worth sharing, given that countries do tend to experience similar challenges – albeit to different degrees:

- Raising public awareness of the advantages of sending children to secondary school would lead to increased levels of enrolment;
- It is important to consider financial barriers to education and how education within specific contexts can be made more accessible, possibly through state funding;
- Good quality and standardised assessments

and certification at vocational and technical training schools would ameliorate the status accorded to these skills;

- A coordinating body within government dealing with youth issues would be helpful in creating synergy among various youth-related policies; and
- Increasing the participation of youth in the decision-making processes on policies that affect them would contribute to more appropriate policy-making.

### **Employment**

The reports raise two major challenges related to youth employment. The first is the issue of unemployment, the second, and related issue, is underemployment. Both issues are flagged as major points of concern particularly as they relate to the so-called 'youth bulge'. The standard ILO definition of unemployment includes 'persons above a specified age who, during the reference period, were without work, currently available for work and seeking work' (ILO 2011, p16).

The causes of unemployment will vary according to context. Arguably, the most pervasive form of unemployment in Africa is what is referred to as 'structural unemployment'. This refers to people who are excluded – perhaps permanently – from the labour market due to a 'mismatch between the number of people looking for jobs and the number of jobs available' (The Economist 2014). This differs from frictional and cyclical unemployment, which 'refer[s] to people moving between jobs and those temporarily laid-off during a downturn', to which economies in Africa are also susceptible (The Economist 2014). In cases where economies are unable to absorb the number of young graduates entering the market these youths may find themselves in a position of underemployment – working in the formal sector in positions not suited to their qualifications, or shifting into the informal economy. The informal economy exists outside of the state licensing and regulation framework and is characterised by

its small scale and a low level of organisation with low levels of productivity (The World Bank Group). It is also worth considering that in the future statistics of youth unemployment will include those youths who are actively seeking employment, and not what is referred to as 'disguised unemployment'. This is particularly pervasive in rural economies and refers to individuals working, for example, on family smallholdings as subsistence farmers. These individuals are not considered unemployed, but are not receiving a formal wage, and may well be living under the so-called poverty line (ILO 2012, p5).

Three of the 16 reports – Algeria, Kenya and Sierra Leone – mention 'youth unemployment' as a cross-cutting issue. According to surveys conducted by the National Employment Agency in Algeria in 2006, 85% of unemployed persons were in the age group 16 to 39 years (Algeria APRM CRR, p314). The Sierra Leone report (2012) also records a high youth unemployment rate – 45.8%. The South African and Lesotho reports list 'unemployment' more generally as a cross-cutting issue, but these countries are likely to face similar issues to those cited above given the growing size of their youth population (and that of sub-Saharan Africa more generally).

Figure 3 shows relatively high word frequencies per ten thousand words for the 'Employment' cluster across all the chapters of all the countries, which suggests that employment is a major issue on the continent. The heatmap does, however, highlight significantly higher word frequencies in the 'Corporate Governance' (22 per ten thousand words), 'Socio-economic Development' (20) and 'Cross-cutting Issues' (26) chapters compared to the 'Democracy' and 'Good Political Governance' (11) and 'Economic Governance and Management' (12) chapters.

Two objectives within the 'Corporate Governance' section create space for

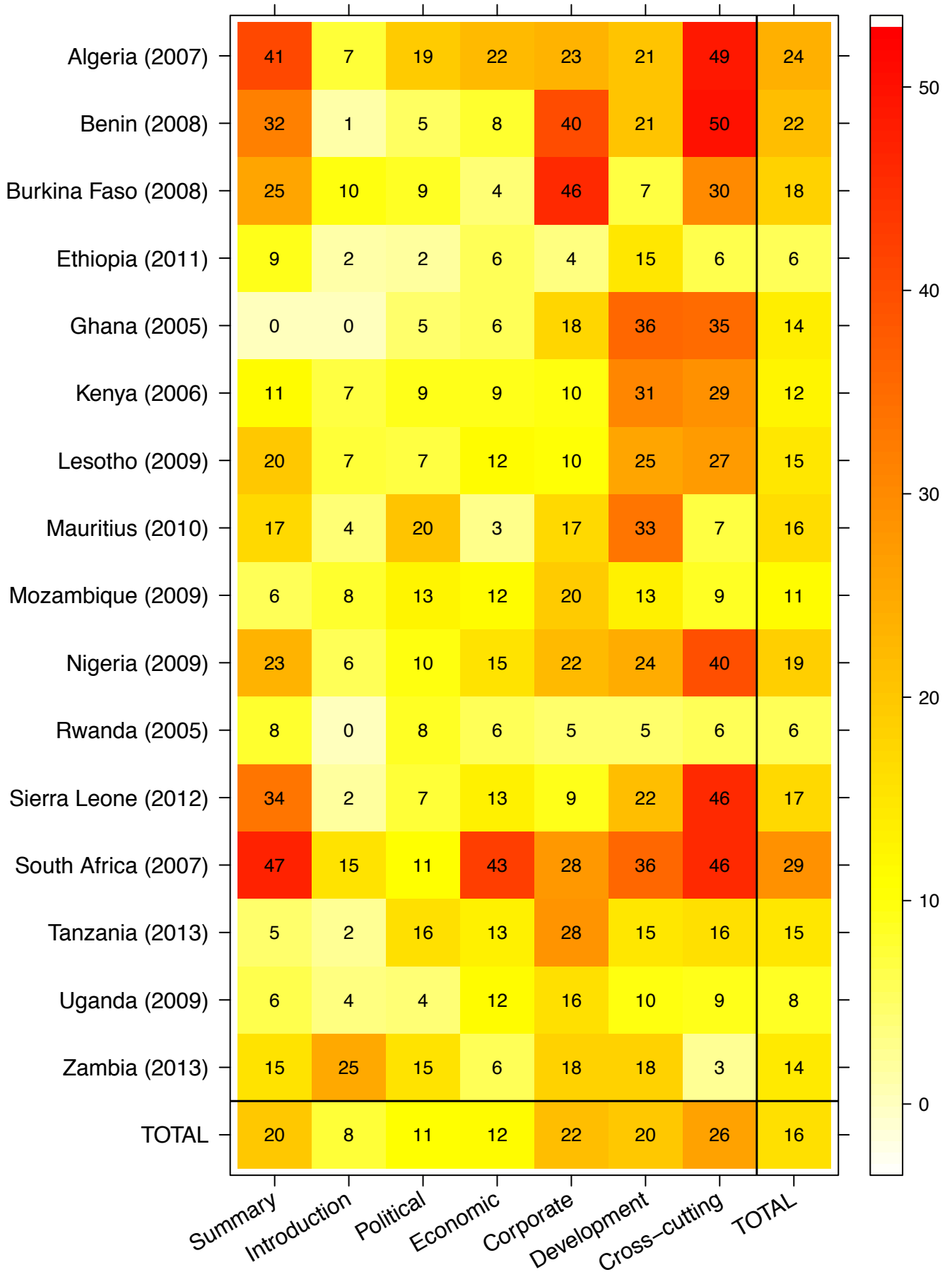
conversation about employment issues. Objective 1, Question 3 deals with internal and external factors that have an impact on business activity (which includes challenges facing economic activity). Objective 2, Question 2 is concerned with the extent to which corporations are responsive to the concerns of the communities within which they operate. Given the generally high unemployment rates, and specifically youth unemployment rates, in Africa, this is likely to be discussed as an issue under these objectives. In the 'Socio-Economic Development' section two particular objectives create a space for a discussion about employment – Objective 1, Question 1 deals with the promotion of self-reliance and sustainable development. Similarly, Objective 2, Question 2 deals with the acceleration of socio-economic development, sustainable development, and poverty eradication.

Figure 3 shows that the average number of references to the words in the 'Employment' word cluster across the CRRs was 16 per ten thousand words. Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Sierra Leone all fall above the average reference to employment, but South Africa stands out from this group, referencing employment 29 times per ten thousand words.

### **Unemployment**

The problem of youth unemployment and underemployment in Africa is framed within the APRM CRRs as being a two-fold issue of supply and demand. The first relates to the supply of young persons to the labour market. The consequence of insufficient or inappropriate education, skills development and integration (outlined above) is a youth population which is ill equipped to meet the criteria necessary for employment in the formal economy. All the countries in this study have experienced similar challenges in this regard, albeit to different degrees due to different contexts.

**Figure 3**  
**Frequency of 'Employment' word cluster by document (occurrences per ten thousand words)**



The Sierra Leone report (2012, p348), for example, notes that years of conflict have had a profound impact on the standard of education in the country. Many young people's education was interrupted, or, indeed, terminated, by conflict, resulting in a large number of young people without the requisite skills to integrate into society. The Kenya report (2006, p249), by contrast, gives the insufficient investment in and development of educational infrastructure in the country as a primary contributing factor – which may be a result of corruption and mismanagement within government structures. The South African report (2007, p274) attributes the country's structural unemployment challenges to the inherited apartheid economy, which disadvantaged the majority of South Africans.

The second concern relates to the demand for young labourers in the market. The youth population growth rate far exceeds the pace at which economies are growing in some countries, resulting in an inability to absorb young graduates. In Zambia, for example, approximately 280 000 new entrants join the labour market annually, creating a 'reserve army' of unemployed youth (ILO 2012, p4). Interestingly, the South African report (2007, p274) uses similar language, referring to a 'large army of unemployed'.

The issue of 'structural unemployment' is specifically highlighted in the South African CRR (2007, p274), but the problem is certainly not uncommon across the continent. This situation has obvious implications for those who suffer from it (not least of which is poverty), but also has wider implications for the economy, putting tremendous strain on social-security budgets (The Economist 2014). Part of the solution to pervasive structural unemployment will necessarily be addressing weakness in African economies. The Sierra Leone report (2012, p249) describes the country's economy (and it is not alone) as being debilitated by: 'limited private investment; weak local purchasing power;

dilapidated infrastructure, weak implementation capacity, a fragile judicial system, and corruption', all of which will retard the economy's demand for young graduates.

Beyond structural unemployment, the global economic and financial crisis of 2008/9 revealed that the macroeconomic policies of some African economies are too reliant on export commodities, leaving them vulnerable to a certain amount of cyclical unemployment. Statistics South Africa revealed that since 2009 youth unemployment rates have been 21 to 25 percentage points higher than those of adults (Smith 2015).

### **Underemployment**

Many youth in Africa find themselves in a position of underemployment rather than unemployment, holding positions 'characterized by low return, long hours, limited personal and job security, zero social protection and high levels of decent work deficits' (ILO 2012, p5). While some will find opportunities below their 'qualification level' in the formal economy, a substantial number will seek out positions within the informal economy.

The Algerian report (2007, p314) notes that 'unemployed youth have been engaged in the parallel market that generally receives smuggled goods and practises its trade in open spaces. Sometimes they occupy the main roads of large cities, as is the case in the capital city'. While this statement clearly outlines some of the negative aspects of having a large informal economy, it should also be noted that the informal sector's contribution to the GDP in sub-Saharan Africa is higher than in any other part of the world. ILO studies in 2002 suggested that the informal sector contributes nearly 55% of the region's GDP and 77% of non-agricultural employment (ILO 2013, p5). Findings in the Benin report (2008, p295) suggest that as much as 95% of the youth work in the informal sector. Given the statistics above regarding the enrolment of youth, and particularly females, in secondary and tertiary



education institutions, it is not surprising that women are highly active in the informal economy (and are under-represented in higher income activities). Within this sector, women are further disadvantaged, competing with their male counterparts, despite their comparatively low levels of education and business literacy (Mirand 2015).

### **Solutions proposed in the CRRs**

Several key steps towards reducing youth unemployment rates emerge from the various APRM reports:

- It is necessary to take a holistic approach to youth unemployment issues, recognising that education and skills development are the first steps to a solution;
- Knowing where youth challenges and opportunities lie is an essential part of finding appropriate solutions. This could be pursued through a youth database such as that in Algeria;
- Cooperation between the public and private sector, including youth, is vital to identifying gaps in the labour market. This could be in the form of an annual meeting like that held in Burkina Faso;
- Coordination of government policies through a focal point or commission is helpful to ensuring synergy – as is the case in Sierra Leone; and
- Effective internship and apprenticeship programmes, enabling youth to acquire professional experience, makes them more marketable and reduces rates of unemployment.

## **THE PERCEIVED CONSEQUENCES OF YOUTH-RELATED CHALLENGES**

According to the CRRs, the large numbers of un/under-educated and un/under-employed youth have had, and are predicted to continue having,

serious political, economic and social implications for the various countries included in this study.

### **Political instability**

The overwhelming risk associated with youth unemployment, as stressed in the Algeria, Kenya and Sierra Leone reports, is that of political instability. In the Algeria report (2007, p314) the concern is raised that ‘unemployed youth are available labour for terrorist and extremist groups challenging the current political order’. In the Sierra Leone report a comparison is made between the current unemployment rate and the economic marginalisation and social and political exclusion that led to the civil war in that country. The report explains how the two dominant political parties – the SLPP and the APC – have appealed to and, in urban areas largely relied on, unemployed youth for support and as foot soldiers of their parties (Sierra Leone APRM CRR 2012, p348).

### **Social instability**

While not all reports display an immediate concern with political instability or risk, a far more prevalent issue is that of social instability, which includes crimes such as theft, muggings and murder, but also ‘social ills’ such as ‘the consumption and trafficking of drugs, AIDS, prostitution and violence, which, in turn, threaten the country’s social stability’ (Algeria 2008, p314). A similar situation is outlined in the report on Kenya, where poverty and marginalisation of the youth is linked to prostitution and early marriage (Kenya 2006, p108). The South Africa report (2007, p274) expands on the abovementioned social consequences of unemployment to include further social issues such as: ‘severe financial hardship and deepening poverty; an unbearable level of indebtedness, homelessness and housing stress; the atrophy of work skills and ill-health; family tensions and breakdown; boredom; alienation; shame and stigma; increased social isolation; crime; and erosion of self-confidence and self-esteem’. While many of these issues also

relate to unemployed individuals in general, they are particularly applicable to unemployed youth.

### **Lack of sustainable economic development**

The third consequence of having a large population of inadequately skilled and unemployed youth is the inability of this group to contribute meaningfully to sustainable economic development. The relatively large informal sectors found across the continent offer some reprieve from poverty and do contribute to the overall GDP of countries, but in their current form do not offer long-term sustainable growth. As noted in the Burkina Faso report (2008, p363) the 'sector is characterised by modest (and often archaic) means of production, by the use of intensive workforce techniques, by low productivity, by the itemised transmission of know-how (through learning) on the job, and by low accessibility barriers and thus a variety of economic operators.'

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The view is expressed in several APRM CRRs that the current youth education and employment challenges on the continent could contribute to social, political and economic instability. While remaining cognisant of the very real susceptibility to instability that some countries are facing, it is important not to fall into the trap of branding youth as a challenge rather than an opportunity. The education and employment issues discussed in this paper are not insurmountable – with some countries achieving more success than others. The APRM process allows for the sharing of best (and worst) practices, peer learning and ultimately the adoption of more effective policies leading to sustainable development.

Some of the countries reviewed draw attention to similar youth-related issues, for example, Benin and Burkina Faso highlight education and training issues as a major challenge, whereas Algeria, Kenya and Sierra Leone highlight

issues around employment as a concern. This paper, however, found that these issues were inextricably connected. Furthermore, countries that cite education as a 'cross-cutting' issue in the first CRR report are very likely to be the countries citing employment as an issue in their second report. These issues were therefore discussed sequentially (from education to employment) in order to gain a more holistic perspective of the challenges faced by youth in Africa.

The general standard of secondary and tertiary education in the countries in this study is marred by relatively poor and gender-biased enrolment, inappropriate and inadequate standards of education and a lack of synergy and coordination between the education system and the marketplace. In cases where students are able to complete their secondary or tertiary education, the skills acquired are often not suitable for integration into society, and the job market in particular. Several countries outline issues of both unemployment and underemployment of youth. These issues are both supply related, in that an inadequate number of youth with appropriate skills is entering the market, and demand related, in that the countries' economies are not growing at a pace adequate to absorb the growing numbers of youth seeking employment. These particular supply and demand challenges create a self-perpetuating cycle in which inadequately skilled youth will not be able to enter the formal market and boost the economy, and without sustainable economic growth there will continue to be a shortage of employment.

This paper has demonstrated the extent to which the problems of youth are being viewed through certain thematic lenses more than others. The youth cluster was mentioned predominantly in the 'Political' chapter, far exceeding mentions in the other chapters. Similarly, education was discussed more in the 'Development' chapter, and employment in the 'Development' and 'Corporate' chapters. Although the questionnaire

guiding the conversation in the APRM reports does bring to the surface valuable information, in future there should be a more balanced conversation throughout the report, creating a foundation for holistic solutions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Adopt a holistic approach:** Proposed solutions to youth-related challenges will need to recognise the interlinked nature of issues and the multiple stakeholders involved. While the revised APRM questionnaire does include more questions on youth, these questions should be integrated across the thematic areas. Special attention should be paid to the level of coordination that exists between public and private sector organisations dealing with education and employment, ensuring that political, social, corporate and economic policies are aligned in order to facilitate the integration from youth education to employment. The private sector is able to provide valuable insight into gaps in the youth skills sets entering the market, as well as to forecast future skills demands. This advice would be useful in creating coordinated government policies regarding youth. It would be useful to monitor the space for conversation between government and business through the APRM reports.

**Understand barriers and make targeted policy recommendations:** The barriers to youth attaining a secondary or tertiary level of education, for example, might include: finances, age, poor primary school performance and early sexual activity or marriage. Youth employment may be affected by factors related to the quality and relevance of the education or skills the youth have (or have not) received, or the relative size of the economy they are entering. In developing solutions it is essential to start from a clear understanding of the context specific obstacles that face this demographic, and from this point develop targeted responses.

**Bridging the gaps:** There is an opportunity for cooperation between public and private organisations to bridge the gaps between education and employment and allow youth to integrate successfully into the economy. To this end, it would be useful for the APRM reports to highlight the extent to which opportunities such as internships, apprenticeships and other skills development tools are available to youth; how well these programmes are regulated and how useful the programmes are in terms of leading to full-time employment for youth in the formal sector.

**Creating a space for participation:** In several reports there is mention of large numbers of marginalised youth posing a threat to political and social stability. The scale of the challenges faced by youth on the continent is unprecedented in the continent's history and it is imperative to include their voices in the political decision-making processes in order to ensure the creation of appropriate policies to deal with these challenges. It should be noted that the revised APRM questionnaire does pose questions relating to the rights of the youth and the facilitation of youth participation in legislative processes. Including the youth in decision-making processes would allow for two-way communication and a space in which to inform youth of the opportunities available to them.

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## ANNEXURE A

**Method of deriving ‘heatmap’ graphics from APRM Country Research Reports using word stemming and clustering**

Grant Masterson and Rod Alence

Each APRM country review culminates in a book-length report. Given the way these reports are compiled, and their proven accuracy and reliability in identifying critical governance issues in APRM member states, they warrant further examination. However, the length and technical language of the reports is often cited as a major obstacle to broader levels of engagement with their content. To address this, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) piloted a text-mining methodology to simplify and disaggregate specific issues from the reports in a manner which, hopefully, enhances their utility.

Text mining reduces the reports to ‘bags of words’, whose frequencies can be analysed statistically. The first step was to capture the text from the 16 reports electronically and to ‘clean’ it – by, for

example, removing all punctuation and numbers and deleting page headers and footers. Next the text was summarised in a word-frequency matrix showing how often each word occurs in each chapter of each report. Using this full list of words, paper authors compiled a list of words usually associated with their specific paper topic. For example, in the paper on ‘Extractives and Mining’, words pertaining to mining, oil, and resource extraction were conceptually grouped together under these three umbrella terms.

This allowed the paper authors to calculate the frequencies of these specific concepts within each chapter of each report. The frequencies, as raw word counts or as counts normalised per ten thousand words of text, provide rough indicators of the degree of emphasis on the paper’s key concepts. Note: Each time any of the grouped words is flagged in the text a result is returned as an instance of the main concept word (see Table 1).

The analysis is aided by the fact that all the APRM country reports have similar structures.

Table 1  
Paper topics and key concept terms by paper

Subject of paper	Author	‘Concept’ words (example)	Grouped words linked to ‘concept’ word
Land and the APRM	Lisa Van Dongen	Land	land landless
Gender and the APRM	Jacqui de Matos Ala	Female	female females girl girls woman women womens*



Subject of paper	Author	'Concept' words (example)	Grouped words linked to 'concept' word
Extractives, Mining and the APRM	Rod Alence	Minerals	mineral minerals miners mines mining diamond diamonds gold tin coal aluminium copper iron quarrying
Elections, Conflict and the APRM	Michelle Small	Election	elect elected election elections elective electoral electorate vote voted voter voters votes vote voted voter voters votes voting
Youth and the APRM	Melanie Meirotti	Youth	youth
Government Responses to the APRM	Grant Masterson	Executive	Cabinet executive minister ministerial ministers ministry president Primeminister*

\*punctuation is removed from the text to avoid data confusion prior to running the analysis.

All contain four core thematic chapters on key themes of the APRM: 'democracy and political governance', 'economic governance and management', 'corporate governance' and 'socio-economic development'. These core chapters are preceded by an introductory discussion of the APRM process and country background. In early reports the introductory material occupied a single chapter, but in later reports it spans two chapters. For ease of comparison, where it occupies two chapters the text is combined into a single document, called 'introduction' and treated as a single chapter. The core thematic chapters are followed by a concluding discussion of 'cross-cutting issues', findings, and recommendations. In early reports this concluding material occupied a single chapter, but in later reports it spans two chapters. Again, where it occupies two chapters these were combined into a single document, called 'cross-cutting issues' and treated as a single chapter. Each report also starts with an executive summary, which is treated as a chapter in its own right. All other front matter and appendices are excluded from the analysis.

Except for the first few reports published the word counts are reasonably consistent. The first two reports, on Ghana and Rwanda, are quite short, averaging only 36 000 words. The third, on Kenya, is 75 000 words. The average length of the other 13 reports is 99 000 words, with nine falling between 90 000 and 110 000 words, and the longest two being Mozambique (117 000 words) and Nigeria (114 000 words). The four thematic chapters account for nearly two-thirds of each report, averaging 65 000 words. Among these, 'democracy and political governance' is longest, averaging 21 000 words; the average in the other three – 'economic governance', 'corporate governance', and 'socio-economic development' – is slightly more than 14 000 words. The average number of words in the remaining chapters – 'executive summary', 'introduction', and 'cross-cutting issues' – is about 8 000 words.

The combined word count of all 16 reports (excluding front matter and appendices) is about 1 400 000 words. Three pages of typed, double-spaced text in a standard font equals about a thousand words. Using this as a rough approximation, the text analysed is roughly equivalent to 4 200 typed, double-spaced pages.

The final heatmaps illustrate the intensity of word occurrences by country and by chapter. The higher the frequency with which a word appears in a chapter, the darker that block will appear. Country chapters with dark red blocks are therefore those with the highest frequency of a word, while those with very pale yellow blocks have no or almost no references to that word. The use of the heatmaps themselves allows for a unique and otherwise unattainable perspective on the contents of the 16 APRM Country Reports analysed. It is possible to identify trends in the occurrences of key concept words in the reports and, due to the thematically arranged structure of the reports, this provides the reader with additional perspectives on the context in which these words are being referenced.

However, caution should be exercised in reading too much into the heatmaps themselves. The brief given to all the authors in this series of papers was to view the heatmaps as an indication of which APRM Country Reports, and specifically, which chapters, warranted further examination with respect to the theme of the paper. The heatmaps are useful insofar as they point a researcher in the direction of interesting trends as well as unexpected (or expected) anomalies and outliers in terms of the referencing of a word within the reports. It is not possible to deduce the content of the reports from the heatmaps, simply which sections of which reports warrant specific referencing when examining specific issues such as those in this Occasional Paper series.

## About the Author

Melanie Meirotti is the (acting) Programme Officer in the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) Programme at EISA. She has research experience in African governance and security, and has a specific interest in participatory governance and the state citizen relationship. Melanie was awarded a Chevening Scholarship in 2011 and subsequently completed a Masters degree in Governance and Development at the University of Sussex.

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