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GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION DIVISION

External peer review meeting – "Diversity Management in Africa: Findings from the African Peer Review Mechanism and a Framework for Analysis and Policy-Making"

United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC)

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
8 March 2011

REPORT

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Governance and Public Administration Division (GPAD) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) organized an external peer review meeting on the theme "Diversity Management in Africa: Findings from the African Peer Review Mechanism and a Framework for Analysis and Policy-Making" on 8 March 2011 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

2. The objective of the external peer review meeting was to provide selected African experts with expertise in the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and diversity management issues in Africa with the opportunity to review the strategic and scholarly focus of the research, validate its empirical and analytical findings and make substantive inputs to improve both the quality and policy relevance of the synthesis report.

II. ATTENDANCE

3. The meeting was attended by academics, policy-makers and experts with substantive knowledge of emerging issues in African governance, in particular conflicts and diversity management. It was also attended by representatives of GPAD. The list of participants is in annex I.

III. OPENING SESSION

4 Mr. Abdalla Hamdok, Director of GPAD, opened the meeting and warmly welcomed the participants. He introduced the theme of the meeting by stating that diversity was not a problem per se; the question rather was how to manage diversity effectively. He noted that, if not managed well, diversity could have destructive impacts and was a challenge to leadership on the continent. He noted that the post-colonial State was characterized by broad unity that masked diversity-related issues. In the previous 5-10 years, however, there had been worrying signs on the continent, in Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire, for examples.

5. Mr. Hamdok argued that the APRM was a home-grown and sovereign instrument which provided strategies for improving governance and diversity management in Africa. The APRM highlighted diversity management good practices, as illustrated by the impressive case of Tanzania. He emphasized the need to generate diversity management best practices and the importance of going beyond the APRM findings. Mr. Hamdok concluded by pointing out that within GPAD, the third African Governance Report (AGR-III) would also address the issue under the theme "Elections and the Management of Diversity". AGR-III would provide useful insights on diversity management and close the loop with respect to knowledge generation.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

6. Mr. Kojo Busia, Chief of the APRM support section of GPAD, welcomed the participants. He observed that the meeting was an opportunity to bring together Africa's policy-makers, experts and academics in the context of diversity management. He summarized the objectives of the synthesis report as to:

- Conceptualize identities of diversity
- Compile/analyse the APRM empirical findings
- Supplement the empirical findings with literature review
- Place findings in a conceptual and analytical framework
- Suggest policy recommendations for mitigating diversity-related conflicts.

V. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE SYNTHESIS REPORT

7. Professor Kidane Mengisteab presented the study "Diversity Management in Africa: Findings from the African Peer Review Mechanism and a Framework for Analysis and Policy-Making". He noted that the role of the State had been given inadequate attention in the study and that the report could have benefited from more quantitative research. He emphasized that diversity management was both a scourge and a challenge for many African countries. He explained that the concept of diversity referred to a plurality of identity groups; whereas identity referred to markers attributed to people and went on to explain the differences between primordial and social identity, noting that both concepts could be exclusive and inclusive.

8. Professor Mengisteab then set out the different types of diversity-related conflicts, which included: state-identity conflicts; inter-communal/inter-identity conflicts; and ethnic groups in conflict. The empirical evidence from the APRM indicated that conflicts in Africa arose from the grievances of different identities. These conflicts had historical roots in colonialism. The post-colonial State had further exacerbated the problems of diversity management and helped to cause various conflicts and instability. He emphasized that, under the prevailing conditions of institutional and economic fragmentation in the continent, it was difficult to develop state-identity relations conducive to diversity management. The APRM findings indicated that managing competition between political actors/identities was the core of diversity management.

9. Professor Mengisteab made several policy suggestions, including promoting/strengthening institutions of governance; reconciling modern and traditional institutions of governance; and addressing uneven development and also the fragmentation of modes of production.

VI. EXPERTS' INPUTS

10. Mr. Louis Darga noted that there was a serious omission in the study as it made no reference to non-African experiences. He pointed out that diversity management was not a uniquely African phenomenon. He further argued that, while the study highlighted the problems connected with the nature of the post-colonial State, the recommendations were based on those same institutions. If those institutions were part of the problem, they could not be part of the solution. He used the case of India as an example and spoke of the need to look beyond the unitary/federal model and investigate the notion of the "flexible" State. He also suggested that further study of Ethiopia in the context of the research would be rewarding since, it had different groups with a high degree of autonomy, but democratic freedoms were limited.

11. Mr. Acheampong Amoateng commended Professor Mengisteab on his research and the manner in which the study had captured the complexity of diversity. He said that the study shed light on conflict prevention and management theories and applauded the integrated theoretical framework used. He went on to outline some aspects of the report that could be improved. There was too much emphasis on the structural mechanisms of identity-related conflicts, which weakened the attempt to build an integrated theory of diversity management. Furthermore, the treatment of inter-identity conflicts had not helped to identify the context and outcome of identity connections. He concluded by stating that diversity concerned substance, variety and disparity.

12. Mr. Adele Jinadu began by indicating the problematic nature of diversity in terms of its structure, the State, and implications for citizenship. He recommended an analysis of diversity management in the context of unitary-federal States. With regard to methodology, he questioned whether or not the APRM really addressed diversity management and the relation between the latter and the liberal State. Furthermore, the findings from the APRM should be used to address the differences between APRM countries in terms of diversity management. With regard to conceptualization, he said that diversity concerned both structure and process and that ethnic identity differed from ethnic diversity. He was convinced that there should be more emphasis on inter-ethnic diversity and the respective conflicts. He also believed that the study should look at examples of reconciliation and cooperation and how institutions could influence that. Finally, he noted that diversity management should be incorporated in the institutions of governance.

13. Mr. Adotey Bing-Pappoe thought that more could have been done to analyse the APRM experiences with regard to diversity management and that more attention should have been given to the African experience of diversity management in a historical perspective. He also raised the question of how diversity management on the continent had changed over time. Mr Bing-Pappoe pointed out that an omitted variable might be the case of countries with little or no natural resources.

14. Mr. Mohamed Salih commended the study and said he had learned a great deal about the APRM in the context of diversity management. He emphasized that a wealth of knowledge came from the APRM and more focus should be given to an in-depth analysis of the findings. Mr. Salih argued that the idea that conflicts were predominantly identity conflicts was challenged by the fact that most groups were not in conflict. The prism of identity was difficult and diversity could simply be used as an instrument of control rather than being a problem in itself. If identity was the real problem, how could it be solved? He went on to address the broader contextual factors of colonialism in relation to diversity management. The emphasis should either be empowering ethnicity or dismissing it. He also highlighted the importance of looking at regional structures and what they had accomplished in terms of diversity management. He concluded by pointing out that it was important to manage diversity from a governance perspective. Governance involved prevention of conflict and it was therefore crucial to analyse the implications of conflict management for diversity management. He ended by saying that the report should place more emphasis on the machinery of governance in the context of diversity management.

15. Mr Cyril Obi questioned approaches to diversity that addressed it as a 'bad' thing. He thought a more pertinent question was how to democratize these elements of diversity. He went on to discuss the need to contextualize African democracy and to democratize diversity. He also emphasized the need to balance individual and group rights in countries with multiple identities. Mr Obi urged a return to fundamentals, consolidation of current practices in the area of diversity management and an analysis of people's knowledge of the objectives and work of the APRM.

16. Professor Mengisteab welcomed and appreciated all the comments made by the experts. He asserted that identity did not lead to conflict but that, under certain conditions, identities could instigate conflict. He also believed that the institutional systems influenced by colonialism were resilient. He ended by pointing out the relevance of some case studies outside Africa. After the expert interventions, the participants discussed the report.

VII. G. DISCUSSION

17. Theoretical propositions: There was general consensus that the theoretical propositions of the report were well thought out and carefully analysed. Some suggestions were made as to how the theoretical framework could be strengthened. First, participants argued that a strict debate by supporters about the unitary State versus the federal State should be avoided. Secondly, there were comments on the structure of the report, which moved from the empirical analysis back to the theoretical propositions. Thirdly, it was argued that the concept of diversity management was analysed too broadly and that it should focus more on resource-based conflicts. The focus should be more on conflict analysis versus triggering conditions. Fourthly, participants argued that too much attention was given to the role of traditional institutions.

18. Findings of the APRM: Participants agreed on the wealth of knowledge that the APRM had provided, but there was general consensus that a more in-depth analysis of the findings of the APRM was required. This study should also highlight the criteria for best practices and apply them more clearly to practices on the continent. The validity of the APRM country assessment reports was also discussed. In this regard, participants felt that the APRM should focus more on the rule of law and an independent judiciary.

19. Implementation of the APRM: Many comments were made on the nature and implementation of the APRM. Participants raised questions about the impact of the APRM and the role it could play in regulating the capacity of the State. They emphasized the importance of developing mechanisms to implement policy recommendations. It was argued that the APRM presented a typology of diversity management, which made systematic comparison possible. However, it was agreed that the challenge was how to move the APRM from an elite-based to a people-based process. The APRM was seen as a distant tool with little connection to the continent or people. It was important to use the country review assessments as the basis of National Plans of Action with a direct impact on governance in the respective countries and therefore an influence on diversity management.

20. Elections and diversity management: Several concerns were raised about elections and diversity management. Participants addressed the role of the electoral system as a tool for managing diversity and the need for further political decentralization as a mode for governing diversity management. There was also discussion of the tension between the need to address long-term governance deficits and the need to attend to current grievances. It was suggested that an independent election commission was needed to manage elections and respect diversity; and that political parties needed to be strengthened. It was also emphasized that the APRM and the AGR were complementary tools for strengthening governance on the continent. Participants also noted the importance of involving rural people more in the political process.

21. *Recommendations:* Participants agreed that there was no one-size-fits-all approach to diversity management but that the study should incorporate clear and specific recommendations. They felt that the recommendations in the report should be more comprehensive in nature; utilize a bottom-up approach; be consistent with the governance deficits mentioned in the AGR; and be informed by best practices on the continent.

VIII. H. RECOMMENDATIONS

22. The Chairperson presented the draft conclusions and recommendations to the meeting. After discussion, the following recommendations were agreed upon:

- Greater emphasis should be placed on the regulation of traditional institutions;
- External dimensions of diversity management should be incorporated in the report;
- A mechanism for providing citizen feedback on the APRM should be developed;

- More examples of diversity management should be incorporated in the report;
- More best practices of diversity management in Africa and the rest of the world should be analysed;
- Current diversity management good practices should be welcomed and used to serve as the basis for policy formulation.

IX. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

23. In his concluding remarks, Mr. Kojo Busia recalled that diversity-related conflicts were an indicator of a deficit in governance. The APRM provided an important framework in that regard, as it aimed to transform state-society relations. He also underscored the need to place democracy in the context of African circumstances. He argued that the external dimension of diversity management was very important to understand and address. He explained that the core of diversity management lay in transforming state-society relations and establishing grievance mechanisms.

Mr. Busia ended by thanking the participants for their insightful contributions, comments and suggestions.

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