

The African Peer Review Mechanism

A compilation of studies of
the process in nine African
countries

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Summary of findings from the country studies

Introduction

This introductory chapter provides an overview of implementation of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) based on the reviews collated in this single volume that AfriMAP has commissioned of the implementation of the APRM in nine countries (and others in preparation). The reviews, carried out by authors from each country concerned, examined how countries organised for the implementation of the APRM and the extent to which civil society participated in the process; for the most part they did not analyse in detail the content of the country self-assessment report (CSAR) and country review report (CRR) that are the product of the APRM process, nor of the national programmes of action (NPoA) that are then intended to guide national implementation of the APRM recommendations. This overview also concentrates on the process, on the extent to which the APRM achieved its ambition of creating a participatory and inclusive national dialogue, independent of, yet integrated into, government processes.

As noted in the previous chapter, 30 countries have signed up as members of the APRM since its establishment in 2003. Twelve countries have completed the review process. AfriMAP considers the APRM a significant effort by African countries to improve governance through a process of peer review and identification of areas that need reform. The APRM secretariat is currently reviewing the process and methodology with a view to improve effectiveness and streamline the process.¹ This is a timely intervention because there are valuable lessons to be learned from those countries that have or are implementing the APRM. There is no doubt that the African Union (AU) has made good governance a centrepiece of the continental development agenda. There are however legitimate questions being asked about the impact of the APRM regarding improvement of governance and credibility of the process in those countries that have implemented the APRM.

The APRM provides an interesting and unique example of south-south peer review. No other regional grouping has committed itself to similar peer review on political as well as economic governance issues. The APRM was in part adopted specifically because of suspicion of the governance monitoring

¹ AfriMAP made a submission to the review process, available on the AfriMAP website at <http://www.afrimap.org/reportDownload.php?id=56>.

efforts of the World Bank, the European Union, bilateral donors and American or European non-governmental organisations such as Freedom House. These exercises were and are seen as essentially nothing more than old-fashioned conditionality externally imposed and without roots in African realities. The process is supposed to be an organically evolved African initiative that has the potential to galvanise citizen involvement in how they are governed.

The varied manner in which the APRM has been implemented in different countries suggests differing motives for undertaking the APRM and the extent to which it influences reforms. The nature of the roles of state and non-state actors, institutional architecture, the duration of the process, and follow-up after the review has differed from country to country. In some countries, notably Ghana, and also Mali (not yet completed for inclusion in this report), genuinely independent processes were led by respected figures, and research carried out by accomplished and independent research bodies. In others, predictably, the process seemed to be far more closely controlled by government. Yet even in the countries with less of a tradition of open public debate – notably Rwanda and Algeria – a space for discussion was opened by the APRM that would not otherwise have been there. In several countries the eminent persons played a critical role in ensuring greater openness than would otherwise have been the case.

The extent to which the APRM has become an integral part of national planning processes, however, is tenuous. It is evident that the APRM is a highly political undertaking – probably more than its designers had ever imagined. Most of the countries that have implemented the APRM have sought to control the process through limited participation of non-state actors. Differing interpretation of APRM guidelines and base documents for national processes has at times resulted in inconsistent implementation of the process at national level. Low levels of awareness about the APRM, like most other AU processes, has kept it a project of the executive arm of government and elite NGOs and think tanks.

Overall, therefore, the verdict on the APRM as process is mixed; though every country reviewed has seen at least some national debate that perhaps would not have taken place, every country has also seen significant weaknesses in the way that research and participation were conducted. But the greatest test of the APRM as a continental and national tool for the improvement of governance will be the extent to which the analysis of the country review reports and the action points from national programmes of action are actually used in practice. This remains an open question, and one for further study.

National Institutional Framework

Once an APRM member state signs the memorandum of understanding, it commences the process of setting up national structures that will oversee implementation and ensure participation of different stakeholders. Key APRM institutions at the national level include a focal point, a national commission,

national secretariat, and technical research institutes. The nature of APRM structures have been varied from one country to another.

National APRM Focal Point

Each participating country must establish a focal point for the APRM process, which should be at a ministerial level, or a person that reports directly to the head of state or government, with the necessary technical committees supporting it. The focal point can be established as an integral part of existing structures or as a new structure in itself. However, it is critical that the work of the focal point is inclusive, integrated and coordinated with existing policy-decision and medium-term planning processes.²

In most countries focal points were established as part of existing structures. In Benin it was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and African Integration. Burkina Faso appointed the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation. In Nigeria the Secretary to the Government of the Federation was the national focal point. The Algerian minister in charge of African and Maghreb Affairs became the focal point. In Kenya it was the Ministry of Planning and National Development. Ghana initially designated the National APRM Governing Council as the focal point although later a chief adviser to the president became the liaison between the APRM process and government. Rwanda created a national NEPAD secretariat in the office of the president led by an executive secretary to serve as the focal point. The focal point in South Africa was the Minister of Public Service and Administration. It is evident that most countries met the APRM guidelines by appointing focal points at a ministerial level. The location of focal points in different government ministries provides interesting perspectives through which the APRM is viewed by different member states. In Benin and Burkina Faso it is largely seen as a foreign affairs and regional integration issue. Kenya sees it as a predominantly planning and national development issue. Meanwhile in South Africa the APRM was dealt with as a public service and administration issue.

It makes sense for the focal point to be a minister or official close to the president: the APRM needs the backing of the highest political authorities and an individual is needed who has the confidence of the head of government and authority to shift blockages. At this level of the APRM structures independence is less important than the mandate and ability to ensure that the process keeps moving. Which particular location in government is held will naturally vary according to the administrative and political traditions of each country. However, it is important that revisions to the APRM guidelines should clearly spell out and distinguish the different roles of the APRM institutions, including the limits of authority of the focal point. In some countries, such as Algeria, Nigeria and South Africa, the role of the focal points became conflated with

² Guidelines for Countries to Prepare for and Participate in the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), 2003, IV.4, para 34 NEPAD/APRM/Panel3/guidelines/11-2003/Doc 8

those of the national governing councils (see below), creating a perception of undue executive dominance of the process.

National Commission/Governing Council

In terms of the Supplementary Document to APRM Guidelines for Country Review³ the National Commission is the body that provides strategic policy direction to the implementation of the APRM. This body must contain upstanding citizens who command the respect of the general public. The country guidelines provide that the National Commission established to manage the process at national level should be autonomous from government and inclusive of all key stakeholders. In this context, membership must be diverse and representative to ensure the spirit of the APRM – broad-based participation.

The extent to which the APRM national commissions have facilitated broad-based participation is different from one country to another. Variations range from national commissions that are clearly dominated and controlled by state institutions to those where non-state actors play a dominant role. The national commissions have been variously described as the National Governing Council (NGC), National Working Group, Independent National Commission, etc., but have essentially performed similar functions.

Rwanda and surprisingly South Africa appear to have had the most government-controlled national commissions. In Rwanda the appointment of the national commission was preceded by a government dominated steering committee. On her preparatory country visit, panel member Angélique Savané urged a more inclusive national commission. A 50 member commission was appointed that was still dominated by government and chaired by the Minister of Finance. In South Africa an initial 15 member governing council, comprising five senior members of government and 10 civil society representatives, was established. It was chaired by the Minister of the Public Service and Administration who was also the focal point. The lack of transparency in the manner in which members of the NGC were selected coupled with a government chairperson raised concerns about government interference in the process.

Probably the most independent was the Benin APRM Independent National Commission (CNIM-MAEP). The Commission was established by decree that provided that the chair and one vice-chair shall be civil society representatives while the other vice-chair will be a member of parliament. The majority of the 97 members were civil society organisations. (Mali, not included in this volume, similarly had a strong and independent national commission, with a highly respected chair, a great strength of the process in that country.) Ghana's seven member governing council was established as an autonomous body that would operate outside the orbit of its parent ministry. Members were appointed in their individual capacities on the basis of their experience and

³ Supplementary Document to APRM Guidelines for Country Review, the APRM National Structure, para III

distinction in their respective fields. There was some concern from the civil society organisations who felt members of the NGC should represent certain constituencies.

Kenya had the most contested process regarding the establishment of its national commission. As in the case of Rwanda, establishment of the Kenyan NGC was preceded by a government task force that developed a framework for APRM implementation in Kenya. There appears to have been an initial reluctance on the part of government to include non-state actors in the process. Civil society groups were eventually included in the 33 member NGC after intense civil society lobbying and intervention by panel member Dr Graça Machel. In Nigeria the final composition of the national commission appears to have been largely influenced by considerations of broad representation. A 50 member National Working Group (NWG) included representatives of the presidency, private sector, academia, media, labour and civil society. The NWG was later expanded to 250 in order to accommodate representatives of all state governments and other groups such as women, people with disabilities and faith-based organisations. As in Kenya, the eminent person assigned to the country intervened to shape the composition and ensure the greater representativeness of the council.

Composition of the Algerian NGC was also driven by a need to ensure broad representation. It comprised 100 members almost evenly split between state and non-state actors including legislators and labour unions.

There are arguments in favour of different sizes for the NGC; however, the Nigerian option does seem too large to be effective, unless coupled with a very effective and smaller steering committee that handles day-to-day affairs and reports back to a larger group.

The role of the NGC in relation to the finalisation of the self-assessment reports has also varied, with some signing off on the text, and others effectively left out of the process, which has been handled by government. In some cases, the councils have been dissolved immediately following the completion of the self-assessment report; in others, more positively, there has been an ongoing role for the NGC in monitoring implementation and follow up for the APRM process.

The continental APRM documents should provide stronger written guidance on the need for the NGCs to be autonomous of the executive, with a majority of non-government members, and chaired by a non-government representative. The NGC should have the clear mandate and authority to sign off on the national self-assessment report, and an ongoing role in monitoring implementation of the recommendations in the country review report and national programme of action.

National APRM Secretariat

The APRM guidelines require the establishment of a National APRM Secretariat that provides technical and administrative support to the National

Commission/Governing Council. It assists the NC/NGC in organising sensitisation programmes at the national and local levels. The Secretariat, which should have ideally a CEO or executive director, will also be responsible for liaising between the NC/NGC and the APRM continental secretariat in South Africa. The secretariat should also facilitate and support the work of the technical research institutions. The secretariat is supposed to ensure adequate logistical and administrative support for the process. There are several variations of national secretariats.

South Africa's national secretariat was headed by the Minister of Public Service and Administration who was also the chair of the NGC as well as being the focal point. It comprised officials from the Department of Public Service and Administration, contracted researchers and members seconded from the South African Chapter of the African Union's civil society body, the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC). In Nigeria the secretariat was headed by the APRM National Coordinator who is a presidential political appointee, answerable to the national focal point.

In both Rwanda and Kenya the national NEPAD secretariat also served as the APRM national secretariat. In the case of Kenya the NEPAD secretariat received a budgetary allocation from the national budget and the CEO was recruited through a competitive process. In Rwanda the head of the NEPAD secretariat was a presidential appointee.

The primary mandate of the secretariats in Benin, Burkina Faso, and Ghana was clearly to service the National Governing Council. Benin established the office of National Coordinator responsible for the day-to-day running of the review process as well as supervision of the technical research institutes. However the reporting structure for the National Coordinator became problematic because he reported to the UNDP on administrative and financial issues and to the chair of the National Commission on APRM substantive issues. He resigned five months into the process. Burkina Faso established a permanent secretariat that provided technical support to the NGC. The NGC in Ghana was supported by a secretariat that was headed by the NGC's executive secretary. In line with the autonomous nature of the NGC, the secretariat operated from separate premises from those of the focal ministry.

In the case of Algeria, logistical and administrative support for the APRM process in the form of staff, transport, office space, etc were provided to the NGC's bureau and communications unit directly by government. These resources were transferred to the office of the head of government at the end of the review.

Even where the national commission has been relatively independent, therefore, its secretariat has sometimes been very closely government controlled. The NGC secretariat should be clearly independent of government, under the authority of the NGC itself, even if staffed by seconded civil servants.

Technical research institutes

In each country independent research bodies known in the APRM documents as technical research institutes (TRIs), though sometimes known by different terms at country level, are responsible for executing the APRM questionnaire for the country self-assessment report (CSAR). They are supposed to have the competence and technical capabilities to conduct sound and objective research in the four APRM thematic areas. The TRIs collate data, analyse and present their findings, usually with one TRI allocated each of the four overall themes established by the questionnaire itself. In terms of the APRM guidelines, the TRIs are to be appointed by the NGC and report directly to it. As was the case with the establishment of the other national APRM institutions, participating countries used different approaches to select TRIs. Those countries with strong traditions of independent think tanks found the process easier; yet even in countries such as Ghana, South Africa or Kenya, the sheer size of the research undertaking was overwhelming for some of those involved.

In Benin, Burkina Faso and South Africa the NGC invited applications or appointed TRIs. The South Africa NGC established an internal seven member research sub-committee that was made up of three government representatives and four from civil society tasked with reviewing submissions received and coordinating compilation of the CSAR. The NGC then invited academic, research and advocacy organisations to apply for accreditation as research partners. Fifteen research partners were selected by the research sub-committee to participate on a voluntary basis by making submissions on themes selected from the questionnaire. The NGC also invited research institutions to apply to be ‘technical support agencies’, a remunerated position. Their role would be supplementary to the research sub-committee and the research partners. They would contribute to the research and writing of the CSAR. Four TRIs were selected a third of the way into the process. There was some tension between the NGC and the TRIs, who had already made submissions to the process and therefore had a vested interest in the process. The focal point complained that the TRI reports appeared to promote their agendas. The Ghana NGC decided that the research and writing of the CSAR was to be done by four expert institutes and approached the four selected organisations. Although there was no public process for selection, all four selected organisations are widely recognised as leaders in their respective areas. The national APRM commission in Benin selected four independent organisations to collect and analyse data on the basis of the self-assessment questionnaire. The selection of the four organisations was done after limited consultations. Their expertise appears not to have been in doubt. In Burkina Faso four TRIs were selected through a public call for offers. Of the four selected by the NGC, three were governmental and one was non-state.

Kenya and Rwanda selected their TRIs during national consultative conferences to create awareness about the APRM. In Kenya, lead technical agencies were nominated early in the process during consultative fora held

at the beginning of the process. The nominations were approved by the Minister of Planning and National Development. Their task was to carry out the research, write the self-assessment report and the national programme of action (NPoA). Technical work in the Rwanda process was largely done by four technical review teams comprising mostly government officials. The teams corresponded to the four APRM themes and worked closely with thematic sub-committees established within the national commission. The technical teams were established by a conference convened to share information on the APRM process.

In Nigeria, the focal point invited ten organisations that included state and non state, to be technical research institutes that would conduct research for and prepare the CSAR. While the TRIs national and international standing was not questioned, the focal point selected them without consulting the NWG nor going through a public request for applications; and at different times a different team of TRIs was in place. In Uganda also (not included in this compilation), the process of TRI selection was highly confused, with different organisations leading on different themes at different times, when those initially appointed failed to perform.

The Algeria National Economic and Social Council (*Conseil National Economique et Social*, CNES) played the lead technical support role. There is no evidence that the CNES was formally appointed to play this role. It is a state institution created by decree with a mandate to act as an advisory body for dialogue and cooperation in economic, social and cultural fields. The CNES worked with other research institutions that provided technical input to the CSAR without being formally appointed as TRIs. It is only after the first country review mission (CRM) that other TRIs were appointed. In Mauritius, the National Economic and Social Council was also appointed to lead the research, but was clearly not well adapted to the task, and the initial draft country self-assessment report was rejected by the APRM panel.

As much as possible, TRIs should be national, competent institutions independent of government. Where such structures do not exist, preference should be given to regional or other countries' TRIs rather than government structures. It should be clear that involvement of independent think tanks in the research does not remove the obligation for broad-based consultation with other civil society structures.

Awareness raising and access to information

In all the countries reviewed the country self-assessment was preceded by consultative and awareness-raising activities of one form or another. Given the constrained timeframes within which such activities were undertaken, coupled with institutional arrangements that did not always ensure broad participation, it is not clear to what extent broader segments of the population were sufficiently informed and aware of the process. The general impression one gets is that more outreach was required in order to make greater numbers

of the population aware of the APRM and thus participate in an informed manner.

The Burkina Faso APRM secretariat had a department of communications and public relations that organised numerous awareness-creation and information-dissemination activities. However a review of the outreach does not indicate the extent to which the general population was sufficiently informed of the process. Until the Burkina Faso review report was presented to the APRM Forum there was no Burkina Faso website that would allow members of the public easy access to information. The first newsletter of the APRM was only drafted six months after the completion of the CSAR. The Rwanda NEPAD secretariat was also weak on public outreach, organising only two national conferences attended by 200 people each. This does not appear to be sufficient outreach in a country of ten million people.

In Ghana, meanwhile, work on the self-assessment report was preceded by public education activities that included a national stakeholders' workshop, a workshop for parliamentarians and one for media practitioners. Though some civil society groups still felt inadequately informed, this was clearly a much more serious effort to let the public know what was planned. South Africa appeared to have had the most extensive outreach programme that covered both rural and urban areas. The process kicked off with a consultative conference attended by some 350 people. This was followed by provincial conferences with participation levels ranging from one hundred to a thousand people. Different forms of media were used to raise awareness about the APRM; these included print and broadcast media as well as a specially commissioned APRM song.

Nigeria admitted facing challenges in ensuring that the APRM was popularised and participatory, mainly because of its population size. A number of sensitisation events were held between the time the focal point was appointed and the APRM questionnaire was pre-tested in Nigeria. In Kenya the process was formally launched by an APRM Consultative Forum, whose aim was to introduce the APRM questionnaire, various research instruments, and the four thematic review groups. The Algeria National Governing Council had a fairly active communications unit that set up and maintained a website that existed for two years before being closed down a month after presentation of Algeria's country review report. The communications unit also facilitated the participation of NGC members on radio programmes.

Access to and dissemination of information is identified in the APRM master questionnaire as one of the cross-cutting issues that require 'systematic attention across all areas of the questionnaire'. Yet gaining access to information about the APRM process has varied widely by country. Even those that were most open often failed to create websites or documentation centres where minutes of NGC meetings, for example, could be readily accessed by researchers (including those compiling the report in this volume) seeking to understand the way in which the process was working – a weakness

that is far from being remedied by the continental secretariat, whose website does not provide even a complete set of the basic APRM documents supplied to national focal points.

Perhaps most importantly of all, only Uganda has formally made the country self-assessment report fully available to anyone interested in reading it. Publication of the CSAR is at the discretion of the country concerned, and all others have chosen not to do so. This discretion should be removed: it is important for researchers and civil society groups to have access to such an important document.

Self-assessment

The manner in which countries conducted the self-assessment component of the APRM differed both in terms of methodology and process. The self-assessment is based on the APRM questionnaire that covers four areas of governance: democracy and good political governance; economic governance and management; corporate governance; and socio-economic development. The questionnaire is quite lengthy and complex comprising 58 questions and 183 indicators. The country self-assessment process produces a country self-assessment report (CSAR) and a draft national programme of action (NPOA). There have been many complaints from countries undertaking the APRM that the questionnaire tries to cover too many issues, has a somewhat confusing structure, with questions that often overlap, and is unmanageable both for governments and for civil society organisations seeking to respond to it. At the same time, there are questions that could usefully be added in order to address some important issues that are currently not covered. There is a clear need – recognised by the Continental APRM Secretariat – for a systematic review of the questionnaire, including the ‘cross-cutting issues’ it selects for particular focus but which need modification in light of the findings of the reviews so far. While the questionnaire is intended to ensure consistency across countries, most countries therefore had to adapt, simplify, or domesticate the questionnaire in order to respond to local realities.

Ideally, a revised APRM questionnaire should be provided in two forms by the APRM Secretariat: a version for expert consultants, and a version in language that can be used by non-technical specialists, enhancing citizen participation. Of course, any country should still be free to revise or add to the questionnaires as appropriate for national conditions.

The methodologies for collecting data and holding consultations took variant forms. Generally the research process included a desk study, elite/expert/key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and sample surveys. In some countries, but not all, a national survey was also conducted by the national statistical office. Similarly, some countries made public calls for submissions from civil society groups, but this has not been uniformly the case. The data was processed by TRIs that also compiled a draft report. Validation of the report usually takes the form of a consultative conference. What appears to be

a common constraint in compiling the self-assessment is time. In most cases the self-assessment was done within timeframes that did not allow sufficient engagement with the draft report by stakeholders resulting in artificial discussion and debate. A common concern was the complexity and length of the questionnaire that had an impact on the rate and quality of responses.

Where government controlled bodies have been employed for this work, there has been concern about the independence of the results; where independent think tanks have been used there have also been concerns, this time related to the way in which using a think tank for such a consultancy may then be seen as sufficient involvement of civil society in the process.

A common complaint running through the reports in this volume is that civil society groups and individuals interviewed or who made submissions had no way of knowing whether their contributions were in fact reflected in the final country self-assessment report. There generally appears to have been no process through which stakeholders could systematically ascertain how their input had been utilised. Validation conferences in most instances were done on the basis of an executive summary of the draft CSAR. There are a number of countries where there was tension about the manner in which the report was finally edited, with the perception being that government took over the process in order to ensure a favourable outcome.

In Kenya the decision was taken to domesticate the generic APRM questionnaire during the initial consultative conferences. Four research approaches were used to do the self-assessment: desk research; expert panels; a national sample survey; and focus group discussions. This approach resulted in a credible process of data collection. Finalisation of the report was delayed due to tensions between government and the NGC that culminated in the dismissal of the NGC chair. After submission of the initial draft self-assessment report by the lead technical agencies, a team of independent experts was put together to critique and write the report that was subjected to a national validation workshop before submission to the APRM continental secretariat.

In Nigeria as part of the 'domestication' of the questionnaire, the national focal point ran a pre-test of the questionnaire. Feedback from the pre-test observed that the response rate was very low, the questionnaire was difficult to complete; and that it did not address the country's peculiarities, such as the role of traditional rulers. A decision was taken to unbundle and simplify the questionnaire. As in the case of Kenya the methodology adopted by Nigeria comprised a desk study, elite/decision-maker interviews, focus group discussions, and a mass household survey. There was controversy about the decision by the national focal point to use the National Bureau of Statistics to carry out the mass household survey. The initial TRIs were eventually dropped over a dispute regarding fees. The process of writing and validating the CSAR was quite thorough. In addition to the TRIs, a team of three experts was appointed as thematic coordinators. Once a draft was produced four

think tanks were contracted to peer review the draft. The executive summary of the CSAR in English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba was widely distributed in Nigeria's 36 states. Teams of members of the APRM National Working Group held validation meetings in 14 states in which state and non-state actors participated.

In Algeria members of the NGC worked closely with the CNES, the institution that led the technical process of data gathering and analysis. Members of the NGC held consultations in select local authorities. Such consultations were said to be open and at times stormy. Selection of the districts where consultations took place was driven by a desire to represent Algeria's diversity in its many forms.

In Benin the process was led by the TRIs that followed a common approach used in other countries, comprising a desk study, key informant workshops, and a representative sample survey. This was followed by a consultative process that sought to obtain input from a variety of stakeholders into the self-assessment report.

South Africa adapted the 88 page questionnaire into a six-page document that was translated into the ten other official languages. There have been concerns that in some instances the simplified version failed to capture the essence of the questions in the longer version. South Africa's approach to obtaining data was through a call for public submissions that could be made in three ways: written submissions; completion of the questionnaire; and reports from consultations conducted by provincial governing councils established in each of South Africa's nine provinces. The TRIs were given only five weeks within which to process data and write their draft respective reports. The TRIs had not been involved in the research methodology design so their approaches to compiling the drafts were different. Most of the TRIs were unable to incorporate all the data due to time constraints, poor quality of data and in some cases language limitations, which meant that the important effort at consultation and outreach was sometimes wasted, with feedback from outreach workers not eventually incorporated into the draft CSAR chapters. Some controversy also surrounds the manner in which the South Africa self-assessment report was compiled and finalised. There is a perception that government dominated the process of drafting the CSAR. After the secretariat compiled the draft CSAR that was a consolidation of the edited technical reports, the focal point convened an urgent meeting of the NGC to discuss the draft on the eve of the validation meeting. A revised draft was presented at the validation meeting. Further revisions were made to the CSAR by a multi-disciplinary task team led by a representative of the presidency on the NGC. There are questions about whether the final CSAR sufficiently incorporated inputs received, especially at the validation workshop.

In Ghana the research methodology used by each of the TRIs was slightly different. However the TRIs followed an approach that comprised a literature

review, elite/expert interviews with state and non-state actors, and sample surveys of ordinary Ghanaians.

In Burkina Faso the TRIs adopted an approach that was similar to other countries. They also faced challenges regarding the time constraints, complexity of the questionnaire and financial resources. The validation workshop was criticised for not providing an opportunity for participants to critique the report. This was due to the almost imminent arrival of the country review mission.

In Rwanda data was gathered mainly through focus group meetings that were also used to complete the questionnaire. The data was compiled into a single self-assessment report. It is interesting to note that Rwanda is the only country that sent the draft CSAR to institutions outside the country for further review. The report was sent to the Africa Institute for Political Analysis and Economic Integration for an expert review. Another external organisation, the Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA), did the final editing of the report.

As in the case of TRI selection, the APRM continental secretariat should provide clearer guidance on the types of research methodology that are suitable for use by the TRIs, and the sort of consultation that should be involved in drafting their thematic reports. While it may well be a useful contribution to have a national sample survey conducted by the body most qualified to conduct it – the national statistics office – if there are concerns about the independence of the national statistics office (according to the standards set out in the African Charter on Statistics), the national commission will need to have strong control over the way that the process is managed. In general, the more that the APRM self-assessment goes beyond desk-study and expert consultation, the greater value it will offer in adding new voices into national debates over the best strategies for development.

APRM country support and country review missions

Each APRM process includes at least two, and sometimes up to four, visits from a team led by the APRM panel member allocated responsibility for that particular country's review. A country support mission early in the process usually concludes with the signing of a memorandum on the modalities for conduct of the APRM in that country. In a significant number of cases, including Kenya, Rwanda and Nigeria, the APRM panel member has played an important role at this stage in ensuring that the national APRM commission has wider representation of civil society, or, for example in Algeria or Uganda, that the TRIs selected are more suitable for the work.

The country review mission (CRM) is conducted soon after the submission of the CSAR to the APRM continental secretariat. There were minor variations in the manner country review missions were conducted. Once in a country the CRM held consultations with a wide range of stakeholders that included state and non-state actors as well as the private sector. The country review

is based on background research done by the continental APRM secretariat and an issues paper developed from the CSAR. After conducting in-country consultations, the CRM compiles its own report and affords the country under review an opportunity to respond as well as amend the national programme of action (NPoA). The response is appended to the country review report for submission to the APRM Forum for peer review.

The duration of CRMs varied from country to country. It is not clear what determined the duration of the mission. The mission was in Nigeria for almost one month, 27 days in Burkina Faso, 19 days in Benin, 16 days in South Africa, 14 in Kenya, and 12 days in Ghana and Rwanda. In Algeria and Benin the mission made two visits. In the case of Algeria the second visit was warranted by gaps that had been identified in the CSAR, leading to the recommendation that the work of the National Economic and Social Council be supplemented by additional research carried out by TRIs.

Generally the CRMs had ready access to almost all levels of society right from the head of state to stakeholders at local levels. However in Algeria the oldest political party, the *Front des Forces Socialistes* refused to participate in a meeting organised by the CRM, alleging that the process was not taking political parties and human rights groups seriously.

Civil society participation

APRM base documents and guidelines urge participating countries to ensure a broad-based process that involves broad segments of the country's citizens in a dialogue about governance. The nature and quality of civil society participation in the APRM process is directly linked to the country's political context and history. Obviously where there are more guarantees for civic freedoms there are greater opportunities for civil society to participate in the APRM process in a meaningful way. The type of institutional arrangements that countries put in place can either promote or undermine civil society participation. The reality is that there will always be different levels at which and spaces in which civil society will participate in the APRM process. There are instances where civil society actors are invited to participate in the process such as consultative forums, through public calls for submissions, as representatives on the national governing councils, or as providers of specialised technical services. In other instances civil society actors have had to contest for a seat at the table, especially for membership of the national governing councils. Increasingly civil society organisations are creating spaces to engage with the APRM through development of capacity to monitor implementation of the APRM, especially the NPoA.

The Rwanda review collated here concludes that the process was government dominated. The self-assessment process was conducted by technical teams under the direction of the national NEPAD secretariat; yet some civil society representatives interviewed also stated that they appreciated the more open nature of the CSAR process in the context of Rwanda's usually closed system.

In Algeria too, civil society participation was limited – but still the process was more open than most national planning processes, creating a precedent that may be useful in future. Limited civil society participation is also noted even in those countries that have a fairly robust civil society sector such as Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. In the case of Kenya it took intense lobbying and the intervention of the APRM panel member for the Kenyan government to include civil society in a meaningful way. In South Africa the tight timeframe within which the process was conducted created the perception that government was not committed to genuine civil society participation. Drafts were generally not made available in sufficient time for stakeholders to engage with substantive issues. On the other hand the government felt that non-governmental organisations were preoccupied with the transparency of a government-led process at the expense of substantive issues that needed to be debated. Although a fairly wide range of organisations were eventually included in the national working group in Nigeria, there was no clear or transparent criterion for inclusion in the working group. Only legally registered organisations were represented on the NGC in Algeria. A lot of organisations are prevented from legally incorporating and can therefore not be represented on the NGC. Invitation to participate in consultations excluded organisations that dealt with ‘politically sensitive issues’. While in Ghana, Benin and Burkina Faso there appears to have been more willingness on the part of government to involve civil society, there were still concerns about the criteria used to invite those who ended up participating.

The APRM core documents should in future clearly establish the stages in the process for independent civil society groups to contribute, the mechanisms by which their inputs can be taken into account, and the report-back systems to civil society and citizens at large on how the final self-assessment report was drafted. It should be made clear that hiring civil society think tanks to conduct research as TRIs does not substitute for a widespread consultation with the wider society. The National APRM Secretariat should also insist on the extension of the participatory ideal to the implementation phase, with regular involvement of civil society and parliamentarians in monitoring and evaluation of progress in achieving the programmes of action.

Political will

In each country where the APRM process has been undertaken, political support from the very top has been critical to the conduct of the self-assessment report and cooperation with the independent review by the eminent persons. Perhaps this is most obvious in the cases of South Africa, Algeria and (though to a lesser extent, given a change of government) Nigeria, each of them leaders in the adoption of NEPAD and establishment of the APRM. For these countries, successful and timely completion of the APRM was a matter of national pride; even of personal pride for the president. In the case of Rwanda too, one of the

very first APRM countries, the process was a priority to a government anxious to attract donor support for national development plans.

In the other countries that have completed the process so far, including in particular those reviewed by AfriMAP, direct support from the highest levels of government – the national focal point and president – has been important. In Benin and Burkina Faso, for example, the representative of the panel of eminent persons assigned to the country explicitly acknowledged the important role of the president during the country review mission or launch events for the report. In Mauritius, by contrast, the APRM process was started as one of the first group of countries to undertake the review; and has not yet been completed, six years later. AfriMAP's review, published midway, concluded that the lack of political leadership was the key reason why the process had stalled.

Strong political support is clearly necessary for the successful completion of the often onerous APRM self-assessment process, and for the role of the independent panel. Yet the political investment of the president can also carry risks: a country self-assessment report or country review report that challenges the government's view of itself can prove a test of commitment to the idea of independent review – as even South Africa found out.

Conclusion

A key objective of the APRM is to promote national dialogue about how the country is governed. This requires that greater numbers of citizens are aware of and informed on the APRM and what it seeks to achieve. Participation of citizens will largely depend on institutional arrangements that member states put in place that should be inclusive and should not be perceived simply as gate keepers of government interests. The research, report compilation, and implementation of the NPoA needs to be participatory so that it engenders a sense of ownership that is a vital principle of the APRM. This in turn entails that broad segments of the population should have easy access to information and should be availed adequate time to review drafts in order to participate meaningfully in the review process.

It is clear that in most countries that have conducted the APRM review, the process has been dominated and driven by government. This has been evident in the national institutional framework that has been put in place, in spite of clear guidelines that encourage processes that are impartial and objective. If the APRM is to be seen as a credible initiative, governments will have to allow more space for other actors to participate. The current revisions to the process, methodology and tools come at a vital time for the APRM. The common concern about the length and complexity of the questionnaire is a real issue that has to be addressed in relation to the realities coming out of those countries that have undertaken the review. Civil society organisations will in turn need to develop capacities to engage in policy dialogue with government in concrete ways that add value to policy making and formulation.