

**STILL
STRUGGLING
FOR EQUALITY:
GENDER AND THE
APRM**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) has adopted the overarching objectives of ‘gender equality’ and ‘empowerment’ into its reporting framework, demonstrating a significant commitment by the institution to correcting widespread gender imbalances among members, and ultimately improving the lives of African women. The success of the APRM in pursuing these objectives hinges on two components.

Firstly, the APRM mechanism needs to translate the concepts of ‘gender equality’ and ‘empowerment’ into policy objectives that will not merely make superficial changes but will fundamentally rebalance the gender equation.

Factors influencing these outcomes are the following:

- The Prioritisation of gender throughout the APRM process,
- The definition of gender objectives utilised
- The instruments selected to realise gender objectives.

Secondly, there needs to be firm commitment on the part of member countries, as the primary agents of policy implementation, to this APRM agenda. At the country level, policymakers are able to re-prioritised, redefine and choose tools of policy implementation for APRM norms. While this allows countries to tailor initiatives to their specific circumstances, it can also allow issues deemed unimportant, too controversial or too unpopular to be ignored – at times resulting in treating symptoms rather than their underlying social and cultural causes.

In the current APRM reports, ‘Women’ are dealt with directly in two of the four thematic chapters: ‘Democracy and Governance’, and ‘Socio-economic Development’. Reporting on women is largely absent in areas that are vital for increasing and maintaining gender equality, namely, the chapters on ‘Economic Management’ and ‘Corporate Governance’.

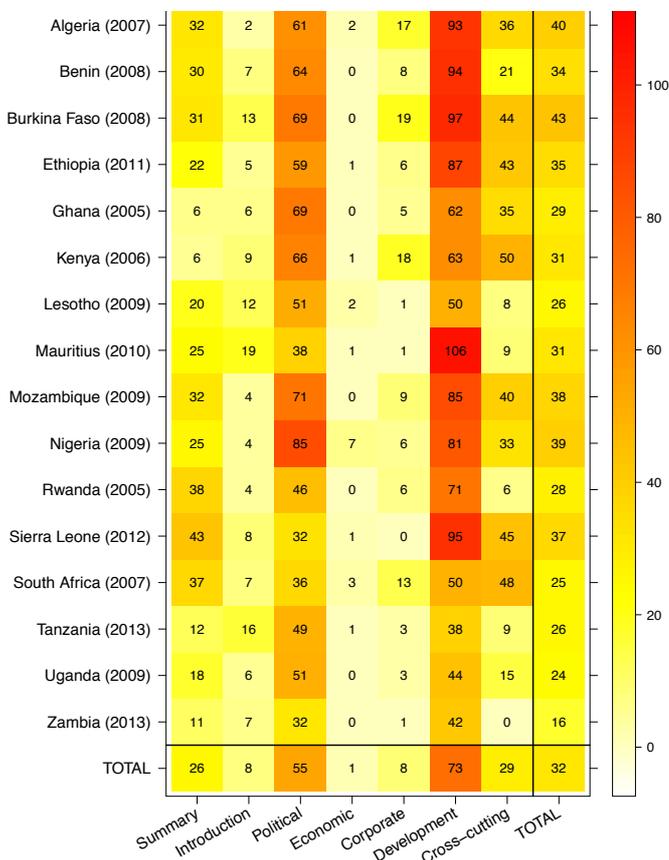
Progress made in advancing gender equality, as tracked in the APRM reports, revolves around legislative measures imposed to improve the political and economic status of women. This seems to suggest that the emphasis is on achieving formal gender equality, with gender empowerment and substantive gender equality being less important. At the root of women’s disempowerment is gender inequality, which is entrenched though cultural norms and values

CRITIQUE OF THE CONVERSATION

Formal over substantive gender equality: The APRM initiative is strong in endeavouring to secure formal gender equality, and in doing so encourages member states to ascribe to these conventions, taking a positive step toward gender equality. However, this may not translate into meeting substantive gender rights, as legislation alone is not an effective tool for altering long-held gender biased norms. In order to be successful, policy implementation will need to be driven by political will within the individual states.

Violence against women: The APRM reports pay insufficient attention to the issue of violence against women - which is a strategic indicator of the extent of gender empowerment in a society. The issue tends to be dealt with as a legal and policing issue rather than a socio-economic problem.

Word frequency analysis for 'Female' concept (Occurrences per ten thousand words)



Economic Gender equality: The economic mainstreaming of women is classified as a socio-economic issue but is not integrated into the sections on corporate and economic governance - which play a part in economic gender equality. Moreover, the questions and indicators which speak to women's economic empowerment are sparse and vague. Furthermore, the focus in the questionnaire is often on assessing the degree of gender inequality but not on considering the reasons for this inequality and attempting to address them.

A danger in standardisation: Women on the African continent are not a homogenous group with respect to their political, social and economic status, but, by standardising gender benchmarks within the questionnaire, the APRM treats them as such. This approach risks further marginalising women whose situation falls outside of or who are not adequately covered by the APRM reporting criteria. The APRM reporting process overcomes these problems in some ways by not being overly prescriptive about the way countries should address gender inequality – it is however worth bearing in mind as a potential concern.

A relatively low amount of conversation on gender: Gender did not feature very significantly in any of the APRM reports. This seems reflect that, in terms of APRM objectives, gender is a lower order priority in the reporting countries than other issues, such as: political stability, good governance or economic growth. It also indicates a lack of gender mainstreaming throughout the APRM questionnaire guiding the APRM conversations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide clarity on the type of gender equality sought: The APRM needs an accurate and explicit definition of terms such as 'gender equality' and 'empowerment'. It must be more specific about what it understands gender equality and empowerment to encompass. Does it envisage gender equality exclusively as formal equality, or does it include substantive equality as well? If substantive equality and empowerment are the ultimate objective far more focus must be placed on facilitating an increase in women's agency and control in all spheres. If such a move does occur, the alignment between gender objectives and APRM questions and

indicators needs to be reviewed to guarantee that they will hold members accountable to the APRM's interpretation of 'gender equality'.

In the event of an evaluation of the APRM's definition of gender equality, emphasis should be placed on interpreting this idea and objective within an African context, allowing countries some leeway in tailoring the interpretation and objective to local realities. This is preferable to trying to set generic Western ideals and solutions, which are unlikely to be successful in an African political, social and economic context.

Commit to evaluating gender mainstreaming accurately: Confining the issue of gender primarily to two thematic areas does not reflect a commitment to the ideal of gender mainstreaming. It excludes the areas of economic and corporate governance, which have important parts to play in the delivery of gender equality. In order to produce a more holistic reflection of the state of gender equality in member countries, there should be clear questions and indicators in the areas of economic and corporate governance.

Give greater priority to the development of initiatives to address gender-based violence: Gender-based violence was, to some degree, a concern raised in almost all of the 16 reports studied. A multifaceted approach needs

to be adopted that not only provides legal protection to women but ultimately targets the social, cultural and economic issues that make them vulnerable.

Give greater priority to addressing social and cultural sources of gender discrimination: The lack of attention paid to the social and cultural equality of women both in the questionnaire and in the APRM reports is problematic. Unless the social and cultural equality of women is given greater priority it is unlikely that significant and enduring strides will be made in securing substantive gender equality.

REFERENCES

This policy brief was compiled by Melanie Roberts, drawn from the full report, "Still Struggling for Equality: Gender and the APRM," Jacqueline De Matos Ala, which can be found at (www.eisa.org.za).



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