

# THE AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECANISM : A CHALLENGE FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

## INTRODUCTION

NEPAD was the result of a general consensus among African Policy makers, the business community and civil society organisations on critical African issues and strategies necessary to overcome them.

Thus the over-arching objectives of NEPAD are the promotion of sustainable human development, the eradication of poverty, continental economic and political integration, global competitiveness, and Good Governance.

The achievement of such objectives requires mobilisation of human and material resources, different types of cooperation and partnership between governments, the civil society organisations and the private sector - but also with development partners – It takes place both at the national, continental and international level.

In this regards, APRM as a unique African initiative was create to promote the political, social and economic objectives of NEPAD – Because it entails conformity to principles, codes and standards and reviews African governance systems.

APRM is voluntary; it is opened to all members of the African Union (AU). It is thus part of AU system. The mandate of the APRM is to encourage the participating countries, ensuring that their policies and practice are conformed to the NEPAD's basic declaration on Democracy and Governance. And the primary purpose of the APRM is to foster the adaption of policies and practices that are likely to promote the over aching objectives of NEPAD, sharing experiences and reinforcing the best practices and assessing the needs for capacity building of the participating countries.

The underlying basic principles of the APRM could be summarized as : African ownership, inclusive participation and partnership; technical competence, objectivity, credibility and independence from political interference. That the whole process is African owned, entered into voluntarily, and conducted on the basis of partnership and participation between governments and all the relevant stakeholders. Both the inputs and the ultimate outputs in the APR process are expected to be the efforts of Africans, working together on the basis of equality

and partnership in pursuit of agreed common objectives. No external, non African, participation is envisaged. This means that the responsibility for success or failure of the APRM rests squarely on the shoulders of Africans. A panel of Eminent Persons, (APR Panel) consisting of well known professionally distinguished, respectable, creditable and independent Africans, leads and oversees the entire process, supported by a Secretariat (APR Secretariat).

To date 26 countries have acceded to the APRM by signing the Memorandum of Understanding. Five countries: Ghana, Rwanda, Kenya, South Africa, Algeria have completed the process. Benin is in the final stage and Uganda, Nigeria, Mozambique, Mauritius have started.

There are five basic stages in the APRM :

- The first stage is mainly national thus the most active and intensive. It starts by the signing of the technical Memorandum of Understanding that stipulates the mandatory responsibilities of the participating country. A national commission including all stakeholders must be established and technical institutions selected for the use of the questionnaire based on the four core areas of APRM : Democracy and Political Governance, Economic Governance, and management, corporate governance, Socio-Economic Development.

The self-assessment exercises through through the results of the questionnaire, the interviews, group discussions, researches, forum etc... will end by a National self-assessment report on the basis of which stakeholders after validation will formulate a preliminary National Programme of Action (NPA).

- The second stage

The secretariat receives the National self-assessment report and the NPA – The secretariat that had prepared a background document on the country will then prepare another document : an issues Paper to determine whether further assessment is needed and then prepare the Country Review visit. The Country Review Team is led by a member of the Panel. The main purpose of the Country Visit is to ascertain the analysis, the propositions of the National self assessment and the NPA to confirm that the country has fulfilled all its obligation, that the exercise has been inclusive. To do so the Country Review team engages itself in the widest possible consultations with governments institutions, political parties, parliamentarians, civil society organisations, women's groups, trade unions, universities, media, business groups, grass-roots organisations, youth etc... etc...

- The Stage three

The Country Review team writes its report on basis of the consultations with the Stakeholders coupled with the background documents, the national self assessment, the issues paper – It entails also the verification of the country compliance with the provision of the MOU. The report will end by recommendations.

- The Stage four :

It is the presentation of the Country Review team report to the Panel for validation – Thus the report is sent officially to the government of reviewed country for comments – Those are appended to the Panel report and presented to the APR forum of Heads of States and governments, for discussions and approval.

- The Stage Five

It takes place six month later when the report is formally tabled at regional and sub regional African organisation such as the Pan-African Parliament and the African Commission on Human Rights.

The APRM is a unique initiative thus is a work in progress. It entails complex and lengthy process involving virtually all governance institutions and agencies and stakeholders. APRM exposes in many ways governance institutions, their management and leadership to transparent public scrutiny and in the process touching on very sensitive political, economic and social issues. It should then be acknowledge the political courage and will of participating countries.

### **The challenge of APRM**

However, after six countries, which have completed their process, there are issues that have emerged as a challenge for the pursuit of the experience and demand for a revision of the methodology, for more thinking on the post review process and the implementation of the National Programme of Action (NPA), a more intense participation and ownership etc...

### **The Standards, Indicators, and Questionnaire**

These have derived from African Union Declaration on Governance and Democracy and have been developed by African experts – During the review, discussions have emerged on the need to clarify or have a common base on concepts such as : democracy, good governance within the African context with

our cultures, traditions and historical experiences. But also among various countries experiences –

These are issues of relevance and ownership of dialogues and debates among the various stakeholders – such discussions would promote and reinforce the democratic process.

### **The stakeholders and participation**

The APRM demand for inclusion and participation is not only innovative but mainly revolutionary. The composition of National Commission is always a matter of on going discussions with the governments. The panel is keen for fair representation of all stakeholders, while governments tend to resist – Political dialogue within stakeholders is not yet a common practice. Moreover, civil society organisation are very doubtful on the sincerity of governments.

The private sector does not appreciate the need for what they call lengthy and unnecessary debates. Thus the difficulties for a real dialogue, based on common objectives.

The challenge will be how to create the conducive environment for true dialogue on building minimum consensus on governance issues.

Civil Society organisation mainly will require special training on negotiation and consensus building. Because in the final analyses APRM is political process. Their empowerment is a MUST.

### **The National Programme of Action**

There is still a lot of confusion on the content and the role of the NPA.

The NPA derives from the main issues and gaps identified by the self assessment. The NPA is not another Development Plan rather it focuses on governance issues. That need to be addressed so as to correct or improve the management of public affairs.

The need to cost NPA, with a clear identification of stakeholders in..... is another difficulty for countries.

In general, the NPA is viewed sole responsibility of governance. Hence the absence of activities for the civil society on the private sector. It will be important for the next reviews to emphasise the participative requirements in the

formulation and the implementation of the NPA and its concentration on governance issues.

In this regard, it would necessitate mobilisation of human and financial resources and various coordination with other national institutions but also cooperation and partnership at international level. It will be a learning process of sharing experiences, lessons and best practices. It will require also capacity building and interaction among the stakeholders.

### **The post review process**

The main weakness of the APRM lies in the vacuum on what next after the peer review. It is time to reflect on how to maintain the momentum built during the review process; How to open the process to new actors and create a culture of participation on policy formulation and making. So far no specific structure has been identified to manage the implementation phase of the NPA. The government, will play the role of the steward, but civil society and the private sector should remain major players.

The time frame of the NPA is not yet clear. Hence the type of institutions that will be required. It will have to be inclusive, participative and be a watchdog, a catalyst.

### **Conclusion**

APRM is still a working progress, being a unique experience time, flexibility, innovation and creativity are required the boost the initiative and put it in the center of human development debates. The APRM Panel is planning a serial of workshops that will help building the next blocks and improve the Review itself. The challenge will live on the capacity after six countries to enable broader participation in revisiting the whole process.