

How Civil Society in Uganda can maximize its role in the APRM process

APRM is a very important innovation by the African Heads of State and Government. Civil Society should take the keenest interest to ensure that APRM works as envisaged. APRM should be popularized so that the wider citizenry is acquainted with and effectively participates in it.

To maximize participation in the APRM process Civil Society should:

- Acquaint itself with the mechanism and its various stages.
- Participate with Government in drawing up the National Plan of Action and ensuring it is implemented.
- Conduct studies that can inform the background papers and the draft report by the Review Team at the start of the process and in stage two.
- Provide as much credible information to the Review Team as possible and ensuring that its input is well reflected in the draft report (this is best done if Civil Society has a leadership team to coordinate this stage).
- Have local civil society experts on the NEPAD and APRM initiative who can clearly articulate these processes for the benefit of the community at large and take a lead in the process of translating the concepts into tangible benefits that ordinary people can 'see' and appreciate.
- Ensure the integrity of the process by monitoring that it is free of political manipulation.
- Use APRM findings to lobby Government for corrective action.
- Use APRM as a learning process by ensuring that lessons are popularized.
- Ensure regular interface amongst civil society and between civil society, government, the private sector and other partners to address the challenges and monitor progress made.
- Identify and address capacity gaps. Undertake in-depth studies and analysis on areas where there are information gaps in both the APRM process.
- Influence the agenda of the review by identifying and selecting the areas of particular interest to civil society including governance, democracy, accountability, (particularly corruption) etc. and ensuring that they become areas of focus for the Review Team.
- Make NEPAD and APRM documents accessible to the wider public by translating them into local languages, developing leaflets, brochures, and posters to make them more readily available to the wider public. Disseminate widely the outcomes of the APRM report.
- Lobby key regional and sub-regional structures such as the Pan-African Parliament, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Peace and Security Council and the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) of the African Union to ensure that the review report gets appropriate attention.

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The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)

What is it and how can Civil Society participate?

Background

In an effort to halt poverty and kick start economic growth and development in Africa, African leaders initiated the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The APRM is an important aspect of NEPAD that seeks to create better conditions for the continent to attract foreign investment by ensuring that there is democratic governance, sound economic policies are in place and peace prevails. It was officially adopted by the 37th Summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in July 2001 and its main aims are:



● **To halt the economic marginalization of Africa in the globalisation process; and**

● **To eradicate poverty in Africa and place member countries, both individually and collectively, on the path of sustainable development.**

What is APRM?

● It is a mutually agreed self-monitoring mechanism of member countries. Countries which voluntarily accept to join the Peer Review Mechanism undertake to submit to *periodic peer reviews*, as well as to facilitate such reviews. They are guided by agreed parameters for good political, economic and corporate practice. This is meant to encourage countries to identify and address weaknesses, and share positive experiences and best practices to promote political stability and economic growth.

● It provides for a process of “technically competent and credible review free of political manipulation”. A team of Eminent Africans agreed to by Heads of State undertakes the process. This Panel of Eminent Persons is already in place and comprises of: Prof. Adebayo Adedeji - West Africa; Prof. Kiplagat - East Africa; Dr. Graca Machel - Southern Africa; Dr. Dorothy Njeuma - Central Africa; Ms. Marie-Angelique Savane - West Africa; and Dr. Chris Stahls - Southern Africa.

● It entails reviews of policies and practices of participating states to assess progress being made towards achieving mutually agreed goals and compliance with agreed political, economic and corporate governance values, codes and standards as outlined in the *Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance*. The mechanism allows for the verification of whether the policies and practices brought into action by the concerned government are in accordance with the values, norms, and standards defined by the governments for this action. It also assesses the progress being made in building capacity to implement such reforms.

● Primarily, APRM is a mechanism for mutual learning. However, it also allows for peer pressure to be brought to bear on governments to adhere to agreed standards and benchmarks.

● All the stages of the APRM process are coordinated by the APR Secretariat.

The purpose and strength of APRM

By adopting best practice, member countries expect to enhance their political, economic and corporate governance image and to create a stable and predictable socio-political environment conducive for attracting and sustaining foreign investment. The assumption is that if leaders are seen to be accountable and willing to monitor and rebuke those countries that are impeding development by promoting conflicts and violence on the continent, the international community, both donors and the private sector will be more sympathetic to development needs of the continent.

The strength of the peer review mechanism lies in the mutual respect and confidence in the process. It is considered to be one of the most innovative and attractive aspects of NEPAD in the sense that it helps the countries to improve themselves.

Stages of the Peer Review Process

There are five stages through which the entire peer review process goes.

Stage one involves:

- Conducting a study of the political, economic and corporate governance and development environment in each country prepared by the APRM Secretariat. It also involves conducting background studies (both qualitative and quantitative) and collection of information including completion of a detailed questionnaire by the government to gauge the progress that these countries have made so far towards the political, economic and democratic governance and development environment in the country to be reviewed.
- Basically, these studies investigate the state of governance in at three levels of political representation, institutional effectiveness and accountability; and economic management and corporate governance.
- These are based on up-to-date background documentation prepared by the APRM Secretariat, and material provided by national, sub-regional, regional and international institutions.
- It is during this first stage that countries are expected to draw up their Programme of Action.

Stage two involves:

- Country visits by the Review Team of Eminent Persons for purposes of carrying out wide-ranging consultations with key stakeholders (including both state and non-state actors, political parties, parliamentarians representatives of civil society organizations (including the media, academia, trade unions, business, professional bodies).

Stage three

- Involves the preparation of country reports by the Review Team on the basis of the briefing material prepared by the APRM Secretariat and the preliminary studies and information provided in-country by official and unofficial sources during the wide-ranging consultations and interactions with stakeholders.
- Allows responses to the report by the government concerned. The Team discussed the draft report with the government to ensure accuracy of the information and to provide the government with an opportunity both to react to the Team's findings and to put forward views on how the identified shortcomings may be addressed.
- The report has to be clear on a number of points in instances where problems are identified. For example, the report has to state whether there is political will on the part of the government to take the necessary decisions and measures to put right what is identified; what resources are necessary to take corrective measures; how much of these resources can the government itself provide and how much has to come from external sources; given the necessary resources, how long will the process of rectification take, etc.
- Appropriate revisions are made and any responses of the government appended to the Team's report.

At this stage the process begins to focus more narrowly on government as it no longer involves other non-state actors.

Stage four involves:

- The submission of the Review Team's report and responses from the government to the Heads of State and Government through the APRM Secretariat. The participating Heads of State and Government consider and adopt the final report.
- Armed with the assessments, recommendations and reports from the Panel of Eminent Persons, participating Heads of State and Government engage in a process of dialogue with the respective Head of State to adopt and implement recommended reforms.
- As all participants have the same status, compliance is only by peer pressure. Progress depends on the positive incentives of support, aid and technical assistance, not on threats and sanctions. *“Once the government of the country in question shows a demonstrable will to rectify the identified shortcomings, then it will be incumbent upon participating governments to provide whatever assistance they can, as well as to urge donor governments and agencies also to come to the assistance of the country reviewed”.*
- Governments not "demonstrating a will" to correct shortcomings will be subjected to "constructive dialogue" with participating governments. Should "constructive dialogue" fail then other Heads of State in the APRM may "put the 'unwilling' government on notice" of their collective intent to proceed with "appropriate measures".
- The final and binding report with recommendations and time frames becomes the final outcome of this engagement.

Stage five

- Six months after the report has been considered by the Heads of State and Government it should be formally and publicly tabled in key regional and sub-regional structures such as the Pan-African Parliament, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the (envisaged) Peace and Security Council and the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) of the African Union. This constitutes the final stage of the process.

Duration of the review

The entire review process is not expected to exceed six months per country, commencing on the date of the inception of Stage One up to the date the report is submitted for the consideration by the Heads of State and Government. There will also be a conference of the participating countries to review the APRM once every five years.

Resources for the review

Funding for the Mechanism will come from contributions from participating member states. Each participating country is expected to contribute a minimum of \$100,000.

The status of the APRM in Uganda

Uganda ratified the APRM protocol in March 2003 and is now laying the basic ground for the APRM process. The APR Forum endorsed the recommendation that a Focal Point be established in each participating country. In Uganda, while Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development coordinates NEPAD with the Commissioner in charge of planning as the National Focal Point, National Planning Authority (NPA) has been proposed to take the lead on the APRM process in Uganda. NGO Forum, as the lead agency for civil society input in the APRM process and also representing civil society on the NPA Board is keenly following this development. Private Sector Foundation Uganda (PSFU) is to coordinate private sector input. The basic ground for APRM is being laid and it is expected that by mid 2005, the base review will have been completed.

What is critical however, is that CSOs should prepare to effectively participate in the APRM process and ensure that the mechanism works as envisaged.