

# AfriMAP:

## Governance under the spotlight

By Prof Fidelis Kanyongolo

The past few years have witnessed an increasing interest in the different aspects of the political economy of African countries by various national and international interest groups. As the social and economic conditions of most Africans continue to stagnate or decline, one question that has preoccupied many development thinkers and practitioners is that of the utility of governance in improving the livelihoods of Africans. Almost invariably, African governments have adopted poverty reduction and economic growth policies which are predicated on the establishment of effective regimes of good economic and political governance. Although democratic governance is widely recognised as a precondition for the improvement in living conditions, however, the challenge has remained one of translating that general principle into practice. As Africans and their governments face this challenge at national, sub-regional and continental levels, the critical issues include not only agreeing on the practical content and meaning of democracy and governance, but also establishing mechanisms for their effective surveillance and auditing. This article discusses the contribution of the Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project (AfriMAP) to governance in Africa by serving as a tool for credible surveillance on governments on the continent.

### Governance and the African Condition

Statements about governance in Africa are likely to be generalisations for which contrary evidence may be found in the specific contexts of particular countries. Nevertheless, there are thematic continuities across national boundaries which justify the analysis of governance and its contextual conditions from a continental perspective. Among the common continuities are long histories of colonialism; one-party or military governments during most of the post-colonial period until the 1990s; and multiparty civilian political systems which have become the norm since then. Most Africans also share a



common socio-economic experience, including that of widespread poverty and inequalities.<sup>1</sup> Despite these challenges, many Africans across national boundaries have experienced improving governance. In a 2004 study, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa found that electoral processes in Africa were more transparent, voter participation was high and political parties were getting stronger, although the same study also revealed on the continent that police and the military often violate the rights of citizens, that electoral commissions need more independence, and that opposition parties often lack access to resources and security.<sup>2</sup>

There has also been some progress in relation to economic governance. The economies of many African countries continued to grow, with 2006 being the fourth consecutive year of economic growth above four percent thanks in large measure to increasing oil and mineral exports, a trend expected to rise at least until 2008.<sup>3</sup> For its part, civil society is developing to the extent where it can conduct organised and effective advocacy at the African Union (AU), with AfriMAP as a significant actor in that process.

Africans and their states continue to engage each other over various governance activities which are generally aimed at reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development at both the national and continental levels. At both levels, the challenge is to determine what results, if any, state policies, laws and citizen action in the various areas of governance produce, and whether such results contribute to the achievement of the ultimate goal of good governance, namely improvement in the living conditions of Africans. AfriMAP addresses the challenge by providing structures and processes which facilitate the rigorous examination of the conditions and practices of governance in particular African countries using continental norms, primarily those articulated in African instruments such as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development

(NEPAD) and Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) as the framework for analysis.

### **The AfriMAP Philosophy**

Within the past decade, African states have re-dedicated themselves to entrenching good governance and demonstrated their commitment to the task through the Constitutive Act of the AU, in which member states agree to promote human rights, democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance. Other newly adopted documents which embody continental commitments to governance include the NEPAD and APRM, as well as the Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption. AfriMAP's research is intended to contribute to respect for these commitments by facilitating monitoring of compliance, particularly by national and continental civil society organisations.

AfriMAP is predicated on the notion that improvement in the living conditions of the majority of Africans depends to a large extent on having good governance which relates not only to civil and political facets of life, but also to the material conditions which define the life experiences, especially those of the poor. In this regard, AfriMAP is contextual in its approach and anchors the concept of governance in the realities of the economic conditions of poverty and inequality. AfriMAP is also continentalist in outlook because it emphasises African, rather than national, norms and standards in its approach to monitoring and advocacy, and promotes self-monitoring of governance by African home-grown mechanisms. In this respect, AfriMAP broadly reflects the philosophy of the APRM and discourses on the apparent revival of the Pan-African idea in continental discourses.<sup>4</sup>

### **The AfriMAP Methodology and Tools**

AfriMAP works mainly with national civil society organizations to conduct systematic audits of government performance in three areas: justice sector and the rule of law; political participation and democracy; and effective delivery of public services. As indicated earlier, the major challenge facing Africans today is not only the imbalance of power that has historically favoured the state against individuals and communities. It is also the provision of basic goods and services to all people, particularly those who are historically disadvantaged or belong to vulnerable groups. The AfriMAP methodology is responsive to this reality and is based on standardised reporting frameworks that link respect for good governance and human rights to development that benefits poor people.

Through a process of expert consultation, AfriMAP has developed reporting frameworks in its three thematic areas. The frameworks take the form of questionnaires which facilitate the auditing of national policies, laws and practices based on the core obligations spelled out in African

and international law against national laws and practices. A core activity used to implement the methodology is research conducted by experts, using a variety of methods, including interviews of representatives of institutions and individuals in their own capacities as well as review of relevant literature. The data collected through these methods are then analysed, mainly qualitatively, and the resultant findings and recommendations are developed into a draft report which is reviewed by stakeholders at a workshop. The draft is then revised and elaborated by experts from the countries concerned, with input from the Open Society Institute's network of foundations in Africa and AfriMAP's own staff. The comments and criticisms of a range of other experts are also sought and reflected in the final reports. The final reports as well as the questionnaires used in the research are published on the AfriMAP website.<sup>5</sup>

AfriMAP began to implement its methodology in 2005 in five pilot countries – Senegal, South Africa, Malawi, Mozambique and Ghana. Since then, it has been extended to other countries, including Kenya and Ghana. In addition to research in the three thematic areas, AfriMAP's involvement is also involved directly in advocacy activities at the African Union level. Among the recent activities in this regard are contributions to the development and presentation of the first independent, substantive and public assessment of the progress of the AU;<sup>6</sup> Entry into the debates around the development assistance strategies of the G8 and the European Union in relation to their engagement with the APRM and their efforts to support and promote good governance in African countries;<sup>7</sup>

### **The “Value Add” of the AfriMAP Methodology**

Ever since Africans came into contact with colonial governments, they have been the subjects of study by a wide range of anthropologists, historians and many other theorists and practitioners. The relative political liberalisation which occurred in many African states from the late 1980s had two distinct effects on this curiosity about Africa and Africans. First, it resulted in improvements in protections of civil liberties which enabled researchers to have more freedom to gather more and better quality, information from African countries. Second, the adoption of liberal constitutions and institutionalisation of the dominance of neo-liberal economic approaches themselves became the subject of study by a growing number of academics, international financial institutions, donor governments, advisors, consultants, government ministries, non-governmental organisations and other practitioners and researchers.

The convergence of increased opportunities for information-gathering and the expanding interest in understanding the emergent political and economic liberalisation have produced many initiatives aimed at identifying the key constitutive elements of good governance and providing criteria for assessing its condition across the conti-

ment. There have also been other initiatives which have attempted to audit governance at various levels, including Afrobarometer, state of democracy audits by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa's Africa Governance Report.<sup>8</sup> Given the existence of the various assessment activities in Africa, what added value does AfriMAP bring to discourses on the condition of governance in Africa?

The fundamental goal of AfriMAP is to add value to the promotion of good governance in Africa. As indicated earlier, African states have been the subject of governance audits by various institutions. The avowed aim of the audits is to ultimately contribute to the improvement of good governance at national or international levels. However, in some cases, other aims, including satisfaction of academic curiosity and informing external governments and other actors with vested self-interests in Africa, including potential investors and tourists, may take precedence over that of contributing to governance for the benefit of Africans. AfriMAP seeks to add value by using its participatory research and advocacy strategy to generate information and advocate for policy reforms which have a direct impact on the quality of specific aspects of governance in Africa.

AfriMAP also adds value to the development of good governance in Africa by providing tools that facilitate the fair and consistent cross-country comparisons of governance on the continent. Admittedly, this feature of AfriMAP has a limitation in that the research on different countries is generally conducted at different times. Thus for example, the research on justice sectors and the rule of law for South Africa, Malawi, Mozambique and Ghana was completed in February 2006, September 2006, September 2006 and June 2007 respectively. In general, the differences in the time when research is conducted in different countries may limit reliability of the comparison of the position in those countries. Ideally, for purposes of comparison, the research in different countries should be conducted simultaneously or, at the very least, with minimal time lapses between them. On the other hand, it could be argued that AfriMAP's phased approach enriches the process because it facilitates lessons learned in research on one country to be applied in subsequent research in other countries.

The AfriMAP approach also makes a significantly distinctive contribution to effective surveillance of governance in Africa, in that the information it generates is comprehensive and in-depth. For example, the questionnaire for the component on justice and the rule of law consists of approximately 80 questions covering a wide range of issues related to the legal and institutional framework; government respect for the rule of law, management of the justice system, independence of judges and lawyers, criminal justice, access to justice and development partners.<sup>9</sup> A similar level of detail is also evident in the questionnaires on effective public service

delivery which consists of over 60 key questions related to the international and national legal framework; information collection, publication and management; strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation; budgeting and expenditure management; human resource management; external oversight mechanisms; decentralisation: regional/local government; and development assistance.<sup>10</sup>

For its part, the questionnaire on democracy and political participation also has over 60 questions covering the following areas: constitutional framework, equal citizenship, participation in the policy process, political parties; the legislature; regional and local government; traditional authorities; and development assistance and foreign relations.<sup>11</sup>

Another distinctive feature of the AfriMAP methodology is its inclusion of an advocacy component. The methodology seeks not only to facilitate the auditing of governance, but also aims at contributing to its progressive improvement through systematic advocacy which supports and promotes the active participation of civil society organisations as independent monitors of government. AfriMAP also directly contributes to continental civil society engagement and dialogue with the AU, NEPAD and the APRM. Predictably, advocacy faces a number of impediments which challenge its successful completion. The first challenge is institutional. While the research for the main report can be undertaken by individuals, advocacy necessarily involves the participation of a number of institutions. This makes the strategy dependent on the capacity of those institutions to deliver. Since AfriMAP has little or no control over this variable, the success of the advocacy component is forever uncertain.

Secondly, delivery of both the research and advocacy components of AfriMAP faces constraints with respect to access to information. Any advocacy strategy is only as good as the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the information on which it relies to make its case. Access to information in most African states remains severely limited due to, among other things, restrictive legislation,<sup>12</sup> cultures of official secrecy and poor record-keeping. These combine to make it extremely difficult for AfriMAP researchers to work efficiently as they often have to spend considerable amounts of time attempting to overcome various bureaucratic and other hurdles in order to access government documents. It also means that the information that the research component generates often contains significant gaps, which in turn negatively affects the advocacy component. After all, advocates and lobbyists need to back their positions with authoritative, reliable and comprehensive information. For this reason, research and advocacy aimed at improving access to information is an integral part of all three thematic areas of AfriMAP. This promotes the AU's Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa which states that "public bodies hold information not for themselves but as custodians of the public good and everyone has a right to access

this information, subject only to clearly defined rules established by law.<sup>713</sup>

### **What's in it for Africans?**

Africans ought to welcome AfriMAP for a number of reasons. The first is that it provides them with an evidence-based overview of their governance situation at little or no cost to their public purse. Even assuming that governments had the political will to undertake such candid assessments of the state of governance in their countries, implementing the methodology would be prohibitively costly for them, particularly in the face of many other pressing budgetary needs. The rigour of the AfriMAP process ensures that it generates information which has been validated through stakeholder workshops and is reliable and current. The good quality of the information means that it can be used by African governments for purposes of the APRM and other treaty reporting processes. The information can also contribute to improvement in the quality of government sectoral planning.

The second benefit of AfriMAP for African governments is that it not only provides governments with information, but also supports advocacy initiatives which seek to complement government efforts aimed at improving the country's justice and the rule of law, political participation and public service delivery. Admittedly, AfriMAP is not the only vehicle for advocacy in these areas. However, it brings added value to the advocacy landscape by being evidence-based and using not only national standards of governance, but also those set down in various continental and sub-regional instruments.

Thirdly, AfriMAP enhances the legitimacy of the process of auditing governance by ensuring that nationals and other Africans play the key role in the design of the assessment framework, the conduct of the research and the implementation of the advocacy strategy. National and other African-based experts designed the questionnaires which serve as the framework for the research, its report and the advocacy strategy. The research is also conducted by researchers based in their countries of focus, and findings are subjected to review by cross-sections of national stakeholders. Effectively, therefore, the AfriMAP method is a self-evaluation by Africans and not an imposition from external political and economic interests. In this regard it shares its approach with that of the APRM, although AfriMAP then has the added advantage of being independent of any inter-governmental structure.

Fourthly, AfriMAP involves the government at all stages of the process. The AfriMAP methodology necessitates engagement with government during the research, validation and reporting of findings, and advocacy. At all stages of the process, participation and input is actively sought from government officials not only as sources of information but also for their unique perspective on gov-

ernance. The cooperation with government in the AfriMAP methodology is, however, not allowed to compromise the integrity of its findings and recommendations.

Finally, Africans also stand to benefit collectively from the intended results of the AfriMAP research and advocacy process. By design, AfriMAP emphasises continental and sub-regional norms on governance in the framework for its assessments. This approach creates space for the further development of such norms to bridge the gap between the national and the global realms of governance. It could also facilitate the consolidation of such norms, thereby, making a significant contribution to processes of regional and continental integration.

### **Some challenges**

As with any other methodology, the AfriMAP model has some areas that could be tightened up to be more effective. For instance, while there has been significant development regarding methodologies and tools to assess democracy, governance and human rights there are still challenges about how to objectively assess progress. The AfriMAP process is fairly rigorous in using multiple, credible and verifiable sources of information and the final AfriMAP report is a discursive narrative that contains evaluative conclusions reached by the researcher based on analysis of information gathered. Such conclusions can be criticised for potential subjectivity since the choice of sources of information is also influenced by the researcher's preferences.

Some users have also observed that in an attempt to produce comprehensive reportage on the three sectors AfriMAP focuses on, the questionnaires developed were rather lengthy and often took considerable time to administer. Some of the lessons learnt through implementation of the project are that some questions do not really add much value and are quite nebulous, while at the time of developing the tool they appeared reasonable questions to ask. The AfriMAP team is therefore refining the tools as they implement. The capacity to carry out assessments at national level is often quite limited. A small pool of competent researchers is sought after by different organisations that are carrying surveys, research, assessments of one form or another. This results in researchers being overloaded and longer completion timeframes for the reports.

While AfriMAP is designed to assess African governments' compliance with commitments they have made under AU and international treaties, it has been observed that this is quite problematic in an area like democracy and political participation. Democratisation is essentially a local process and despite the growing acceptance of common democratic values such as participation, representation, political contestation, accountability, and others, the form and shape that democratic systems of government will take will differ from country to country. As such, rather than simply look at whether a country is in

compliance or not, some have argued that it may be more useful to have a discussion about what options are available; that will contribute to democratic consolidation in the different countries.

Implementers of the AfriMAP project have experienced challenges with assessing compliance in an area such as public service delivery, which is a relatively new frontier, especially where expertise in these types of assessments has largely focused on civil and political rights. While this area of socio-economic rights I considered critical for assessment, the reality is that there is limited capacity compared to other sectors such as justice and rule of law, democracy, and others where normative frameworks have developed over time.

### Conclusion

However, in spite of the above challenges, the AfriMAP methodology has immense potential to influence democratic processes on the continent. The ability of African states, both individually and collectively, to address the many challenges that stand in the way of their people's survival and development depends significantly on the deepening of understanding of the nature of those challenges, including those that affect governance. Such deepening of understanding is only possible through systematic monitoring of the key elements of governance such as the rule of law and justice, political participation and public service delivery. The AfriMAP methodology makes a critical contribution to this process through its comprehensiveness, rigour, enhanced legitimacy and advocacy strategy which involves civil society. AfriMAP seeks to make a contribution to the improvement of governance in respective national governments, but also promotes the development and consolidation of continental norms within the framework of the AU, NEPAD and the APRM. ■

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### Endnotes

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- 2 See United Nations, "Synopsis of the Africa Governance Report", 2005, at <http://www.uneca.org/agr/>.
- 3 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Africa Economic Outlook 2007*, Paris: 2007.
- 4 For a recent history of the discourse in the African Union, see African Union, "Study on an African Union Government" (2006) at [http://www.africa-union.org/Doc/study\\_on\\_AUGovernment\\_june2006.pdf](http://www.africa-union.org/Doc/study_on_AUGovernment_june2006.pdf).
- 5 For reports, see <http://www.AfriMAP.org/report.php> and for questionnaires, see <http://www.AfriMAP.org/questionnaire.php>.
- 6 See AfriMAP, AFRODAD and Oxfam GB, *Towards a People-Driven African Union: Current Obstacles and New Opportunities* (2007) at [http://www.AfriMAP.org/english/images/report/AU\\_PeopleDriven\\_text.pdf](http://www.AfriMAP.org/english/images/report/AU_PeopleDriven_text.pdf).
- 7 See <http://www.AfriMAP.org/researchDetail.php?id=20>.
- 8 See <http://www.afrobarometer.org/>; <http://www.idea.int/democracy/sod.cfm>; and <https://unp.un.org/cover.aspx?cover=E05IIK7&title=African+Governance+Report+2005>.
- 9 See questionnaire at [http://www.AfriMAP.org/english/images/questionnaire/Justice%20Sector%20Questionnaire-Sept%2006%20\(EN\).doc](http://www.AfriMAP.org/english/images/questionnaire/Justice%20Sector%20Questionnaire-Sept%2006%20(EN).doc)
- 10 <http://www.AfriMAP.org/english/images/questionnaire/AfriMAP%20Public%20Services%20questionnaire-v6.doc>
- 11 [http://www.AfriMAP.org/english/images/questionnaire/Political\\_Participation\\_Questionnaire\\_Mar07.doc](http://www.AfriMAP.org/english/images/questionnaire/Political_Participation_Questionnaire_Mar07.doc)
- 12 For an indicative summary of the position in southern Africa, see Raymond Louw (ed.), *Undue Restriction: Laws Impacting on Media Freedom in the SADC*, Media Institute of Southern Africa, Windhoek, 2004, available at <http://www.misa.org/documents/undue.pdf>.
- 13 Principle IV.

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