

African Peer Review Process

Rwanda's experience

Background

The Government of Rwanda acceded to the principles of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 9th March 2003, and later offered to be one of the first four countries alongside Kenya, Ghana and Mauritius to undergo peer review.

The process, which was to last 12 months, began in earnest with the establishment of an APRM National Focal Point and the nomination of the APRM National Commission whose task was to provide oversight to the process. Prior to the actual commencement of implementation activities, sensitization campaigns were carried out to raise awareness of NEPAD and APRM, among key stakeholders starting with the National Assembly.

Thereafter, as part of the self assessment stage of the review, several workshops were organized to obtain views of the different stakeholders. The first workshop took place on the 25th and 26th of March 2004 and was attended by over 200 people. Prior to this, the APRM Focal Point's office had conducted desk research, contacted many stakeholders, and solicited views on the different governance issues.

After the first consultative workshop in March 2004, it was realized that not much would be done in an unwieldy group of over 200 people, even when divided into different thematic groups to discuss the four different themes.

As a result, a technical group comprising 21 persons was then formed to carry out the exercise and report back to a subsequent national workshop. The teams were organized according to the members' expertise in each of the four thematic areas of the APR Questionnaire namely;

- Democracy and good political governance
- Economic governance and management
- Corporate governance
- Social/economic development

The thematic groups later reported back to a National Consultative workshop, convened to review progress and validate the team's work. The team effectively became the "**Technical Review Team**", and accepted to form a permanent group for the entire self-assessment process.

Following the support mission visit and the inauguration of the APRM National Commission, the first meeting of APRM National Commission, provided further guidance to the review process.

The APRM National Commission was also organized into working sub-commissions according to the four thematic areas of the aforementioned APRM questionnaire. Taking into consideration the advice of the Support Mission, the sub-commissions held discussions with different stakeholders, and guided the Technical Review Team in improving on the self-assessment report. The final self assessment report was

subsequently submitted to the APR Continental Secretariat in March 2005. After the preparation of the issues paper by the Secretariat an External Review Team came to Rwanda in June 2005 for deliberation and verification. The External Review mission constituted a vital part of the peer review process. This team was in Rwanda for ten days. Besides looking at the self assessment report they visited a number of provinces throughout the country and consulted various stakeholders to obtain an independent impression. This stage was important because of its role in strengthening the credibility and sustainability of the Africa Peer Review Mechanism.

This presentation comes after the self- assessment; Country Review Team and the actual Peer Review for Rwanda that was held on 30th June 2006 at the Heads of States Forum convened at Banjul the Gambia, thus serving as a post-mortem of the entire process.

By highlighting the issues that Rwanda confronted during the APRM Implementation exercise, this presentation seeks to enrich future APRM country implementation programs, as well as the continental management of the instrument.

CHALLENGES

a) Institutionalisation of APRM in the country

The following issues form the institutionalization issues a country is likely to confront as it gears to start the APRM process:

- Buying the political will at all levels
- Creating awareness on the APRM process (through workshops, meetings, seminars etc)
- Setting up effective structures to implement the APRM process (Focal point, National commission etc)
- Resource mobilization from all stake holders (Government, Donors, etc)
- Identification of technically competent personnel, consultants and institutions to facilitate the implementation

b) Linkage between APRM objectives and domestic development agenda

Given the various processes and programmes already underway in the country, it is quite challenging to explain the relevancy of APRM and NEPAD within the context of the other national initiatives already in place like the national vision, policies and programmes. Some of these processes and programmes include: Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Vision 2020, Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, national investment strategy (NIS), sectoral strategies, and many others. This sensitization campaign takes significant amount of energy and time at the expense of progress with the review itself.

c) Lack of flexibility for domestic innovations

The APR Questionnaire is designed on the basis of internationally renowned standards. Moreover, even the self-assessment and external reviews are constrained to asses the country's state of play purely along those standards. Unfortunately, this approach ignores the very important domestic innovations often created to address particular local problems. It is these kinds of unique solutions to problems that have potential for peer learning and scaling to other African countries with similar challenges.

d) The constraints of time

The guidelines to the Peer Review process stipulate 9 months to have concluded the process, with the Panel of Experts having only 10 days in the country. The time available for self assessment may not be adequate but the 9 months provided can suffice if certain adjustments are made to the process, especially ensuring that enough preparatory work is actually done before the process begins. However, the 10 days spent by the Panel of Experts is definitely inadequate considering the four pillars of governance that must be examined and the geographic coverage necessary to adequately sample the country. Consideration should be given to increasing the period given the fact that some countries have very big geographic sizes to cover.

e) Resource constraints

APRM being a highly consultative exercise inevitably is expensive. This is especially considering that workshops and cross country travel are essential to ensure that the self assessment phase is as participatory as possible; taking into account the views of the various segments of the society. In the case of Rwanda the process, especially in its early stages, the review process was conducted with serious resource constraints, human and material. One creative solution to this constraint was to utilise volunteers already working in their areas of expertise, to help in information gathering at minimal cost.

f) Experience sharing among APRM participating countries

Whereas the line of communication with the continental secretariat is necessary, in terms of enriching the APRM, closer cooperation among the countries that have acceded and reached the same stage of implementation would help. Moreover, experience sharing amongst participating countries would deepen their understanding of the APRM, help each of them fine tune their respective national structures and enhance the spirit of community which NEPAD in general and APRM in particular set out to achieve in the first place.

g) Instrument (Questionnaire)

The questionnaire currently as it is designed, is characterized by being too repetitive, Lengthy (over 80 pages of the Questionnaire) and is not flexible enough to capture local initiatives to governance problem solving initiatives (eg Gacaca courts in Rwanda).

(h) Other challenges

In addition to the key challenges outlined above, there were of course other challenges of lesser weight, but which are worth a mention none the less. Among these are language impediments. Rwanda is, fortunately, trilingual (Kinyarwanda, English and French), and in some instances even multilingual. However, the further move away from urban centres the more likely it is that the local languages becomes the most spoken language by the population hence requiring translating the questionnaire

Despite the challenges posed by the implementation of the African Peer Review Mechanism, it was Rwanda's experience that the process also afforded a number of opportunities that would go a long way in further enriching the nascent culture of good governance in the country. Here below are some of the opportunities presented by the implementation of APRM in Rwanda.

OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED BY APRM

a) Bench-marking good governance on international standards

Before the APRM, as a matter of national policy, Rwanda had already prioritised good governance as an essential component in the country's quest for socio-economic progress. However, the coming of APRM was value added; causing the country to measure good governance not just by its own domestic standards, but to benchmark on international standards inherent in the African Peer Review Mechanism.

b) A chance for the population to evaluate governance

Whereas most national good governance initiatives are undertaken by government institutions, like the office of the ombudsman, on behalf of the citizens, APRM provides a unique opportunity for the general public to participate directly in evaluating the country's governance.

c) Mainstreaming civil society on governance issues

Ordinarily, civil society has plays the role of watchdog and critic of government's governance initiatives. Civil society too had a chance to engage directly with the public sector in evaluating the performance in governance matters. This opportunity for all people to work together towards the same goal is a credit to the APRM.

d) Showcasing the country

For Rwanda, the APRM was an opportunity to demonstrate just how far the country had come in just a decade after the 1994 genocide. For ten years the image that most people had on Rwanda, including many in Africa, was that of mayhem and slaughter. Tragic as the events of 1994 were, the country had moved on but not many people knew of this progress. The External Review Team had the opportunity to travel the length and breadth of the country, and saw for them not only the residual effects of the genocide but also the transformation the country had undergone in those ten or so short years. This process was, therefore, an image- building window for Rwanda which also could be for other countries.

e) Evaluation of ongoing national initiatives

While the Country was at it carrying out self- assessment for the APRM process, this also became an opportunity to evaluate the ongoing national initiatives in the context of Vision 2020. This then was a case of killing two birds with one stone, as it were. APRM can therefore be said to offer the opportunity for a midterm review of national programmes.

LESSONS LEARNED

As previously averred, the APRM implementation was a novelty for Rwanda, and indeed for all the four countries which volunteered to pioneer the process. It therefore follows that the process was an immense learning opportunity for the country, and for institutions and individuals involved. The following are among key lessons learnt from APRM implementation:

a) The role of the media

It became apparent during the process that if the media is positively mobilised, could make a major contribution particularly in mobilising people, and empowering them with information. The print and electronic media in Rwanda were fully involved in the APRM process and activities. Through feature articles, editorials, announcements, commentaries and periodic coverage of APRM events, the media played a critical role in ensuring the country stayed abreast of events. The media also provided a platform for national debate as people air their views.

b) Participation promotes ownership

APRM being a participatory process required the participation of all segments of society including government, civil society, private sector, Non-governmental Organizations, the media and private citizens. The enthusiasm of all involved demonstrated that people feel they own a process if they are given a chance to participate. In the case of Rwanda the sense of ownership made it possible to enlist the services of volunteers which eased the challenge of inadequate human and financial resources. Inclusion rather than exclusion is the key.

c) Political will makes implementation easier

The implementation of APRM in Rwanda benefited tremendously from political goodwill. The President of the Republic of Rwanda gave his full endorsement and unqualified support to the process, and so did other leaders at the national and grassroots levels. There is no doubt that without this good will the process would have faced obstacles. This is a clear indication that political will is an important ingredient in the successful implementation of APRM.

d) Resourcing is critical to the success of APRM

An important lesson learned during the APRM implementation was that a process as widely consultative as this requires an outlay of huge resources, human, material and financial. Even allowing for the selective use of volunteers as was the case in Rwanda, the need for funding and other resourcing remains a prerequisite for the successful implementation of APRM in all its stages.

CONCLUSION

Rwanda is delighted and privileged to have been among the very first African countries to pioneer the implementation of the Africa Peer Review Mechanism. With all the challenges which came with the process, Rwanda believes that good governance is critical to the recovery of Africa's economies and self confidence. There is no better way to achieve this than through the support and constructive criticism of fellow Africans as opposed to previous approaches which were all externally driven. There is no doubt in Rwanda's mind that the APRM processes can be polished and improved in order to make it even better and more widely acceptable.