THE AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM
Lessons from the Pioneers

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Lessons and Recommendations from the Pioneers

APR is a 'learning by doing' process. By sharing experiences and lessons, beginners (in the Peer Review Process), can learn important things as how to sensitise the population, how to bring as many stakeholders as possible on board.

– Aimable Kabanda,
Rwanda APRM Coordinator

Hunger, war, AIDS … Epidemics that destroy Africa will not disappear while the power is in hands of corrupted official governments. They are the main obstacle to get the whole continent out of the tunnel.

– Kofi Annan,
former UN Secretary-General

Sharing of information will result in increased adoption of best practices and standards and also accelerate the integration of the economies of participating countries.

– APRM Base Document

THE APRM AS POLITICAL PROCESS

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> The APRM process is designed to be open and participatory. Through a participatory process, the APRM will engage key stakeholders to facilitate exchange of information and national dialogue on good governance and socio-economic development programmes, thereby increase the transparency of the decision-making processes, and build trust in the pursuit of national development goals.
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> **– APRM Country Guidelines[1]**

> The APRM, if someone is still in doubt, is not an instrument for punishment or exclusion, but rather it is a mechanism to identify our strong points, share them and help rectify our weak areas.
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> **– Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat, Panel of Eminent Persons[2]**

The APRM has come about because Africa recognised that its political systems were not always producing the quality of governance needed to ensure stability, economic growth, protection of rights and, in many cases, basic political fairness.

In Africa as in the rest of the world, political systems can stagnate in a cycle of decline, blame and denial. Such an atmosphere can be both cause and consequence of economic and social decline. When decline and non-performance reach a certain level, politicians can find it politically impossible to be candid about the extent of problems or to take decisions that would be disadvantageous to their short-term political interests. Political stagnation in that environment can begin to reinforce failure, which further strengthens the desire to hide or deny problems. Consequently, political systems can fall into 'a vicious cycle, in which economic decline, reduced capacity and poor governance reinforce each other,'[3] as the Nepad framework document put it.

Political systems can stagnate in a cycle of blame and denial … And when decline and non-performance reach a certain point, politicians can find it politically impossible to be candid about the extent of problems or to take decisions that bring short-term political disadvantage.

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1. APRM Secretariat, 'Guidelines for countries to prepare for and to participate in The African Peer Review Mechanism', November 2003, article 2, pp.2–3.
2. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 'Implementing the African Peer Review Mechanism: Challenges and Opportunities, Report of the Sixth Africa Governance Forum (AGF-VI),' Kigali, Rwanda, 9–11 May 2006, report produced 20 June 2006, p.44.
3. African Union, 'The New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad),' Addis Ababa, October, 2001, p.6.

The APRM has political ramifications on six different levels:

Where politics is involved, fears and apprehensions exist. Governments and civil society will inevitably approach the APRM with different assumptions, particularly about what the other might do with the process.

First, it produces a high-profile report discussing national problems, which has the potential to embarrass politicians and thus makes the process politically charged. This is despite the fact that the APRM is not meant to be a scorecard on an incumbent government, or a rating system to compare countries, but an evaluation of the overall political, economic, and corporate governance systems and the socio-economic strategies in the country. Nevertheless, APRM reports must cite evidence of how systems are faulty and how people are bending rules or acting for personal gain. Such evidence has a great potential impact on politics.

Second, in discussing political systems and the allocation of economic goods, the APRM is political because changing such things can affect the methods that political parties use to campaign, to raise funds for their parties, and to win elections.

Third, the choices of who gets consulted, invited to meetings, appointed to governing structures or chosen to write and edit reports are highly political. Decisions over personnel and consultation affect decisions about the content of the Country Self-Assessment Report and Programme of Action. Selection for these functions also can bring public prestige and offer opportunities for honoraria, which can lead to competition and controversy among politicians and civil society organisations.

Fourth, in discussing corruption, the APRM affects political fortunes. Corruption is the single most potent political campaign issue in many countries. And for those who profit illicitly from corruption or use it to generate the political party funds needed to win elections, the APRM's focus on corruption is political in more than one sense.

Fifth, parliaments, the judiciary and autonomous government entities – such as human rights, constitutional reform or anti-corruption commissions – as well as planning ministries all feel that they have a vital stake in the topics covered in the APRM. These include discussions about the independence of separate branches of government, and their powers, accountability and relationship to the national political structure as a whole. For instance, the executive branch can tend to take a proprietary approach to the APRM process, but excluding or marginalising it can raise the political stakes.

And sixth, the APRM process calls on participants to build trust and national consensus around the exercise, national self-assessment and Programme of Action. However, trust and consensus can only be built if one understands the forces working against them and the dynamics of the national political climate.

If the APRM is contested political terrain, then how specifically should civil society and governments factor these six levels into their planning for peer review?

Where politics is involved, fears and apprehensions exist. Governments and civil society will inevitably approach the APRM with different assumptions, particularly about what the other might do with the process. Angry debates have erupted in some of the early APRM countries as a result of the high political stakes, and the fears and suspicions that they arouse. If ignored or suppressed, such concerns can cause real damage to the process. Instead of helping to build trust and catalyse change, a poorly managed APRM process can increase political tensions and increase distrust. Therefore, the first step in planning for the political dimension involves assessing the kinds of concerns that various groups may have.

Civil society concerns

The early APRM countries highlighted a variety of civil society concerns surrounding peer review, which have grown out of recent political history. The African Charter on Popular Participation in Development and Transformation – one of the standards adopted by the APRM – puts it this way: 'The political context of socio-economic development has been characterised by an over-centralisation of power and impediments to the effective participation of the overwhelming majority of the people.'[4]

Despite decades of multi-party democracy, many states are yet to fully overcome that legacy, and it will affect the perspective of any civil society body asked to participate in the APRM. Civil society is affected by its own institutional self-conception. Many civil society groups and the media conceive of themselves as watchdogs for the public interest. Governments, particularly those that see themselves as liberators fighting in the public interest, often resent the civil society presumption that governments need to be monitored. For the APRM to work, governments need to put that resentment aside and accept that it is healthy and appropriate for civil society to want to verify what government says and what it does.

Indeed, modern democratic theory is built on the assumption that unchecked power will result in abuse of rules and resources, and all sectors of society – citizens, business, the police, military, parliament, executive and judiciary – all require legal restraints and oversight institutions. The APRM acknowledges this through the Questionnaire's call for effective separation of powers, oversight, transparency and accountability. The best way to ease civil society concerns over real or perceived government domination of the process is for each participating nation to incorporate those same principles of separation of powers, oversight, transparency and accountability into the governance of the

A constructive dialogue between all stakeholders is crucial. Space must be given and resources need to be allocated for this to happen regardless of any tense relationships which might often be experienced, particularly between civil society and government. – GTZ[5]

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4. African Charter on Popular Participation in Development and Transformation, Arusha, Tanzania, 1990, p.4.
5. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), 'The APRM Journey So Far', a summary of outcomes of recommendations from previous APRM review conferences prepared for the conference 'Africa's Bold March to Capture the 21st Century – The Role of the APRM', Accra, Ghana, 8–10 May 2007, p.6.

review process itself. The most important initial provision needed to ensure a constructive and rigorous review is the structure and composition of the National Governing Council or National Commission. As the Supplementary Country Guidelines note: 'the National Commission established to manage the process at national level should be autonomous from government and inclusive of all key stakeholders.'[6]

In every pioneer country, three main clusters of concerns mattered to civil society. The biggest area of concern was over how the governing council would be chosen.

Civil society in these five countries expressed strong concern that government would either numerically dominate the council with government officials or would fill it with civil society representatives allied to government. Civil society also expressed concern about whether government would unilaterally name pliant civil society representatives or allow civil society to nominate its own participants. In several instances, civil society observed that even though it had a nominal majority on the council, government – through its nominees and control of overall timing and financial resources – can retain effective control through a variety of means.

In some countries, civil society representatives must manage full-time jobs in addition to duties on a governing council. But government officials can be allocated to the APRM full time. Without rules about a council quorum, complaints can emerge over decisions taken in the absence of civil society. This tendency is made more pronounced because the division of labour and responsibility is unclear between the National Governing Council, Technical Research Institutes and the local support secretariat. If the local secretariat is drawn from government and the council meets infrequently, the government, working through the secretariat, can end up making many crucial decisions about how public consultations are conducted. This tendency was a key factor in both Rwanda and South Africa.

The size of the governing council also can subvert civil society control. Large governing councils tend to be unwieldy, even if they are nominally more representative. Without clear voting and decision-making rules, control in larger councils can shift toward the council chairperson or an executive committee. The scheduling and management of public consultations and the processes to be used to create the Programme of Action and Country Self-Assessment Report can require many fast decisions. Unless a clear and detailed research and consultation plan is put to the council for debate, such decisions will tend to be taken unilaterally by the secretariat or research institutions, which may not reflect informed decisions of the council. The formation of an executive committee within the governing council may speed decisions but it can easily undermine the representivity of the council. South

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6. APRM Secretariat, 'Supplementary Document to APRM Guidelines for Country Review – The APRM National Structure,' Midrand, South Africa, undated [2007], p.1.

Africa formed different subcommittees within the council, some of which were numerically dominated by government despite the overall composition of the council favouring civil society. Rwanda similarly used subcommittees. Lesotho, which is still in the early stages of its process, set up an executive committee which gave rise to concerns that some key decisions were taken without full debate in the overall council.

These issues will be dealt with more fully later, but for the moment it is important to note that they consistently spark public complaint and have not been dealt with adequately by the written guidance given out by the APRM Secretariat.[7]

A second cluster of concerns relates to how the research should be conducted, how and by whom the report should be actually written and edited and whether the text fairly reflects the views of all the nation's various regional, ethnic, religious, business and other constituencies. Again, these will be dealt with in greater detail later, but governments should note that civil society will be legitimately very interested in the mechanics of the process. Reactions will be particularly sharp if government is seen to be dominating the decision-making or is dismissing public inputs about the process.

The third cluster of concerns relates to timing and lack of information. With some variation, all of the early governments have officially signed up to the APRM without substantive public consultation or advance warning. That decision was followed by a long period during which government said little about its APRM plans. Neither the media nor civil society did much to fill this information vacuum. Then abruptly, from civil society's point of view, a plan was released for the conduct of the review and appointment of a governing council. Kenya did the best job among the early countries of engaging in pre-consultation about the process before taking key decisions about how to form the council. It established a large task force to discuss how to choose a council and allowed civil society to choose its own representatives. But Rwanda, South Africa and Mauritius took major decisions on the process and appointment of council without public debate or transparency.

Governments should acknowledge that the public will expect to play a prominent role in the process and expect to be consulted *before* decisions are taken about the process and governing structures. To announce a process without first publicly consulting on alternatives will inevitably arouse concerns over manipulation and lack of consultation. Extensive public consultation, transparency and candour go a long way to alleviating civil society complaints.

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7. The Country Guidelines note: 'The APRM process is designed to be open and participatory. Through a participatory process, the APRM will engage key stakeholders to facilitate exchange of information and national dialogue on good governance and socio-economic development programmes, thereby increase the transparency of the decision-making processes, and build trust in the pursuit of national development goals.' And it notes that, 'Every review exercise must be technically competent, credible and free of political manipulation.' See APRM Secretariat, 'Guidelines for countries to prepare for and to participate in The African Peer Review Mechanism', p.3 and p.22.

Government concerns

So far, the discussion has focused on civil society concerns. But governments themselves bring significant apprehensions about this process. Many governments and APRM proponents argue that governments have shown themselves to be fully committed to Nepad and the APRM simply by signing up for review.

In the sense that they have no intention of backing out, that is true. But the decision to undergo review is far more politically complex than official statements imply. Despite public professions of commitment to the process, many government participants interviewed for this book expressed concern about how criticism might be directed at incumbent administrations through the APRM. Others have made significant efforts to control the national process and particularly the editing of the Country Self-Assessment Report. South Africa's first official response to the final APRM Report on the country gave expression to such fears, implying that the APRM process was playing into the hands of racist critics, that some of its assertions were ideologically driven, poorly researched and risked reaffirming negative images of Africa.[8]

In a passage challenging the evidence behind the report, the South African government argued:[9]

> The risk is that general perceptions, often essentially racist, about the hopelessness of the African situation are all too easily confirmed by statistical constructs that have a very tangential relationship to the actual universe.

In the early stages of the process the minister in charge of managing the process asserted that it was inappropriate for civil society to question who was on the National Governing Council or how the process would be managed as such questions would introduce 'negative elements.'[10]

In a different way, Rwanda's APRM co-ordinator, Aimable Kabanda, explained that doubt about the APRM affects not only top government officials but also

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8. South Africa submitted its official response to the report of the Panel on 18 January 2007, but its review by the heads of state Forum was postponed for six months. This allowed the South African government the opportunity to amend its initial comments. The country later submitted a revised set of comments that has not been released at this writing, but the original comments are telling in their accusations and undiplomatic language. They were posted on the *Sunday Times* website, *www.sundaytimes.co.za*, on 27 May 2007. The South African *Sunday Times* editor, Mondli Makhanya wrote in 'Shred the peer review and you will trample Africa's best hope,' 20 May 2007: 'Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda were the first to be reviewed and were uncomfortable about some of the findings. Nonetheless, they accepted the findings and the recommendations and are in the process of implementing them. The speed and effectiveness of their implementation is another story, but the bottom line is that, for their own good, they have put themselves at the mercy of the APRM. Then came South Africa, which for some reason saw the APRM process as a school exam. Because we believe we are Africa's shining example, we expected the examiners to give us top marks. When the report came back with red marks all over the show, the government baulked. "How could they?" we screamed, and effectively told Africa's Eminent Persons to shove their stinky report in the incinerator.'
9. Mahkanya M 'Shred the peer review and you will trample Africa's best hope,' *Sunday Times*, Johannesburg, South Africa, 20 May 2007
10. Videotaped interview with G Fraser-Moleketi, Midrand, 28 September 2005.

the mid-level civil servants whose information is vital to making an accurate assessment of problems:[11]

> Some people think this mechanism is going to appraise them, to review their performance and may lead to them having bad grades so they become quite defensive. It is very necessary to create awareness that assures [people in government] that this process will not have an impact on their jobs. It is quite a sensitive thing. They need to be reassured on it so that the people who are going to provide data to you are not going to have any problem if the review points out a problem … It is a quite delicate thing.

On the positive side, participating countries can use the APRM to demonstrate their sincerity to lenders, aid donors and investors who may curtail support if they do not see tangible commitments to improved governance. Participating governments can use the process to show the public that leaders intend to entrench a new era of responsive democratic governance. They can use it as an opportunity to uncover neglected problems, which, if fixed, would improve national development and political support. And they can use it to forge a new tone in politics.

The architects of African Peer Review hoped the process would facilitate more open and constructive national conversations about national problems and potential solutions. As the Self-Assessment Questionnaire notes, the process is:[12]

> intended to promote national dialogue on development issues and to facilitate the evaluation of countries on the basis of the realities expressed by all stakeholders. It is therefore important that there be broad based representation at the National structure co-ordinating the APR Process as well as wide dissemination of the Questionnaire and active participation of all stakeholders in providing responses to the Questionnaire.

This sees the process as a way to strike a new, more co-operative, consensus-seeking approach to solving problems. Through the demand that the APRM incorporates broad public input and its embrace of the African Charter on Popular Participation in Development and Transformation, the process recognises that decision-making is more effective when it involves those concerned. As the Country Guidelines note:[13]

> Participatory processes can reveal information about the needs of people and their reactions to policy proposals, and thus provide information about the effectiveness of different strategies. Negotiation between different stakeholders over priorities can broaden the ownership, and thus strengthen the commitment and buy-in to implement the strategy.

At the same time, the designers of the APRM hoped the public nature of the process would help to hold leaders accountable by ensuring that everyone

**Those countries that bare their souls should be recognised. Peer review brings risk and that risk should be met with the reward of the early flow of capital to states that have signed up.
– Trevor Manuel**

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11. Videotaped interview with A Kabanda, Kigali, 15 May 2006.
12. APRM Secretariat, 'Country Self-Assessment for the African Peer Review Mechanism,' Midrand, South Africa, undated [2004], p.5.
13. APRM Secretariat, 'Guidelines for countries to prepare for and to participate in The African Peer Review Mechanism', paragraph 34, p.14.

would know clearly what the problems are and what promises are made to rectify them. Theoretically, civil society, local and global media and other heads of state all would add pressure on governments to fulfil the promises made in national action plans.

That theory is sound, but the fears that drive the blame game will not vanish overnight. Some governments have recognised the positive potential of the APRM and embraced it as a more effective means of identifying and solving problems. However, the APRM system has not made adequate provision for how to reassure and inform governments who could see the APRM predominantly as a threat.

In practice, governments are neither wholly enlightened nor wholly suspicious of the APRM. They contain both tendencies in differing measures. Participating governments, to one degree or another, all have expressed concern that the media or political opposition may use the APRM revelations to score political points. In one of its earliest public discussions of the APRM, top Ghanaian officials expressed concern over how foreign reviewers may misunderstand the country during its review.[14]

South Africa's finance minister, Trevor Manuel, also noted that government sees risk in the APRM:[15]

> I don't want the African Peer Review Mechanism to become a new set of conditions, but it is important that those countries that bare their souls should be recognised. Peer review brings risk and that risk should be met with the reward of the early flow of capital to states that have signed up.

Answering concerns, building trust

Acknowledging that both government and civil society have anxieties and fears is a crucial first step in forming an effective national plan for the APRM. The next step is finding specific actions and institutional arrangements that build trust and allay fears.

For government, the best advice is to follow Ghana's example, as outlined in the country case study in chapter 10. More than any other APRM country, Ghana saw the process as an opportunity to position government as an advocate of reform rather than as its opponent. Its response, broadly speaking, has been to welcome suggestions for change and to openly brand policy changes as outgrowths of the APRM. They did not worry about whether suggestions came from an outside body or whether accepting an outside recommendation represented a loss of face.

South Africa, in contrast, went to great lengths to deny and minimise problems or argue that the draft APRM Country Review Report compiled by the

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14. Appiah F, remarks at the conference 'African Peer Review: Building a Civil Society Response Strategy', Accra, Ghana,13 November 2003.
15. Manuel T, 'More Production, More Growth', interview in e*Africa* magazine, South African Institute of International Affairs, April 2005, p.11.

Panel was misinformed. It consequently incurred near continuous negative publicity. In conferences, diplomatic briefings and the media, its conduct of the APRM has been carefully scrutinised, and the resulting discussions continue to cause the government diplomatic embarrassment. Perhaps the best way to alleviate government concerns is for leaders to reflect on the need and value of constructive criticism to a democracy. Without criticism, sycophancy gradually takes over, and problems get swept under the carpet. Criticism, particularly through the media where all can see and debate its merits, ought to be something to be embraced rather than fought against. It represents an opportunity to build momentum for positive change and focus on neglected systems of governance.

Such reflection on the value of constructive criticism is a useful first step. Second, it is important to consider what the APRM would be without public input. It would be no different from the many reports and analyses that are produced to fulfil legal or aid requirements but which make little impact. Without public involvement, there is no collective memory of conclusions and no debate about priorities or alternative solutions. And without public discussion, reports are all too easily left on shelves to gather dust.

Civil society in all the early APRM countries recognised that the APRM without public input is tantamount to government reviewing itself. As a result, civil society has shown itself to be as concerned with the fairness of the APRM process as it is with the content of its outputs. That includes how the process is governed, who is selected, who is consulted, how much time and money is allocated to activities, who attends conferences, which experts are chosen, how questionnaires are structured and who writes and edits the final reports.

Running through all these concerns is the fundamental fear that government will attempt to control the process to produce a more favourable review or to keep sensitive issues out of the report. If that concern is not addressed, it can permeate all facets of the APRM and limit its ability to build trust and policy consensus. However, a few basic ideas can contribute to a more active, empowered and committed civil society participation in peer review. And many of the same approaches to addressing civil society concerns also ease government fears by ensuring fairness to its interests.

The problem in Africa is that there is no communication between civil society and the government or between the government and the private sector, and even less among the three stakeholders together. – Marie-Angelique Savané[16]

Effective planning for the APRM

The nature of the APRM – with its many steps, complex Questionnaire and myriad participants – tends to focus minds on the logistical and technical considerations. The who, what, where and when loom large.

16. Savané M-A, quoted in Déme O, *Between Hope and Scepticism: Civil Society and the African Peer Review Mechanism*, Insights Series, Ottawa: Partnership Africa Canada, October 2005, p.37.

As with many public processes, there can be a temptation to measure success by the quantity of inputs. For example, a country might say that it held 50 consultation meetings, 10 expert workshops, a citizen survey, provincial meetings, a validation meeting and spent $1 million. All of that entails much hard work, but quantity is no substitute for quality. Rushing to establish institutions and host meetings will not guarantee success. As this chapter has outlined, hasty preparation can spark controversy and feed cynicism. Worse, it can detract from the quality of the solutions produced by a review. In the end, the ability of the APRM to bring about constructive change depends on its ability to accurately identify problems, find long-term solutions and build consensus on those solutions inside and outside government. If any of those three – defining problems, crafting solutions, building consensus – are poorly managed, the process will not live up to its potential.

How can a country plan for an effective APRM review? Good management of any process requires both accurate anticipation of problems and clear thinking about goals. It depends on four things:

- studying and learning from the past;
- developing a clear understanding the objectives or benefits desired;
- anticipating likely challenges or obstacles; and
- implementing appropriate strategies to realise the benefits while avoiding the obstacles.

The bulk of this chapter has examined the political concerns surrounding the APRM. This section examines how to realise the benefits inherent in the APRM process, and how to begin planning for an effective review.

In workshops and research interviews, SAIIA has frequently asked participants what an ideal APRM process ought to be like. Identifying the positive traits that a review should possess is a valuable first step in understanding one's APRM goals and anticipating some of the political challenges and anxieties that can sidetrack the process.

In the APRM, how the journey is managed can determine whether the process reaches its destination – consensus on clearly defined problems and effectively designed solutions. It takes political skill to bring people with diverse concerns to a common view about problems and solutions. Governments particularly need to be attuned to the sensitivities of diverse stakeholders; they should build trust through transparency and set up governing bodies and procedures that are widely seen to be professional, inclusive, fair and rigorous.

After holding more than 25 workshops in 15 countries, the authors have synthesised the answers into an acronym – 'COPPER' – which summarises traits most often cited (see box below).

> **As with many public processes, there can be a temptation to measure success by the quantity of inputs but quantity is no substitute for quality.**

The COPPER principles for an effective APRM process

Candid   The end result should be a report and Programme of Action that both discuss problems, solutions and best practices honestly and frankly. Describing problems in candid terms reinforces perceptions of honesty, which adds positively to internal and external perceptions of the process.

Open   The process used to develop the report and Programme of Action should be open and transparent. Openness and transparency are the best ways to build trust and the only ways to deflect concern over political manipulation. Citizens readily conclude that the only reason processes are not open is if there is something to hide. Keeping it open pre-empts criticism.

Planned   The process should be well planned, anticipate problems and incorporate the lessons from the APRM pioneer countries. The better the planning, the more likely the results will achieve the country's goals.

Participatory The process should involve broad participation from the public, business, government and different regions, ethnic and religious groups. The more participatory the process, the more likely civil society will remain supportive and the more likely the process will produce a comprehensive report that all parties support.

Exemplary   A process that reflects well on government and the nation should strive to incorporate the best practices from other APRM nations and bring some innovations to strengthen the APRM system. Actively seeking out best practices can demonstrate sincerity and credibility.

Rigorous   The research and analysis should be of a high quality, be systematic and objective. The more robust the research, the more likely the process will result in reforms that make fundamental improvements to governance.

If the process used to build a Country Self-Assessment Report and Programme of Action is robust and consultative, it will result in good analysis and consensus. Unfortunately there is no short cut that can bypass the hard work of thorough research and widespread public consultation. If the process is designed to limit negative comments or result in a report that says mostly favourable things, it will fail to build consensus or find new, durable solutions to the nation's systemic problems. But a process that strives to learn from the past and follow best practices from the early countries will succeed.

Planning for the benefits of the APRM

So far the discussion has been focused on process. This section looks more closely at the destination. To better understand this aspect, SAIIA frequently asks APRM workshop participants to write anonymously on small slips of paper the three main things they hope their country will achieve by undergoing peer review. When they finish, facilitators cluster the results in logical groups on a flip chart. While their words differ, the exercise highlights the areas of common understanding. Participants across the continent are remarkably consistent in citing five main things that they hope the APRM can achieve:

1.   Improve the quality of governance;

2.   Find solutions to problems that might be neglected or marginalised;

3.   Deepen democracy and strengthen national institutions;

4.   Build national consensus and political trust needed to find new solutions; and

5.   Boost the image of the nation and continent with investors and development partners.

The first three are direct benefits and closely align with the official APRM goals. The fourth, (also mentioned in the Base Document and Country Guidelines), building consensus and political trust, is both a strategy for APRM success as well as an indirect benefit to democratic and economic life. For any reform drive to be sustained, it needs broad political consensus behind it, which benefits from trust. The extent to which trust is built will depend on the extent of success at the first three goals.

But the ability of a country to reach the first three goals depends on the APRM process being broadly seen to be fair, open, candid and impartial. In effect, the process must be managed in such a way to build trust in all its participants. If any seek to score political points or manipulate to control the results, trust can dissipate quickly and be replaced by acrimony. As the Country Guidelines note:[17]

> The organisation of public participation in the APRM process is in itself a central aspect of enhancing the state of governance and socio-economic development in the participating country. Such interactions can build trust, establish and clarify mechanisms for ongoing engagement and empowerment of stakeholders.

A process that focuses only on the mechanics of generating a Country Self-Assessment Report without taking active steps to build trust can easily become mired in conflict and accusation that can undermine the APRM's ability to achieve all its goals. Instead of portraying the nation under review as an innovator, a disputed APRM can highlight negative perceptions. Instead

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17. APRM Secretariat, 'Guidelines for countries to prepare for and to participate in the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)', November 2003, paragraph 36, p.12.

of acting as a catalyst for a new kind of open politics that reflects well on the incumbent government, the APRM – if managed without due regard for trust building – can simply become a battleground for the same old factional divisions that play out elsewhere in political life.

Thus a very important conclusion from SAIIA's work on the APRM is that the fifth benefit – improvement of the national image – depends on the extent of success at obtaining the first four. There is no shortcut that can avoid public debate on the shortcomings of government. Typically, and quite correctly, workshop participants assert that the first four goals are by far the most important and the fifth is a welcome consequence, not a prime mover.

However, for governments, concern over the national image is a much bigger force in the APRM than participants often acknowledge. The desire to boost the national image is understandable but comes with a dark side: fear that the APRM will bring embarrassment by documenting governance problems. That fear, in turn, has led to some important instances of governments trying to control or limit what a Country Self-Assessment Report says and what solutions the Programme of Action will include. Such a fear grows from a misunderstanding of the process, but it is real nonetheless.

The process is definitely not a scorecard or a ranking of the nation. It produces no ratings that could be used to say one country is better than others. The reports are long narratives that describe what is commendable and what needs work. Nevertheless, the perception of the APRM as a scorecard remains an important factor in the political-social dynamics of the APRM.

As the country case studies illustrate, the more open governments have been to civil society involvement and the more candid and rigorous the process, the more governments benefited in all five areas. Ghana and Kenya were much more comfortable with public involvement and criticism and turned much more decision-making over to civil society. They embraced the process and used it to position government as a champion of reform, in some cases openly branding new laws as APRM legislation. As a result, they realised substantial internal and external reputational benefits.

Participants in the early reviews identified a number of important measures that help address government and civil society fears and thus contribute to a more constructive review process:

Assert presidential leadership. It is easy for the APRM process to be delegated to a small group of mid-level officials, who can be afraid of embarrassing their superiors and attempt to guess at the least controversial approaches. If the president signals that he or she wants a rigorous, open and candid process and stays engaged with the process, lesser officials will follow this lead. If the president is detached or suspicious, officials will follow this approach.

**By clarifying the objectives and mechanisms for participation, an environment for frank and open dialogue can be created to ensure transparency and legitimacy and minimise misconceptions.
– UNECA[18]**

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18. UNECA, Report on the Third Meeting of the Committee on Human Development and Civil Society, 4–6 May 2006, p.16.

Without clear signals of openness from the top, lower level officials can be defensive.

Commit to fair principles. To reassure both government and civil society, particularly in situations affected by substantial political tensions or distrust, it would be useful – before any governance structure is chosen – for all parties to commit publicly to a set of principles that all pledge to uphold in the conduct of the process. These should include a commitment to fairness, openness, accuracy, consideration of all views, actively seeking consensus, and, where agreement cannot be reached, a commitment to include in the report the various viewpoints on all controversial issues so that no party feels its perspective is ignored or marginalised. (See box below for statement of principles proposed by civil society organisations in Congo-Brazzaville. See also South African civil society principles in Chapter 14 and Appendix E). Government should commit publicly at the beginning of the process to debate fully all solutions offered by the public and government should agree to report back in writing the reasons why particular proposals have been deemed inappropriate or excluded from the Programme of Action.

Ask civil society before committing to specific processes or governance structures. In all the pioneer countries, controversies erupted over how the process itself should be governed. Some participants and governments have dismissed arguments about the process as a sign that civil society is quarrelsome by nature. But having a robust, transparent, inclusive debate about how peer review will proceed is absolutely essential to the credibility of the process. Without an open conversation about how the APRM should be conducted and governed, public trust in the process will decline. And distrust limits the ability of the process to build consensus and break out of the acrimony that characterises politics in many countries. Kenya defused initial complaints and helped build public support for the process by permitting civil society organisations to propose how the process should be governed and to elect their own representatives. This process took time and had its problems, but in a political environment often characterised by distrust, the investment of time helped pre-empt complaints.

Choose eminent, non-partisan council members. By choosing its National Governing Council from distinguished citizens known both for their competence and non-partisan character, Ghana imbued the process with credibility and pre-emptively minimised civil society and opposition concerns.

Allow non-government leadership of the National Governing Council. To both build trust and ensure the process delivers a rigorous report, it is crucial that the National Governing Council elects its own non-government leader. Announcing this policy early will more effectively allay fears.

Congolese CSOs set out principles for the APRM process

Having participated in a training workshop on 'civil society and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)', organised in Brazzaville from 18 to 19 May 2007, by the comité de liaison des ONG du Congo, (CLONG), in collaboration with Partnership Africa-Canada (PAC) and the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), the Congolese civil society organisations:

Welcome the political engagement of the Congolese government in light of its accession to the APRM;

Convinced that the APRM, as a participatory, inclusive and transparent process contributes to the consolidation of good governance;

Firmly committed to engage in a constructive citizens' dialogue with government and the private sector;

Determined to disseminate information on the APRM;

Undertake to:

1. Reinforce existing dialogue between civil society organisations interested in the APRM;

2. Identify and integrate civil society organisations working on the four areas highlighted by the APRM;

Demand that the government of the Republic of the Congo:

1. Clearly identify the government structure housing the APRM Focal Point and provide it with adequate resources;

2. Ensure that the mandate of the Focal Point is limited to liaison as stipulated by the APRM guidelines;

3. Allow civil society to comment on the proposed text on the establishment of an 'APRM National Commission';

4. Share information on the APRM with civil society and the private sector;

5. Ensure that a third (1/3) of members of the national commission are drawn from civil society;

6. Allow civil society to choose its representatives;

7. Follow on the Ghanaian experience by ensuring that the National Commission is headed by a distinguished person;

8. Ensure that consultation plans and the budget of the Commission are prepared by the Commission itself, once it is operational;

9. Facilitate the creation of an independent and autonomous Secretariat to serve the National Commission;

Invite the Congolese private sector to collaborate with government and civil society to make the APRM a success.

Call on the APRM continental Secretariat to:

1. Take the necessary steps to allow the launch of the national process; and

2. Engage with the Congolese civil society by providing it with the necessary information on the functioning of the APRM.

Signed in Brazzaville, 19 May 2007

Caucus with parliament, opposition. Government will inevitably be concerned about how the APRM reports will be used by the political opposition, particularly if the APRM process overlaps with an election period. The APRM could usefully take a page from Ghana's approach. To avoid criticism that government might manipulate the National Governing Council, the Ghanaian government reached out to opposition political parties and briefed them on its plans and possible choices of people for the council. Making the council fully independent and filling it with people widely accepted as competent and non-partisan reassured the opposition. Reaching out to the opposition can be an important gesture that will signal to the broader public that government intends to run an open, transparent and candid process. Parliaments have felt left out of national decisions to undergo peer review and have complained that the executive branch has failed to consult them. Government could increase buy-in and lower public anxiety about the APRM process by holding an informal retreat for parliamentarians and members of the executive.

Commit research and consultation plans to paper. Consulting on APRM plans is important, but only a few can attend such planning meetings. Those outside such consultations may still have doubts and comments. Ghana and Kenya were credited for the best practice of formally committing their initial research, consultation and validation plans to paper and then circulating them for comment before finalising them. Specifying how many consultations, when, where, with whom and by what methods will also help in planning an accurate budget.

Agree on a fair report structure. One way to address government concerns is to offer much greater clarity about how a report should be structured. Governments broadly accept that the reports must identify problems but they are concerned that they will give an overall negative view that fails to give credit to government for its attempts at reform and development. Consequently, the written guidance for the APRM should include a section on how to write and structure reports. Governing councils should also discuss it and commit to a set of principles in writing. By clearly and prominently setting down some rules about how reports should be structured to ensure that they are fair, the process can help significantly reduce government concerns that it will be treated unfairly.

Nothing prevents participant countries from releasing the report early and doing so would speed the reform process by allowing parliament to begin acting on the Programme of Action immediately.

Recast the Questionnaire. Questions in the existing Questionnaire are inconsistent. Some call for a list of government efforts in a given area and others do not. Recasting the Questionnaire so that every question asks for both strengths and weaknesses would signal to government that participants and research bodies will follow a fair format (see chapter 4).

Set clear rules at continental level. Government concerns could be substantially allayed if the quantity and quality of communications from the APR Panel and continental Secretariat are enhanced. This communication should include clearer rules and more practical guidance on how to handle

public consultations, the media, budgets, surveys and research methods. In the same way that civil society anxieties increase in the absence of clear communication from government, government's own concerns are compounded by a lack of clear, early communications from the APRM Secretariat and Eminent Persons. The APRM system does involve a support mission to each country that is supposed to offer guidance. However, some early APRM countries have said that these encounters have been too short, lacked clarity on key points and often came after countries themselves have committed to certain APRM processes. Critically, each country process is led by a different member of the Panel of Eminent Persons, who decides what to say and how the various missions will be conducted. As a result, there has been different advice offered to different countries and different approaches applied to Country Review Missions. But participants in at least four major APRM review conferences have pointed to inadequate support and lack of clarity on the rules and procedures. As Dr Francis Appiah, executive secretary of the Ghana APRM Secretariat noted:[19]

> [The APRM] does not provide a practical guide on how to actualise the expectation set out in the country's guidelines. The institutional development, organisational processes, technical expertise, capacity and skills as well as funding are not provided beyond the requirement to set up a Focal Point.

Make the governing council process transparent. Holding open governing council meetings or making the minutes public demonstrates there is nothing to hide.

Include the media on the National Governing Council. Having media representation on the National Governing Council would also signal inclusiveness and sincerity. Lesotho, for example, has a member of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) on the National Governing Council.

Regularly brief the media. Officials on National Governing Councils should frequently engage with newspapers, magazines, radio and television. A good way to get the public talking and to start getting civil society ready to provide well-formed submissions is to put government, business and civil society representatives on radio or television talk shows that debate the various options for organising and conducting the APRM. This kind of media intervention takes time and planning but can diffuse tensions and establish public buy-in.

Communicate early, often and candidly. The APRM is designed to help nations break out of the business-as-usual mode that can grip national planning and budgeting processes by bringing fresh voices into the national policy conversation. The public will examine early communication around the APRM to determine whether it truly signals a fresh start. If it suggests a

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19. Appiah F, 'Workshop on Sharing National Experiences on the African Peer Review Mechanism Implementation Process', Algiers, Algeria, 20–21 November 2004, p.51.

closed, government-controlled process, distrust can begin to build very early. However, if government uses public debates to signal that it has not made up its mind and that it is comfortable with civil society leadership, the APRM will be far more likely to achieve its goal of forging consensus and breaking out of the point-scoring and acrimony that characterises many political systems. Good public communication cannot be done once, but must be continuous.

Allow ample time for consultation. Time pressures are a reality of the APRM, but most anxieties about the process can be defused if ample time is allocated for consultation at each phase of the process.

Post draft texts on the Internet. Transparency is enhanced when the National Governing Council makes copies of public submissions, research plans, survey results, conference reports, meeting minutes and draft versions of reports available on the Internet. Even if public use of the Internet is low, it signals that authorities welcome comment and are not trying to hide material or monopolise information. South Africa did this to good effect with the public submissions and four technical reports produced by the Technical Support Agencies.[20]

Circulate the Country Self-Assessment Report and Programme of Action widely. Both of these are public documents that should be publicly validated. Some countries have argued that once these have been finalised and submitted to continental authorities, they should be confidential. But this is contrary to the spirit of broad public consultation and represents a missed opportunity to stimulate public discussion. Particularly the Programme of Action should be widely circulated, and the process would benefit if it were serialised in newspapers.

Circulate the final country report as soon as it is presented to heads of state. The rules allow countries to delay the public release of the final report for six months after the heads of state review. But the rules do not say the country must delay. Delaying the public release can slow the momentum of the reform process and reduce the political impetus for action, given that it often takes more than a year between completion of the Country Self-Assessment Report and the review by the heads of state. Releasing the report earlier would allow parliament to begin acting on the Programme of Action immediately. Announcing this policy at the beginning of the process will further build trust. As the report 'The APRM Journey So Far' prepared for an APRM conference in Ghana in May 2007, notes:[21]

> The Peer Review reports should be released simultaneously to the public and to the APRM Heads of State and Government so as to both minimise negative speculations and to satisfy the 'transparency and ownership' criteria.

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20.   See the South African APRM website, *www.aprm.org.za.*
21. GTZ, *op.cit.*, p.10.

Balancing time and trust

Politics is an inescapable part of the APRM process. It is not part of the official guidelines, but it is ever present. If Africa had highly effective governance systems that delivered fairly and efficiently, it would not need the APRM. While it is not the kind of thing heads of state would wish to emphasise in speeches, the APRM fundamentally exists because of the inability of political systems to deliver the kind of progress that Africa seeks. The APRM does not mean that the political and economic order is without merit, but the essence of the process is identifying shortcomings, which makes it inherently, if unwillingly, political.

If handled well, the APRM can help make constructive criticism a more normal part of political life. It can support the idea that critics and debate are indispensable parts of healthy democracy that help societies identify and start fixing their problems sooner.

Because the APRM seeks to document problems rigorously and commit to solutions, political leaders may see in it as many risks as benefits, which can lead to the temptation to keep the analysis superficial. Civil society so far has been on guard against efforts to step back from the APRM's promise of open and participatory processes. Governments should consider that in order to realise the benefits of the APRM, they must manage the process in such a way that builds political trust. That means particular attention must be paid to ensuring that the establishment of the national institutions to manage the APRM is seen to be fair and transparent, and the personnel that fill the governing council are competent, non-partisan and representative. Open communication and candour are vital to all phases of the APRM and the research, editing and final reports should reflect that ethos.

Other factors may distract attention from careful management of the political sensitivities surrounding the APRM. The sheer complexity of the process and the breadth of its Questionnaire naturally focus attention on the mechanical aspects of the process. The difficulty that all nations have had in completing the process in the intended time frame has worked against the goal of broad consultation and rigorous research. And lack of adequate funding and realistic activity plans can make trust-building more difficult. But a process that cuts corners and results in superficial solutions will only deepen public cynicism in the long-term.

Governments should consider that in order to realise the benefits of the APRM, they must manage the process in such a way that builds political trust. That means particular attention must be paid to ensuring that the establishment of the national institutions to manage the APRM is seen to be fair and transparent.

THE KEYS TO CIVIL SOCIETY INFLUENCE

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> If you go to one demonstration and then go home, that's something, but the people in power can live with that. What they can't live with is sustained pressure that keeps building, organisations that keep doing things, people that keep learning lessons from the last time and doing it better the next time.
>
> **– Noam Chomsky[1]**

The chapters so far have focused on how the APRM process should be run and could be improved, which implicitly takes the perspective of those with the direct power to set its rules – governments and the continental authorities. However, the role of civil society in APRM deserves special attention.

As noted in the introduction to this book, the APRM represents a valuable opportunity for civil society to get key problems and solutions onto the national agenda. It can be a useful advocacy tool to usher in a more inclusive national conversation on policy and to ensure implementation of government pledges. However, the APRM is also complex and demanding. While governments can dedicate staff and funds to the process, civil society participants have other work commitments and limited financial resources. Because the process can take a year or more to complete a national review, it can be extremely challenging for civil society to exploit the opportunities offered by the APRM.

Given its limited time and resources, civil society organisations must focus particular attention on how to efficiently and effectively influence the process. 'Influence' is the key word that civil society should bear in mind.

Government, as the signatory to the APRM, has the power to initiate action and can choose whether to run an open and transparent process or one more heavily controlled by government. Civil society has many options to persuade government to manage the process in particular ways, but it cannot set the rules or force government to adopt particular approaches. Indeed, government holds most of the important cards. It controls the timing of the APRM, the funding, the leadership and selection of the governing council and, through a

Given its limited time and resources, civil society organisations must focus particular attention on how to efficiently and effectively influence the process.

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1. Chomsky, N, *What Uncle Sam Really Wants,* 1993, *http://www.zmag.org/chomsky/sam/sam-4-2.html.*

variety of strategies, can control how the research is conducted, and what the final Country Self-Assessment Report and Programme of Action say. But civil society is not without options. It has the power to influence public opinion, to lobby, and reach out to the media. It can influence – through evidence and persuasion – the continental institutions and Country Review Teams that write the final national report. And civil society can continue to monitor the APRM commitments set out in the Programme of Action.

This chapter focuses on how civil society can cope with the institutional challenges posed by the APRM, increase its influence with key organisations and thus use the process to contribute to positive political and economic change.

Assessing the political dimension

It would be desirable, from a civil society point of view, if every country were to follow the Ghanaian model and turn the process over to an exclusively civil society National Governing Council. But faced with deviations from the rules by South Africa, the APR Secretariat and Panel of Eminent Persons made clear they were unwilling to censure or attempt to change the intended course of a determined government.

Governments may be open minded about the APRM and untroubled by the criticisms that will be expressed in its reports. But governments alternatively may be anxious and seek to control the process and its outcomes. As commendable as it is, Ghana's example seems unlikely to be emulated in many other countries. Regardless of the format used to govern the national process, civil society must expect government to be assertive.

'Let us look at the APRM as contested terrain. Let's not be very romantic about it,' argued Peter Anyang' Nyong'o at a UNECA-SAIIA training workshop for national Focal Points.[2] The former Kenyan APRM Focal Point and Minister of Planning, Anyang' Nyong'o argued that neither civil society nor government can expect to command the APRM stage without the other. 'In as much as possible we would like civil society in all African countries to bloom like flowers and express themselves fully to the APRM. The reality is that this is not going to happen.'

If his view prevails, some governments will inevitably attempt to take a more controlling approach to peer review. Nevertheless, the process represents an opening that civil society can and should utilise to good effect. The more robust and thoughtful that civil society engagement, the more elements of reform are likely to make their way onto the national agenda through the Programme of Action.

2. Anyang' Nyong'o P, remarks at 'APRM Best Practices and Lessons Learned: Exploring the Process and National Experiences', training workshop for APRM Focal Points by United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the South African Institute of International Affairs and the APRM Secretariat, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 20–21 February 2007.

In previous chapters, the goal has been to objectively analyse the APRM process and the social and political dynamics that surround it. However, here it is important to examine the tools of advocacy to assist civil society in playing a full and constructive role in the process.

A variety of valuable lessons are evident in the experiences of civil society in the early APRM countries. The process is significantly more difficult and lengthy than the guidelines suggest. Government has great power to set the rules and shape the process. With limited funding and staff, civil society can make greater impact if it seizes the initiative. However, in most countries civil society has had a tendency to sit back and wait for government to announce the National Governing Council members and a timeline for the process. This is an important mistake. Once the plan has been announced, governments can be very reluctant to change it, if for no other reason than the desire to avoid the embarrassment of admitting to an error. By waiting for government, civil society also misses a crucial opportunity to influence government's formative thoughts on the APRM. Putting ideas and demands into the public domain can signal that civil society is serious about the APRM and conveys a crucial message: if government opts for a controlling approach, it will face months or years of public criticism as a result. By sending signals that civil society is well informed and determined, it can change government calculations about what the public will and will not accept in the process.

Exploiting the opportunity offered by the APRM requires applying pressure and persuasion in many forms by many people over a long period of time. One overture or public statement will not be sufficient. Civil society organisations (CSOs) must build flexible coalitions and alliances to bring pressure and persuasion from multiple directions and on a variety of institutions. During such a sustained process, civil society must know when to persuade and when to protest. At times both are necessary. Persuasion is preferable but some governments will make concessions only in response to concerted pressure and complaint through the media.

The APRM is a multi-dimensional process involving many organisations and individuals – government, the National Governing Council, Technical Research Institutions, and many civil society constituencies. Each has separate priorities and approaches. Achieving the best outcome requires that civil society think not only about what the APRM report should say, but also how to influence these various participants and the decisions that must be taken at key stages of the process. That requires constantly thinking ahead and planning for the next phase.

Civil society will find that the sheer number of meetings and potential targets of influence will strain time and resources. Therefore it is vital to set priorities and build alliances. And if the APRM is to result in long-term change to the systems of governance, civil society must see it not as an opportunity to score political points but to broaden consensus behind various reform proposals. It must attempt to bring government and political parties around

to its way of thinking. Ultimately, neither the national APRM process nor continental authorities can force governments into decisions with which they are uncomfortable. Persuasion is the answer.

Once government concludes that civil society will not be quiet and go away, it is likely to take civil society proposals more seriously.

What follows is an APRM strategy guide for civil society, based on discussions with civil society activists in the APRM pioneer countries. The next section describes some of the overall strategies that apply to a variety of situations. Later sections go into greater depth about the goals or objectives of influence and key elements to bear in mind pertaining to the media and other key institutions.

Overall strategies for influence

Talk to all who will listen. The APRM is a new process and all participants will be trying to make up their minds on the best way forward. Thus government officials may be open to influence. In many cases, they have not thought through the implications of their proposals and can be persuaded to make alternative arrangements. But remember that persuasion requires more than one conversation. CSOs will have to persuade a variety of influential persons to change policy. Government does not have one mind and not all politicians or civil servants have the same views.

Target key decision-makers and those who can influence him or her. Civil society organisations should seek direct meetings with the Focal Point and Governing Council, but should also persuade other individuals and institutions that may have influence on the Focal Point, including presidential advisors, ministries of communication, the foreign ministry, retired heads of state and influential persons. Communicating with many people takes time, so CSOs must prioritise and they must tailor their message to each unique audience.

Also make an effort to communicate with parliament. While decisions about the APRM are made by the executive branch, parliaments often feel marginalised. Even when they are dominated by the president's party, parliamentarians do take pride in their institutional role and have expressed an active desire to be more involved in the APRM. Thus parliament can be an important point of influence as well as a back-channel that may be able to influence the executive branch. Parliament has an important institutional interest in governance, and parliament itself features prominently in the APRM Questionnaire. However, when the Eminent Persons and continental APRM Secretariat visit, their focus in the early countries has been on communication with the executive branch and Focal Point. As a result, parliament may well appreciate information on how the process is supposed to work, on how other country's parliaments have become involved or on proposals to host public hearings. And parliament can be an influential ally in convincing the executive to open the process up or in ensuring adequate funds are allocated.

Apply persuasion privately and publicly. It is important to attempt to persuade, but also consider what to do if the target does not adopt the CSO's view. He or she may not be quite persuaded by reasoning but can be swayed by the extent to which an activist's views seem to reflect a broader public opinion. Thus it is important to encourage many civil society actors to speak out through personal meetings, letters, radio call-in shows, newspaper editorials and interviews with news reporters. The media can be a particularly effective means of pressing for changes to the process or report. Using the media in conjunction with a variety of other forms of influence will reinforce key messages and signal to government that civil society is informed about the rules, will not accept simplistic answers and is determined to follow through with the APRM until the end. Once government concludes that civil society will not be quiet and go away, it is likely to take civil society proposals more seriously.

Stay informed, network and continue to lobby. Once the formal processes are in place for managing the APRM, there will be a great many further decisions to be taken by the governing council. At times, civil society members of the council may find themselves outnumbered or at odds with other council members on questions of how the public will be consulted, how surveys will be managed and how the report and Programme of Action will be written and edited. Thus it is important that civil society members form an active network, stay in touch on the key developments and events and collectively continue to influence the process as it moves along.

Attend all public consultation meetings. All countries so far have used a combination of public and expert consultations. Attending every event can be taxing but can be worth the effort. The more frequently the Technical Research Institutes hear the same messages, the more likely those messages are to be incorporated into the country self-assessment.

Put views in writing. Focusing on process is important, but civil society also must find ways to influence the heart of the APRM – the analysis of problems and the formulation of solutions. Many countries have offered civil society the chance to speak in public meetings, but these have proven to be fairly ineffective at capturing substantive critiques of governance. Often dozens or hundreds of people attend, but government officials may dominate the conversation and an individual may find she has only one brief moment to speak. More importantly, governments will, justifiably, be reluctant to change major policies based only on expressions of opinion. They will need solid evidence and compelling reasoning. Preparing a written list of issues and solutions can be influential at several levels:

- For the research teams that are assigned to write the Country Self-Assessment Report, answering all the parts of the APRM Questionnaire can be very difficult. If they have a well-written document by authoritative groups within society, the job of identifying priorities and finding evidence

Often dozens or hundreds of people attend, but government officials may dominate the conversation and an individual may find she has only one brief moment to speak.

can be much easier. The views of a Specialist in a particular field, such as human rights, agriculture or gender – among many others – will have particular influence because they come from someone well informed and may well be cited in the final report as evidence that a given problem needs attention.

- Most countries have left the Programme of Action until the end and have been under great time pressure to assemble solutions to the problems noted in the self-assessment. However, this time pressure can work to the advantage of civil society if it submits sound written recommendations. As the country rushes to finish its process, strong recommendations would assist those drafting the Programme of Action.

- The media will be looking for ways to determine whether the final self-assessment is considered to be a good reflection of civil society comments. Providing the media with copies of the inputs given by civil society can allow them to compare the submissions with the final product.

- The country self-assessment is not the final word. After the country submits its Country Self-Assessment Report, the Panel of Eminent Persons makes up its own mind about the national issues. If CSOs take the time to write their views, they have something that can readily be submitted directly to the Eminent Persons, which allows them to judge public opinion directly. In South Africa's case, the self-assessment document compiled by the Technical Support Agencies was heavily edited and many issues were removed or marginalised. However, civil society made a point of providing written documents directly to the Eminent Persons, who read them carefully and incorporated nearly all of the problems articulated by civil society in the final report. Thus civil society reports provided an important check on the government, which sought to minimise discussion of problems.

Targets for influence

To translate the APRM opportunity into real impact on the outcomes requires a strategy that seeks to influence how the process is managed, by whom and what it concludes. To ensure a fair and credible process, civil society should keep in mind seven key targets for influence. In addition, Appendix D provides a more detailed checklist of factors that can be important considerations for civil society at each stage of the process. (See also the sets of principles articulated by civil society groups in South Africa in chapter 14, Congo-Brazzaville in chapter 7 and Appendix E.)

How the National Governing Council is selected and led. Because the National Governing Council should be the key decision-making body for the APRM, it is the first and perhaps most critical target of influence. The council can decide exactly how broad public consultations are, what methods are used, and how the Country Self-Assessment Report is written and edited.

As long as civil society has clear ideas about some problems that need fixing, can provide evidence and offer recommendations, it has the ingredients needed to get those problems and solutions into the final APRM report.

Thus civil society should seek to influence its membership and leadership. The extent of the council's control of the support Secretariat and its independence from the Focal Point can be particularly important to the objectivity of the final Country Self-Assessment Report and Programme of Action.

How the National Governing Council makes decisions. Establishing clear rules for the council can make it more effective and avoid questions about fairness and transparency.

How research and consultation are conducted. There are many options for conducting the technical and public aspects of APRM research, each of which has implications for the time, cost, thoroughness and credibility of the process. Once the National Governing Council is in place, civil society should shift its attention to influencing its decisions about the research and consultation methods to be used. A more rigorous process will likely produce more sound analysis and stronger supporting evidence that is harder for opponents of reform to ignore.

What the Country Self-Assessment Report and Programme of Action say. The process issues above are crucial, but civil society can have perhaps the greatest influence on content – what the Country Self-Assessment Report and Programme of Action say about problems and solutions. To make a case for changes to the systems of governance, civil society must find compelling evidence of the need for change and organise it in a written submission.

What like-minded groups do. Coalition building is essential. A lone voice making a suggestion in a conference – no matter how logical – is not as powerful as a variety of voices making the same point. Thus it is important that civil society groups seek out like-minded allies and urge them to make APRM submissions. Civil society also should reach out to parliament, business, the media, academia and other key institutions and urge them to express their views in writing and in public meetings.

What the Country Review Team concludes. The final APRM report on a country is written by a team of 15–25 outside experts and supervised by the APRM Secretariat and Panel of Eminent Persons. They do not blindly accept the country self-assessment but conduct their own evaluation based on a two-to-three week visit to the country. The short duration of their visit can limit their ability to consult, but it can also represent an opportunity for a well-organised civil society to get their views across. Thus it is crucial that civil society seek opportunities to talk to the Country Review Team and assist it by providing written evidence on areas that may have been left out of the Country Self-Assessment Report or draft Programme of Action.

How the APRM is institutionalised and monitored. The APRM is not a once-off event but an ongoing process of evaluation, monitoring and reporting back. Countries are required to submit reports on the status of implementation of their promises every six months and the entire review is supposed

You have to run an introductory programme on the rules of the APRM. When you don't have understanding and haven't engaged with the rules, you just believe what government says is right. – Zanele Twala, SA NGO Coalition

to be repeated every three years.[3] The APRM ought to be established in a sustainable way so that its pledges are regularly monitored and are central to national budget and planning processes. However, in some countries the governing council, which had provided an avenue for civil society input, has been disbanded after the first review was completed. Civil society should seek to influence where the APRM is lodged in government and how it is monitored. Civil society also should consider establishing its own APRM monitoring and tracking mechanisms.

Key civil society strategies

Preparing a written submission

To assist civil society, SAIIA has developed a simple eight-step process for preparing a written APRM submission. It is based on the idea that the APRM is about identifying problems and finding solutions. Although the Questionnaire is a daunting 88 pages and even well-staffed Technical Research Institutes struggle to answer all of its questions in a reasonable time, civil society should not feel obliged to try to answer it directly. Civil society should think instead about creating a list of problems and possible solutions. Whether those particular problems fit neatly into the Questionnaire does not matter. As long as civil society has clear ideas about some problems that need fixing, can provide evidence of them and can offer recommendations to fix them, it has the ingredients needed to get those problems and solutions into the final APRM report.

Although the process for preparing a submission is straightforward, it does require effort and teamwork. Civil society must recognise that changing the systems that run a country is not an easy task and will not happen by showing up at a few meetings and offering one's opinions. Preparing a written submission will take several weeks of dedicated work, collaboration with other organisations and searching for evidence. The first hurdle is reaching the conclusion that a solid, influential submission is possible but it will not happen without dedication and perseverance. It is not expensive but may require the purchase of five or 10 key documents and a few trips to libraries and key organisations.

Civil society should not feel obliged to answer the APRM Questionaire directly, but rather create a list identifying problems and recommending solutions.

Identify authoritative reports on governance. Governments and the Country Review Team can be persuaded but require solid evidence from reputable sources. Dozens of reports and analyses of governance have been written about every country on the continent. Many are written by government itself and provide the evidence to prove the case that certain problems deserve

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3. This schedule was articulated in the APRM Country Guidelines but looks increasingly improbable as of this writing. Accepted by the African Union in 2002 and established as a programme in 2003, the APRM system succeeded in completing reviews for only five countries by 1 July 2007 – Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Algeria and South Africa. Thus the pace of reviews would have to accelerate dramatically to reach the goal of a reviewing each country every three years.

more attention. Thus an easy first step involves identifying the major written reports that may touch on subjects of concern to civil society. These may include reports from human rights organisations, from various arms of government, from the auditor-general, public protector, police, parliament or university research. Most will be available for purchase from the government printing office. Local World Bank and IMF offices may have copies that can by photocopied. Do not forget to include publications or reports by one's own organisation or international bodies that have studied the country. A report from a government source can be particularly persuasive because it is government acknowledging or defining the problem in its own words. Useful government reports can include the finance minister's budget speech, central bank assessments of economic management, national development plans, long-term documents setting out the national vision, the text accompanying the national budget, parliamentary committee reports on investigations, and reports of special commissions dedicated to gender, human rights, corruption or local government. (See Appendix C for a list of useful sources.)

A report from a government source can be particularly persuasive because it is government acknowledging or defining the problem in its own words.

If civil society members find themselves unable to complete all of the steps below, simply gathering together a set of persuasive reports and handing them over to the Country Review Team and research institutes can have enormous impact.

Find descriptions of problems, evidence and recommendations from each report. Read each report and highlight key paragraphs that either define problems or offer evidence of the extent or impact of the problem. Also highlight recommendations from such reports. Mark each highlighted page with a paper clip or post-it note.

Type and footnote the evidence. Once the key passages in each report have been highlighted, create a separate word processing document for each report. Type in the key quotations, evidence and recommendations, placing footnotes at the end of each. Footnotes should include the exact document title and page number. Once documents for all the key reports have been created, merge the separate documents into one.

Label and sort the issues. To be useful, the evidence must be sorted. An easy way to do that in Microsoft Word is to ensure that each piece of evidence, quotation or recommendation is a separate paragraph. As the first word in each paragraph place a one-word label or tag, such as corruption, gender, rights, or parliament. Once every paragraph or piece of evidence has been tagged, highlight them all with the cursor, select the Table pull-down menu and choose sort. All of the paragraphs and their accompanying footnotes will be sorted according to the tag word or label inserted as the first word in the paragraph. Once sorted, the evidence will need to be further grouped according to more specific problems. Place all of the evidence pertaining to each problem under a separate heading, using bullet points to list evidence such as surveys and direct quotations.

The media can help spread information to civil society, rally support and signal that civil society will insist on an open and transparent process.

Describe each problem. Once all the evidence has been sorted, examine the evidence and write a short paragraph describing the problem under each heading. Mention the main factors that cause the problem and recommendations for fixing the problem. To make it easier at the end to find the recommendations, set each recommendation off in its own paragraph with a separate heading that says 'Recommendation'. When the report is complete, use the sorting technique above to bring all of the recommendations to one place in the document. This constitutes an issues list.

Organise problems under the relevant APRM thematic area and question. In order for Technical Research Institutes and the Country Review Teams to place evidence in the right part of the APRM report, it can be helpful if issue areas are organised under main headings corresponding to the four thematic areas of the APRM: democracy and political governance, economic governance and management, corporate governance and socio-economic development. If you have time, you can note to which specific APRM questions your issues pertain.

Prepare an executive summary. After creating the issues list and organising it, print out a copy and write notes in the margins to designate problems that are major and minor. From these notes, prepare an executive summary listing the issues considered most important. Follow this summary with a list of the most important recommendations.

Build consensus among civil society. Once the issues list is complete, circulate it for comment and ask other influential organisations to add to it and comment on its wording. If possible, try to build a coalition of like-minded organisations that are prepared to sign their names to the report, which will give it added influence with government and the Eminent Persons.

Influencing through the media

In all of phases of the APRM process, the media can be an extremely valuable ally to civil society and a vehicle for influencing outcomes. Particularly in the early phases when government has not made up its mind on how to conduct the APRM, the media can be a useful way to spread information to civil society, to rally support for joint civil society initiatives and to signal to government that civil society is aware of the APRM rules and will insist on an open and transparent process. If government senses that civil society is poorly informed or uninterested, it may choose to cut costs by reducing the amount of public consultation and the openness of the process. And once the process begins, civil society organisations, individuals and the governing council can use the media to raise awareness and broaden the public conversation about governance. However, civil society should bear in mind some key opportunities and challenges.

In terms of the opportunities presented, newspaper articles or broadcast talk shows represent useful ways to signal to government that civil society is serious about the APRM, knows what the rules are and intends to play

an active role. Sending that signal early, through a variety of media, can positively change the course of the APRM in a country. Writing and sending opinion articles to the print media can also help inspire broader public debate about and awareness of peer review. And when the process is complete, the media can be used to raise awareness of the commitments to reform that were undertaken through the Programme of Action.

But there are challenges in this area too. While the media will likely be interested in the peer review, many newspapers, radio and television stations are thinly staffed and consequently may not have the time or experienced journalists needed to handle complex topics. Here are a few pointers can make the process more effective.

Understand the media emphasis on events over analysis. It is important to understand that many media outlets are very focused on covering events and do not always have the staff or time to analyse complex developments. In the early APRM countries, journalists have tended to cover the official launch, the announcement of the governing council, the first public consultation meeting, the hand-over of the Country Self-Assessment Report, the arrival of the Country Support Mission and Country Review Mission, among other key events. However, these stories have often been very shallow, short and focused only on the occurrence of the event, not the substantive issues of how particular aspects of governance should be changed. To get journalists to report on controversies in the formation and conduct of the APRM, develop a programme of outreach to provide reporters and editors with information on what is at stake and whom to approach for comment. Given a choice between an article that is easy to write or one requiring lots of thinking and digging, reporters will often, of necessity, favour the simpler story. By offering assistance and pointers, civil society can help ensure that the APRM gets better and deeper news attention.

Influence editors. In many media establishments, journalists are assigned to stories by their editor, who is the decision-maker about how to deploy reporters. Thus it is a useful strategy to phone key editors and ask to brief them on the process and provide them with insights about how the process is working and where the problems or opportunities lie.

Reach out to different types of editor. Publications may have different editors for different sections. There will be an overall editor, who can be fairly detached from day-to-day news decisions but still someone worth speaking to because he or she sets the overall tone of the publication. In addition there can be an editor in charge of news, the opinion section and of a feature or analytical section of the publication. Each of those editors will have particular spaces to fill and different interests, so stories need different angles to interest each of them. News editors can direct stories about particular events while opinion page editors look for outside writers from NGOs or academia to make contributions.

If government senses that civil society is poorly informed or uninterested, it may choose to cut costs by reducing the amount of public consultation and the openness of the process.

Seek experienced reporters. Though editors can be key decision-makers, it is helpful to identify and send information to the more senior reporters who cover politics and government.

Submit opinion articles. While news stories may quote CSOs on a subject, the opinion pages of newspapers offer a chance to put views forward in a coherent way that will get significant public attention. To get an opinion article printed, it generally should be 600–800 words in length but it is best to check with the editor about what word length he or she has to offer.

Use opinion articles early in the process. While some governments may be open to active civil society leadership in the APRM, others may be tempted to control the process and limit criticism. However, if civil society signals that it takes the APRM seriously, that it knows the rules and intends to engage, government can be persuaded to conduct a more open, consultative process. This happened in Ghana, Kenya and South Africa. The best time to influence the process is before the national structures and processes have been announced, while government is still making up its mind.

Influencing the Panel of Eminent Persons and APRM Secretariat

All of the ideas above are aimed at influencing the Country Self-Assessment Report and Programme of Action. But these are not the last word. They are only the building blocks that the Panel of Eminent Persons, the continental APRM Secretariat and the Country Review Team use to write the final country report. The review team is a group of 15-25 experts drawn from universities, research institutes, business, international agencies as well as former politicians. Even if CSOs fail to get certain issues into the Country Self-Assessment Report or Programme of Action, there is still opportunity to influence the final report on the country.

The country self-assessment consumes a great deal of time and in early countries, some civil society members have thought that once it was done, the APRM is effectively over for civil society. But there are still several crucial opportunities to influence the process and get civil society concerns reflected in the final report. A country review is based on three main inputs: background research by the APRM Secretariat; the Country's Self-Assessment Report and draft Programme of Action; and the information gathered by the Country Review Team during a two-to-three week Country Review Mission.

The Eminent Persons assign a member to lead each country review and that person plays an influential role in assessing issues and solutions in that country. Ultimately, the whole Panel will debate the country's report and the recommendations that they feel should be added to the Programme of Action. If they are aware of neglected issues, they can and do insist on changes to the report or revisions to the Programme of Action. Providing information to both the Panel and Secretariat thus can be valuable.

4. Kanbur R, 'The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM): An Assessment of Concept and Design', Ithaca (United States): Cornell University, SAGA Working Paper, 2004, p.9.

The continental APRM Secretariat plays a crucial co-ordinating and research role and thus should not be ignored by civil society. The APRM Secretariat is responsible for preparing a background report and an issues paper that together guide the Country Review Mission. Getting issues into the background report and issues paper is a crucial step to alerting the Country Review Team about key priorities in your country. Because the Secretariat is small and has to do research on many countries, it may be limited in how much time it can dedicate to background research, and it may not have access to some of the key documents that are available in your country. Therefore, key strategies can help:

Send in written submissions. When CSOs complete their written issues list and recommendations, they should not only submit it to the National Governing Council and Technical Research Institute, but also send it along to the Secretariat.

Send key reports. Even if there is not time to write an issues report, CSOs can make a big difference by sending copies of key national governance reports to the Secretariat and the Eminent Person who will lead the country's review. Because they work from far away, they may not be able find or even know about many documents. Purchasing the documents and mailing them may cost a bit of money, but it can be a very beneficial investment in the cause of good governance. (See Appendix C for examples of these documents).

Send in lists of experts. Although the Eminent Persons have the right to speak to anyone in the country, in practice the organisation of the country review visit has been left to the government in the early APRM countries. And because of time pressures and limited research staff, the Secretariat may not know who the best people are to speak to about certain key issues. As a result, it can be very beneficial to prepare a list of contact details for key experts and civil society groups and forward this list to the Eminent Persons and Secretariat. It can help them do their jobs better and make it easier for them to get candid views.

Send a critique of the APRM process in your country. The APRM is about learning from the past and sharing experience, but the APRM Secretariat will not be as familiar with the details of any national process as civil society. If there are problems, it can help the broader cause of the APRM to send comments on the process to the continental authorities. If issues, recommendations or complaints are not documented, they cannot be acted upon in future country reviews.

Send a critique of the Programme of Action. In the early APRM countries, the Programme of Action was left until the very end of the process and was often prepared in a rush, which means the initial draft Programme of Action may not include some needed solutions or it may be unrealistic in some facets. It is important to remember that the Programme of Action outlines the steps the country is actually committed to implementing. The assessment report is

The continental APRM Secretariat plays a crucial co-ordinating and research role and thus should not be ignored by civil society.

useful to outline problems but the Programme of Action is how progress will be achieved. If CSOs see inadequacies or would like to see certain laws or policy changes included in the Programme of Action, it can be helpful to point these out to the Eminent Persons. They ultimately make recommendations and tell the country whether its Programme of Action is acceptable or not.

Influencing the Country Review Team

If civil society prepares for the Country Review Team, it can still make a big impact, even if key problems and recommendations have not made it into the Country Self-Assessment Report. A number of factors combine to make the Country Review Visit an opportunity for civil society. Country Review Teams have so far been independent minded and have striven to produce fair and credible reports. However, the APRM Secretariat has an enormous workload in preparing background research on 27 countries. On early review missions, the Secretariat provided its background research to the review teams only after they arrived in-country. This is a shortcoming of the system but an opportunity for civil society to make sure that the review team is aware of any issues left out of the Country Self-Assessment or Programme of Action. The review team examines the self-assessment, but is not bound by it.

It can be extremely useful for civil society organisations to gather copies of key national reports and pass them on to the review team. These can include the national development plans, corruption surveys, reports of the parliament and auditor-general, governance surveys, reports of human rights or corruption commissions, news articles and written civil society submissions.

Civil society can also be influential at another level. In the first four countries, the review team effectively relied on the government to set the agenda for the country review and arrange meetings. Because background research was not distributed prior to the country visit, the team members had limited opportunity to determine who they should interview in-country. Thus it can be useful to provide the Eminent Persons, the Secretariat and the review team members with contact details for key constituency representatives, experts and NGOs knowledgeable about certain issues. These should include unions, academics, business, trade experts, banking and financial representatives, independent review boards, judges, parliamentarians, human rights groups, election observer organisations, corruption monitors and others.

If civil society prepares for the Country Review Team, it can still make a big impact, even if key problems and recommendations have not made it into the country self-assessment.

Getting these lists of contacts and reports into the hands of the review team can require persistence and a bit of investigation. Country review visits have not always been publicised well in advance and it can be difficult for civil society to find out when the team arrives, who is on it and where they will visit. Providing information to the Secretariat is a valuable first step. Each country review is led by one member of the Panel of Eminent Persons. Finding out who and making e-mail or telephone contact can be very valuable. Preferably it should be done at the earliest stages of the APRM.

Because information sent by post or e-mail may not get to all review team members, it is advisable to find out which members are working on which of the four thematic areas of the APRM and provide them with paper copies of key documents. Given the length of some documents, it may not suffice to provide the team with electronic versions because the review team may find it prohibitively expensive to receive material by e-mail, which would have to be printed in expensive hotel business centres.

Making personal contact also is an advantage, because individual review team members will likely have myriad questions requiring follow-up, or they may need assistance in finding the right experts on specialised subjects. Offering to assist them with information can make sure that they access needed information in a timely way.

Influencing how the APRM is institutionalised and monitored

After the Country Review Report and Programme of Action are discussed at heads of state level, and their contents are made public, countries must implement the reforms outlined in the Programme of Action. Again, civil society organisations should seek to influence which organisations put the Programme of Action into practice, who monitors its implementation, and how. The APRM Country Guidelines note that reviews should be conducted every three years and reports on progress toward implementation should be filed every six months. Is there a suitable system to independently monitor progress on the Programme of Action? Has authority for such monitoring and appropriate funding been provided to an appropriate institution? Does the national budget cater for APRM reforms? These are some of the important questions for civil society to ask.

The APRM is a challenging process with which pioneer countries are currently struggling. While many governments already have or are developing monitoring and evaluation systems, many CSOs lack this capacity and expertise. But the same principles of building trust and exercising transparency should be applied when reporting on progress or delays. Citizen surveys and report cards are being used by Ghana to gauge public perceptions of the success of APRM-inspired reforms. Parliamentary public accounts committees and the auditor-general should be involved in monitoring the APRM. And CSOs should know the time commitments stipulated in the Programme of Action, and raise questions when implementation begins to lag. The methods of influence outlined above can be used at this stage of the process as well.

Seizing the initiative, raising funds

Finally, civil society should consider the advantages of being proactive. In several early countries, civil society was aware that government had acceded to peer review but took no action until government announced its plan for the process and the appointments to the governing council. Only after the

The success of the APRM depends on the seeds of its assessment of a country falling on the fertile soil of a vibrant civil society dialogue in that country. This requires a civil society that is itself competent to understand and respond to the APRM assessments. – Ravi Kanbur[5]

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5. *Ibid.*, p.11.

process began, did organisations attempt to raise funds to make civil society input. However, the process gathers pace quickly after the governing body has been formed and the process of raising funds can take months or years.

If civil society wishes to influence how the governing council is created, how its membership is chosen and its level of independence from government, it must begin raising awareness of the APRM and seeking influence early, through the media, personal contacts and conferences. Similarly, writing compelling written submissions take time and preparation. Hence the sooner civil society mobilises, the more impact it can have.

Funding can be useful, but a great deal can be accomplished for very little. In several APRM countries, civil society neglected to seize the initiative because it sought to first raise donor funds.

Funding can be useful, but a great deal can be accomplished for very little. In several APRM countries, civil society neglected to seize the initiative because it sought to first secure very substantial grants. In Kenya, many of the disputes in the governing council grew from the desire of some civil society representatives for government to fund an entirely separate civil society report. A strong submission can be created without spending funds, if organisations are willing to put in the time and effort without expecting personal payment. In South Africa, civic organisations produced more than 60 major written submissions without outside funding, and these reports dramatically changed the course of the national APRM, influencing both the national self-assessment and the final country report.

The APRM is hard work but it has great potential to improve Africa's governance and thus its economic success. Countries – both governments and civil society – will get out of the process only as much as they put into it.

THE WAY FORWARD

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> The organisation of public participation in the APRM process is by itself a central aspect of enhancing the state of governance and socioeconomic development in the participating country. Such interactions can build trust, establish and clarify mechanisms for ongoing engagement and empowerment of stakeholders. These processes will be most effective if they build on existing structures, rather than duplicating or creating parallel processes such that learning becomes cumulative.
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> **– APRM Country Guidelines[1]**

This book is intended as a guide that would both analyse the internal dynamics of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and offer concrete proposals to help participants make the most of the opportunities it offers. This focus on the practical details of the APRM process grew directly from feedback by government and civil society groups in numerous conferences and interviews. Participants in the pioneer countries frequently observed that the formal structures of the APRM do not offer enough guidance in how to plan and manage an APRM review.

They noted that, given the complexity of the process and the Questionnaire, it is difficult for first-time participants to anticipate all of the issues that will arise. Governments do not always allocate sufficient time and funds to the right areas, which has contributed to the slow pace of the early reviews. In focusing on the details and internal dynamics, it is hoped that this book has helped to fill this important gap and thus assist APRM participants in making the process more meaningful and effective.

As important as it is to understand the details of the APRM, it is equally important that participants and architects of the process consider several larger questions. The limitations of time and space necessarily mean that one volume is insufficient to deal with both the detail and the strategic issues. However, those larger questions deserve some discussion and offer useful points of reflection on the future of the APRM system.

Given the complexity of the process and the Questionnaire, it is difficult for first-time participants to anticipate all of the issues that will arise.

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1. APRM Secretariat, 'Guidelines for countries to prepare for and to participate in the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM),' November 2003, article 36, p.12.

Strategic trends

Research for this book revealed five overarching trends, which deserve particular attention. They all are interrelated and affect the ability of the APRM system to realise its goal of catalysing fundamental governance reform.

Time pressure. The APRM process takes longer than anticipated, which has a variety of knock-on effects.

Planning and organisation. Pioneer countries have not always anticipated what funds, staff and logistical considerations the APRM would require and frequently express the desire for more detailed and practical guidance on research, surveys, consultation, budgeting, drafting Programmes of Action (POAs) and other key elements.

Research methods. Countries have not always appreciated up-front the many technical questions posed by the Questionnaire or the challenges of assembling a fair and rigorous Country Self-Assessment Report and a POA that contains sound policy recommendations. Nor have they foreseen the particular difficulties of trying to do so within a short time frame.

Consultation systems. The ability of the APRM system to find effective solutions and foster consensus depends on the quality of public and government dialogue but getting civil society and senior politicians to engage in a rigorous way is expensive, and politically and logistically challenging.

Comparative advantage. The APRM is one of many national planning and budgeting processes and its relationship to other processes needs additional clarity to ensure that it improves upon rather than repeats other processes.

Time pressure

The speed of the process is a very basic but important indicator deserving attention. The APRM process is far more difficult, costly and time consuming than its architects imagined. The guidelines suggest the process should take six to nine months from public launch to heads of state review, but many participants at the Sixth Africa Governance Forum and other APRM conferences noted that such a target has proven substantially over-optimistic. As noted in the table below, it has taken countries from nine to 18 months from the public launch to complete the national self-assessment phase of the process. Scheduling the heads of state review has taken even more time. The Panel and Secretariat seem to have extended this period for Stages One to Four to nine to 12 months, according to the introduction to the South African Country Review Report.

A slow process is not necessarily bad if it results in substantive improvements to governance. If countries took two to three years to give substantial thought to how to solve governance problems it would be of great value. But that is not how the process unfolds. The pioneer countries

> ### How long does the APRM take?
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> The APRM Guidelines note that a review should take six to nine months, but no nation has so far come close to this target.
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> Ghana took 12 months to complete its Country Self-Assessment Report from its public launch of the process, and another 10 months before the report was presented and defended in front of heads of state.
>
> Rwanda took 12 months from launch to completion of the self-assessment, and another 15 months before its heads of state review.
>
> Kenya took 14 months from the public launch to completion of the self-assessment, and it took another 10 months before its heads of state review.
>
> South Africa publicly launched its process at the end of September 2005 and completed its Country Review Mission in July 2006. The final presentation to heads of state occurred on 1 July 2007, 21 months after the official start. If one considers that the government instructed different ministries to begin completing the Questionnaire seven months prior to the public start of the process, it took South Africa 28 months.

have all spent significantly more time getting organised and setting up APRM governance structures than on actual research, and they have spent significantly more time on researching problems and comparatively little on formulating solutions or building political support for particular reforms. The allocation of time is different in each county, but the South African example is illustrative. Out of a total of 52 months, government spent a long time getting organised before the public launch of the process. The self-assessment phase took nine months. The country review phase, including the writing of the final country report, took approximately four months. An additional seven months passed from the time the country report was handed to South Africa for comment before the heads of state review. Out of the nearly three years that were spent on APRM, only five weeks were allocated to research.[2]

If governments and civil society had no other challenges before them, the length of the APRM would matter less. But the APRM comes with a significant opportunity cost as it draws a considerable number of people away from other activities. This is true of both government officials and civil society. Over time, if the process does not become more efficient, participants will begin to make calculations about whether it is really worth the effort. There are signs that such calculations are already being made, with some

The APRM comes with a significant opportunity cost as it draws people away from other activities.

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2. The process officially began with a national conference on 28–29 September 2005. But official briefings by the Department of Public Service and Administration note that government began organising for the APRM a full year before publicly announcing the process and inviting public input. If this earlier date is taken as the start, the process took 33 months from start to finish and a total of 39 months from signing the accession documents until the end of the first review.

governments worrying that the APRM brings substantial risks of public criticism and no real certainty that the process will facilitate greater aid or investment. This perhaps explains why some countries have not established a governing council or begun writing their self-assessments, even several years after acceding to the APRM. This is, of course, a narrow way of looking at the process and one that does not fully grasp the opportunities offered by the APRM. But it is nonetheless a very real political reaction.

The slow pace of APRM reviews reduces their political impact. The more time that passes between the self-assessment phase – when public discussions are concentrated – and the implementation of the POA, the more likely it is that political momentum will dissipate. With most governments sitting for four to five years, the two to three years that the APRM takes means that there is a high probability that the process will be interrupted or affected by an election cycle. This has already happened, to varying degrees, in Ghana, Mauritius, Nigeria, Lesotho and South Africa. In the case of Nigeria, the 2007 elections contributed to substantial delays and in Mauritius the change in administrations in 2005 and inadequate initial funding plans resulted in a multi-year delay that has, at the time of this writing, not yet been rectified.

Even where there is no direct conflict with elections, succession battles often begin a year or two before the end of a president's term in office. As those battles intensify, the political class can be distracted by issues of political survival, which can push the APRM and its recommendations far from centre stage. This can not only undercut the ability of the APRM to build consensus, but also weaken implementation. This is not a uniquely African phenomenon. It afflicts nearly all democracies and derives from the very human problem of politicians having limited time in office and too many issues competing for attention.

The overlap with the election cycle can also add to the political fear within the administration that opposition parties or the media will use the APRM to discredit it. That in turn can undermine the government's willingness to be open and candid or consider certain reforms that might disadvantage the incumbent party. If an election results in a change in the governing party or a new leader of an incumbent party, the new administration may not have as great a commitment to the APRM or may view the country-self assessment as the product of the previous leader, which can make the APRM's conclusions more politically difficult to embrace.

For civil society, time also is a key factor. The length of the process and its many steps make it gruelling, particularly for civil society representatives on the governing council. With limited funds and staff, civil society organisations struggle to attend the many APRM meetings, review draft texts, prepare written submissions, offer a critique of the Country Self-Assessment Report and POA, and attend the Country Review Mission workshops. Civil society organisations have their own activities to manage and must raise funds to

ensure their own organisational survival. The APRM pulls the most senior staff away from these vital tasks. Sustaining that commitment over two or more years can be exceptionally difficult for many organisations.

Getting organised

The early countries all spent many months considering how to organise the process, what kind of governing council to appoint, selecting research institutes, writing contracts, finding facilities for events, office space for a local administrative secretariat and sourcing funding. These tasks are necessary but could have been greatly accelerated if the written guidelines were more clear, detailed and practical. A second important factor in the speed of the APRM is the operation of the continental Secretariat, which was slow to get itself organised and remains inadequately staffed, given the great demands on its time. Country Support Missions theoretically address this issue but they often come after countries have taken key decisions. Participants have noted that the Country Support Missions also do not offer sufficiently specific advice on the process and at times offer very unrealistic counsel on the time required. In Lesotho, the Country Support Mission advised that the entire process could be done in a few months. Given that costs are directly related to the length of the process, such advice can encourage under-funding, which can create additional delays. Algeria noted that it was only asked to do a citizen survey after the Country Review Team had arrived, and the deadline given by the Panel was inadequate to conduct a proper survey and incorporate its results in the self-assessment. Such guidance should have been delivered at the start of the process, which would have prevented the need for staging two costly Country Review Missions.

The official guidelines, which ought to explain the process and make clear the key research requirements, are inadequate. They offer little guidance on specifics and include a number of crucial contradictions that lead to governments and civil society squabbling about the form, composition, leadership and powers of the governing council, Focal Point and national support secretariat (which has often been staffed with government appointees). The lack of clear guidelines also contributes to indecision and faulty financial and logistical planning. The pioneer countries all have routinely noted that they would like to have a guide to a model APRM research process, which sets out the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches to research, expert testimony, surveys and public consultations.

The Panel has decided not to thoroughly revise and reissue the guidelines to clarify such matters, which the authors believe is a strategic mistake. Panellists have explained informally that they feel that redrafting the guidelines would be too time consuming for already overworked APRM structures and potentially introduce delays for countries that have already begun. However, the APRM is about good governance and one of its most elementary tenets

Participants have noted that the Country Support Missions also do not offer sufficiently specific advice on the process and at times offer very unrealistic counsel on the time required.

is that processes should have clear rules. The clarity is valuable because it helps the uninitiated plan more effectively, it avoids disputes and speeds up the process. The system should also make provision for countries that approach the APRM with less than complete sincerity. There are many ways for governments to consult superficially without really taking on board public criticisms. Clearer rules for how consultation should be managed and a clear requirement for an independently managed citizen survey would strengthen the process and remove the temptation to go through the motions without engaging in substantive self-reflection. Offering clear guidelines on consultation and the use of surveys would give civil society some leverage to push for a more open, candid and inclusive process.

The lack of clear guidelines also puts the Panel in an awkward position. Countries do not get effective or realistic guidance on the timing, cost, research methods or consultation systems. They make their plans largely on the basis of the contradictory written guidelines that appear in a variety of different documents, and once these decisions are announced, governments find it politically embarrassing to change plans. Thus the Panel can be forced, by its own lack of clarity, to stand toe-to-toe with governments and attempt to force changes. That is diplomatically difficult at the best of times.

Any large scale process with as many participants and stages as the APRM would present a planning and organisational challenge. As noted in earlier chapters, effective management of any process involves anticipating the likely challenges and designing strategies to overcome them. The lesson from the pioneer countries for civil society, government and the APRM authorities is that participants need to build their APRM plans around a well-considered list of potential problems and challenges, which draws on the lessons evident from the pioneer countries. Assuming that it will all work itself out is a sure recipe for delays, controversy, unanticipated problems and, as a consequence, a weaker process. The Panel has correctly tried to avoid giving the APRM a punitive ethos. Clear rules and effective guidance are not punitive and would be appreciated by civil society and governments alike. At present, each country must, to a great extent, reinvent the wheel on questions of research, consultation, and report writing.

The dynamics of research and consultation

Even if the organisational side was made more efficient – through better written guidelines, more and better direct guidance from continental authorities and better foresight among participants – time would affect other critical aspects of the APRM.

The Panel can be forced, by its own lack of clarity, to stand toe-to-toe with governments and attempt to force change.

The technocratic nature of the process tends to focus too much attention to the difficult task of writing a report. If the APRM process were to be judged only according to the quality of the final report, the time factor would not be that important. But writing a report is only a means to an end. The process is

supposed to galvanise enduring change, which depends less on what reports say and more on how the process changes perceptions about issues and builds consensus around solutions. It takes a great deal of time and plenty of face-to-face consultation to change views.

If the APRM is to catalyse fresh thinking on governance, greater care needs to be given to how public consultations are managed. The report writing process gives civil society, government, opposition parties and various technical or industry experts an opportunity to work together and debate. Just being in the same room is no guarantee of success. Countries should focus attention on how best to manage the personal and political relationships to build trust and commitment to reform. The process will achieve more if it is managed with due regard for the anxieties and concerns of civil society and government.

In the pioneer countries, there has been a particular emphasis on consultation with the public through conferences and workshops. In some cases, these are spread geographically around the country. In others, seminars and focus groups have been held with particular interest groups on key issues. Typically, researchers take notes and attempt to feed public comments into the country self-assessment analysis. Providing opportunities for broad public comment lends the process important credibility, but public meetings are usually inefficient means of gathering information or finding solutions to problems. The APRM covers so many areas of governance that seminars often allocate very little time to any particular issue. Average citizens may be able to relate personal experiences, but it is difficult to gauge how typical their testimony is, or what remedies would change the situation.

Surveys offer a structured way to gather public input that addresses some of the weaknesses of large public conferences. Well-structured surveys that randomly select a representative section of the population give every citizen an equal chance of being polled. They allow opinions to be gathered across ethnic groups, regions, sexes and ages to provide a fair picture of national opinion at a particular point in time. However, continental authorities have not been clear about whether surveys are required – as was discussed previously. Nor have they provided realistic counsel about the amount of time and money a statistically valid survey would require.

In addition to consultations aimed at the broad public, countries have experimented usefully with other more directed forms of consultation. These include small focus-group discussions, workshops aimed at particular issues or involving particular constituencies.

Pioneer countries note that no single method of consultation is sufficient to capture all views. Countries should plan to use a variety of methods that reach out to different regions, religions, ethnic groups as well as the many forms of expertise required by the more technical questions in the Questionnaire.

Continental authorities have not been clear about whether surveys are required, nor provided realistic counsel about their cost and time implications.

The media has so far been underutilised in the process, although it has the potential to dramatically enlarge the public conversation around governance. Part of the problem derives from the economics of publishing. Most print and broadcast media are thinly staffed and poorly paid. Editors assign reporters to the biggest stories and concentrate on events rather than analysis and investigation, which take more time. That is why the media has, with a few exceptions, focused articles almost exclusively on APRM events – the official start of the process, the arrival of the review team, the completion of reports – and dedicated very little attention to the substantive issues of how to address various gaps in governance, which are much harder for reporters to understand and write about.

As a result, the APRM conversation has been confined to the few conferences and workshops, which are attended by a very select group of civil society organisations and researchers. Getting the media to dedicate time and space to governance would require granting reporters free access to governing council events and APRM workshops. As public submissions and expert workshops are completed, research institutes could be encouraged to summarise the arguments for and against certain key reforms, which could be printed in the newspapers. Such articles need not take a final position but in reflecting the nature of the debates going on, they would raise awareness and keep the APRM firmly in the public mind.

Consultation with senior politicians

Consultation in the pioneer countries has focused much time and money on consulting with the public. But if the process aims to galvanise commitment to reform, the recommendations that come out of the process must be supported by political leaders. How, exactly, should that happen? What kinds of arrangements can cast the APRM in a non-threatening light and foster more open and thoughtful discussion that brings citizens, politicians and experts together?

Although this is a clear goal of the APRM process, insufficient attention has been paid to the mechanisms needed to achieve such constructive dialogue with elites. The process stipulates that the national Focal Point should be of ministerial rank to provide direct access to the president. That is a good start, but is not enough to ensure the breadth and depth of dialogue required to make enduring change to political and economic systems.

Experience from the structural adjustment era shows that when outside powers – whether bilateral donors or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – attempt to force through reforms that are not energetically supported by political leaders, such reforms fail. They are implemented in a half-hearted manner or obstructed and delayed. Unless leaders understand fully the recommendations coming out of the APRM and are convinced of their correctness, the process will suffer a similar fate.

There are two broad options for such elite consultations, which depend on how the president of the country under review intends to manage the APRM. Governments can either allow the APRM process a free hand to make recommendations and promise to implement them, or government can actively engage throughout the process, participating in debates and learning from the discussions. Both these approaches have advantages and disadvantages.

Ghana adopted the first approach. The Ghanaian government wanted to ensure that the APRM analysis was seen by the public and the outside world as fair and credible. The president turned the entire exercise over to a small governing council composed only of civil society representatives. This approach requires strong presidential leadership to push cabinet ministers and civil servants to accept the criticisms contained in the APRM self-assessment.

Other countries were much less willing to give research institutes or civil society this kind of pledge that government would implement anything recommended by the process. In South Africa, civil society, governing council members and the final country report all recommended that the country regulate private funding to political parties in line with African Union, United Nations and other anti-corruption codes to which South Africa was a signatory. Government simply ignored the recommendation along with about half of the recommendations put to it in the final country report. The South African process failed to engage adequately with senior politicians able to make decisions. The process seemed to be treated as something necessary to meet the nation's diplomatic obligations and not as a process that could be useful in gauging public sentiment or finding problems otherwise marginalised by government processes.

Getting cabinet ministers into a dialogue is not easy. Scheduling alone is a problem. But once political heavyweights enter the room, the dynamics of conversation can shift. In South Africa's provincial consultations, the meetings were largely organised by government and frequently involved a panel with senior officials talking at citizens with very little sustained debate or genuine interaction. The deference that citizens grant to senior politicians can stilt the conversation further.

Kenya recognised the need to build consensus and support within government. To do this, Kenyan APRM leaders arranged a meeting to brief permanent secretaries (the top civil servant in each ministry) on the APRM report and its recommendations. The idea was sound, but the reception from the permanent secretaries was substantially hostile towards the report. This grew in part from the 'not-invented-here' syndrome. Some civil servants may have thought that because they were not personally consulted, they did not have to accept the APRM conclusions. And undoubtedly passages suggesting that certain departments or units were not performing well were greeted with hostility because such statements reflect poorly on those

Strong presidential leadership is needed to push cabinet ministers and civil servants to accept the criticisms contained in the APRM self-assessment.

Bureaucracies inevitably defend their prerogatives and resist reforms pushed from the outside.

in charge. Others doubted whether problems were real and questioned the validity of the citizen survey that supported the APRM conclusions. This reaction reflects the kind of dynamics other APRM countries should consider when laying their plans. Bureaucracies inevitably defend their prerogatives and resist reforms pushed from the outside, unless presidential leadership is firmly asserted and sustained over a long period.

The Kenya experience suggests it is important to bring senior civil servants and politicians into the APRM consultations before the report is complete. South Africa attempted to engage government by inviting experts, including mid-level civil servants, to four one-day workshops each of which discussed the draft report for one of the thematic areas of the APRM.

The conversation in these events was constructive, but two clear lessons emerged. First, one day per theme was far too little to discuss adequately all of the issues raised. It takes time to build consensus. People disagree on facts and interpretations and they spend a lot of time debating word changes. Although these South African workshops were filled with well-informed people, almost no one came with specific suggestions about how to respond to problems. At best, comments on the nature of a problem were suggestive of a solution but much additional research was needed to transform open conversation into actionable policy initiatives.

Second, although the one-day workshops had a constructive tone and participants were largely in agreement with the text and discussions, there was a big difference apparent between what was acceptable to senior political leaders and what was acceptable to civil society and civil servants. Senior political leaders did not participate in all the discussions and did not hear and engage with the evidence and arguments. Once the draft text was complete, South Africa embarked an extensive editing process of its self-assessment. Much of the evidence cited in the draft report was removed and large sections of analysis were compressed into mere phrases or allusions. As editors marginalised discussion of problems, they added large sections praising government performance. This is an indicator that dialogue failed to build consensus.

The processes required to facilitate consensus can vary depending on the issue. For example, people in the capital city can talk endlessly about how to settle problems with nomadic cattle herders who periodically engage in bloody raids and reprisals against other groups. Unless the participants in such conflicts are part of the conversation, durable solutions are unlikely to be found. The right choice of mediator and meeting location can affect the outcome.

With many problems, attempts to build consensus around solutions are already underway when the APRM starts. Each of these processes has a history, logic and location of its own. For example, the chamber of mines or the ministry of commerce may be leading talks with unions and business to agree on new worker safety or retirement benefits. Such delicate talks cannot be stopped and abruptly relocated to the APRM. The APRM should make reference to ongoing efforts and contain pledges to ensure that such negotiations will be brought to a constructive conclusion, but it would be wrong for the APRM POA to prescribe a solution based on superficial analysis.

There are no easy answers to these questions about how to build consensus. But it is clear that a simplistic plan for APRM consultations will fail to engineer substantive dialogue.

The Panel and Secretariat have taken a hands-off approach to public consultation, leaving it up to each country to decide how to manage the details. It is important for the process not to be so rigid that it prevents adaptation to local circumstances. But it is equally important that Africa studies the detailed human and political dynamics that make for effective consultations. Getting the policy dialogue right is essential for the APRM to be able to achieve its mission of catalysing change. At present, each new country reinvents the wheel, reproducing the same forms of very basic public conferences, which have not achieved meaningful dialogue between senior politicians, civil society and experts.

There is no real mechanism for learning and information sharing across countries. A variety of private organisations have organised conferences to review the APRM but the continental authorities have generally opted not to attend such functions. Nor have they staged sufficient training events of their own. For the APRM to live up to its potential, new participants need to have intensive training and access to very detailed comparisons of the strengths and weaknesses of what has occurred so far. Ideally, the Secretariat should have a dedicated learning unit that attends many events in every APRM country and prepares notes and comparisons that highlight creative new ideas, and particular changes that would strengthen public consultation and dialogue.

Comparative advantage

The APRM process aims to direct attention to governance and development challenges. But it is one of several planning and review exercises that African governments undergo. Participating countries also have their own national development planning processes, medium- and long-term spending plans, reports by oversight bodies and review processes focused on health, education and other sectors. Many also are called upon to report on their progress toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to create a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and track its implementation to qualify for debt relief, create plans to justify and manage development aid, and

to engage with the International Monetary Fund over fiscal and macro-economic management issues. They also are drawn into discussions about how they rate according to the World Bank's Cost of Doing Business index, credit rating agency ratings and rankings for the US Millennium Challenge Corporation, among others.

All of this planning and reporting comes at a cost. Across the continent, governments and civil society groups in the APRM process have mentioned consultation fatigue. Implicit in this sometimes flippant comment is the question of whether these grand planning exercises produce real benefits that are greater than their cost.

This does not at all suggest that Africa should abandon its own home-grown governance improvement system in favour of foreign instruments. But governments should be more discriminating with their time and be aware of the toll all of this consultation and analysis can take on civil society organisations as well as the distractions it brings to ongoing government business. It makes sense to look for ways to rationalise different reporting and planning requirements.

The APRM system itself cannot change or remove these other planning processes, but its leaders should consider how to give the APRM a clear comparative advantage that makes the time and money invested in it worthwhile. Time pressures have a direct affect here. The less time that is available for research, the more the APRM process will tend, of necessity, to reflect existing analyses and conventional approaches. Researchers working on the country self-assessment or on the Country Review Mission do not have time to conduct original research into problems or new solutions.

It is undoubtedly galling to many Africans that the home-grown APRM process must compete for attention with many externally-driven processes that are effectively mandatory (because refusal to conduct them can result in a major loss of funding). But time and human resources are finite, which means that participants and the APRM authorities should strive to ensure that the APRM delivers real benefits or higher quality analysis that the other processes do not deliver.

Giving the APRM a stronger comparative advantage requires devoting much more attention to the POA, which is one of the weakest components of the peer review system. Participants in the pioneer countries have frequently noted the tendency to spend substantial time on organisation and the self-assessment but comparatively little on the POA, which is developed at the end of the self-assessment phase. Unfortunately the mechanical steps of the APRM – the need to deliver a self-assessment report, find funding, conduct surveys and organise consultations – consume a lot of time and attention. By the time countries are ready to formulate the POA, they are frequently behind schedule and under intense pressure to wrap up the process. As a result, POAs have not received the attention they deserve.

Instead of leaving the POA until the end, participants would achieve stronger results if they planned their way backwards from the POA, asking what kind of research and consultation would result in a more effective and realistic POA that offers clear advantages over existing planning and evaluation exercises?

Allowing enough time is a crucial first step. Countries ought to spend as much time finding solutions as they do defining problems. Policy formulated in haste is often bad policy that either brings unintended consequences or fails to make a meaningful impact.

Pioneer countries have so far struggled to find an efficient approach to the POA. The present template is a table with columns showing the objective, action, indicator, timeline, budget, participants and other particulars. This structure does not allow sufficient space to detail how reform programmes will work. In many cases, action items are mere phrases to strengthen or improve some programme.

Superficial treatment of the POA prevents effective monitoring and makes it nearly impossible for civil society to judge whether a promise has been fulfilled or not.

This kind of superficial treatment prevents effective monitoring and makes it nearly impossible for civil society to judge whether a promise has been fulfilled or not. It does, however, suggest an opportunity. The Secretariat could commission a web design firm to create a system that would allow each country to organise action items in the current table format. Then behind each action item could be stored a full set of related documentation. Where the action calls for a new law, its text could be posted. Where it focuses on a policy development conference, the particulars could be attached. Giving countries this kind of systematic capability would help make the POA more accountable through use of a more rigorous, detailed and standardised approach.

Another idea for strengthening the POA would involve taking a more structured approach to the desk research that guides the early phases of the APRM. If researchers first culled all of the descriptions of major problems and proposed solutions from existing planning and review documents, they would have a single report synthesising all other major national reviews. If each problem and solution were footnoted, the report could present a clear consensus of what needs to be done from which the APRM could build. Working from such a foundation would allow the APRM to strengthen its comparative advantage. Adding more action items through the APRM can create additional confusion, because some of the other review plans have their own monitoring and implementation systems. But if the APRM dedicated time to keeping track of various reforms that were planned or begun under other reviews, it would act as a master plan. To fulfil this role, researchers would have to footnote or otherwise annotate APRM Country Self-Assessment Reports and note which organisation and funding sources were being used for which actions.

Many of the problems pointed out in APRM reports are not new. Indeed, most will have been identified through earlier review exercises, which included recommendations. The POA process could be improved if researchers made a conscious effort to evaluate the extent to which those earlier reforms had been implemented and if not, precisely what obstacles intruded. Those could include political factors, bureaucratic infighting, lack of funds, staff, legal authority or technical capacity.

Evaluating fully past reforms failures would greatly increase the APRM's power as a learning system.

Evaluating such factors would require leaving time to interview participants in those past reform efforts. Doing so would greatly increase the APRM's power as a learning system and result in more realistic reforms. This kind of study of the obstacles to reform has been chronically lacking in African development plans, and would be time consuming. The APRM system is arguably already too long and complicated. But adding such a phase would ensure that the APRM would produce much more effective POAs than is currently the case.

The APRM would also benefit from studying the weaknesses of other governance reviews, such as national development planning efforts and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper process, which is used to say how debt relief funds will be spent. Both the APRM and PRSP tend to result in very long lists of actions, often without sound cost estimates or realistic assessments of the time, staff, funding, technical capacity and management required. Malawi completed a national development strategy in 2006 that included 547 action items. Although it contained many good ideas, it remained a wish list because there was no indication of how so many projects could be practically launched and managed.

To avoid this problem, countries participating in the APRM should establish a set of criteria that would be used to determine which actions will make the most impact or deliver value for money. Efforts to tighten budgetary controls and fight corruption would seem to be the highest priority because they can directly save money and ensure that more funding goes to its intended purposes. Next, many laws and regulations can be improved at little expense to tighten up management and send important signals that inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated. Closely related would be actions to make the key agencies involved in auditing, oversight and prosecution of corruption have the funding, technical staff and legal powers needed to function efficiently and swiftly.

One of the most common governance problems is a lack of effective mechanisms for measuring the quality of government service delivery, particularly in the social sectors. Accountants keep track of what money is spent, but little effort goes into determining if services were well designed or effective in realising their goals. A great deal can be done to improve the quality of health care, education, road maintenance or other vital services through attentive, disciplined management control systems that include performance audits, performance goals built into contracts for senior civil

servants and contractors, and regional and district reports showing which schools and clinics have the best and worst service delivery rates.

Such efforts to concentrate on low-cost, high-impact reforms should not mean that complex, long-term problems are ignored. The pressure to assemble the POA matrix rapidly tends to bring out quick fixes. One unintended consequence of the present approach to the POA is that inadequate attention is directed at complex structural problems that do not lend themselves to the sort of action items that can be described in the tiny cells of a POA table.

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A great advantage of the APRM is its use of a questionnaire, which gives structure to analysis and can assist in planning and organisation. This same approach could be taken with the POA. A POA questionnaire need not get into detail on particular solutions but it could usefully guide participants in creating a POA and asking thoughtful questions. Such a process would have to be applied to the Country Self-Assessment Report in preparation of the first draft POA. Once the final country report is received, the process should be repeated because the final country reports invariably make a variety of recommendations not covered by the national self-assessment.

At present, too many POA items call for non-specific efforts to strengthen, improve or accelerate existing programmes. They frequently lack meaningful detail about how such changes would be achieved. Without detail, such commitments are impossible to measure, and without the ability to clearly determine if a pledge was fulfilled or not, the APRM system will lack the accountability needed to sustain reforms.

Thus, revised guidelines and/or the Questionnaire should ask countries to prepare a summary document on each proposed initiative in the POA. For each item they should be required to answer some basic management questions about required staffing; technical expertise; enabling regulations or legislation; capital and recurrent costs; whether the given reform can be expected to fully or partially solve the underlying problem; accompanying reforms that may be needed to achieve success; and the likely start-up time needed to get staff, laws and offices in place.

Once each potential solution is documented in this way, they should be ranked according to difficulty, cost and impact. For important problems for which no solutions are immediately apparent or where the recommendations put forward would not fully address the problem, the POA should include an action item that commits the nation to an extended period of research, consultation and policy experimentation to find better solutions.

Options to strengthen the APRM

One question frequently asked in APRM review conferences is whether it would not be better to split the APRM into smaller reviews, each covering a section of the Questionnaire. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation

and Development – a club of the 30 most developed democratic nations from which the APRM drew some inspiration – conducts peer reviews of members, with each review focused on a narrow area, such as development aid policy. Splitting the APRM into smaller reviews would enable a faster process but could detract from the quality of analysis because many of problems in the political realm overlap with problems and causes in the economic, corporate and socio-economic realms. Having said that, most countries manage the process by assigning a different research institute to handle each of the four thematic sections of the APRM Questionnaire. In practice, this division tends to balkanise analysis. Thus, dividing the APRM into smaller thematic reviews would not be appreciably different from the current mode of analysis.

An arguably stronger reason not to divide the APRM relates to capacity and the amount of attention any reform process can attract from senior political figures. Smaller APRM reviews would presumably come more frequently and require the nation to be continuously under review, which could drain participants of the energy and commitment needed to sustain the process on an ongoing basis. On balance, splitting the APRM is not the right approach to making it more manageable.

Instead, the speed of the process (as well as its impact) can be greatly improved by making the self-assessment phase more efficient and productive and the organisational phase shorter. Of all the detailed recommendations in earlier chapters, seven key reforms are offered here that can help strengthen the APRM system.

1. **Clarify the ambiguous rules.** The guidelines contain a number of important inconsistencies that should be removed. The present system relies heavily on person-to-person communication through Country Support Missions, but countries often have made key decisions about how to manage the process based on reading (or potentially misreading) selected parts of the guidelines.

2. **Improve the capacity and responsiveness of the Secretariat.** Many participants and APRM review conferences have called for a larger Secretariat that has enough staff to be more active and responsive to requests for guidance.

3. **Build a best practices unit with the Secretariat.** Part of the APRM mission is to study best practices and share information with other countries about how to improve governance as well as how to better manage the APRM reviews. With the existing APRM staff overstretched and heavily reliant on outside consultants, it is difficult for staff to take time away from existing reviews to observe APRM processes and interview participants about what has worked and what needs changing. The Secretariat could provide a more valuable and responsive service to member states if it established a unit that was not involved in overseeing reviews but given the task of observing, learning and spreading information on alternative approaches and best practices.

Too many POA items call for non-specific efforts to strengthen, improve or accelerate existing programmes. They frequently lack meaningful detail about how such changes would be achieved.

4. **Publish operational advice.** Several conferences have called for written documentation on lessons learned in budgeting for the APRM, conducting surveys, managing consultation processes, preparing realistic POAs, reconciling POAs with other national strategy and budgeting processes, writing the Country Self-Assessment Report and managing communications. There are a variety of approaches to all of these tasks and there may not be one answer, but participants could plan and manage the process more effectively if they had a regular flow of advice in writing, through a newsletter, monographs or printed debates about contrasting approaches.

5. **Analyse compliance with African and international standards.** The APRM cites a variety of international codes and standards, and the Questionnaire asks about the extent to which countries have operationalised these commitments. However, the reports so far have made little attempt to make such an assessment nor have they required countries to answer these crucial questions. This is a major lapse and retreat from the process as outlined in the APRM guidelines.

6. **Focus greater attention on the POA.** The ultimate strength of the APRM process depends on the quality of policy making that goes into the POAs. However, POAs have been weak in many cases, unrealistic and superficial in their policy responses or neglected some of the more difficult national problems. Countries have spent much more time on the self-assessment phase than in developing the POA. With the POA left until the end when the country is already past its deadline, pressure to wrap up the process is intense. Also, the matrix format used for the POA allows little space for detail. Every major action should be supported by a full document outlining the solution to be pursued. Countries should be encouraged to make provision in the POA for ongoing research, peer learning and policy experimentation to deal with systemic or intractable problems. To strengthen this area, clear guidance should be issued and a section of the Questionnaire dedicated to how to build an effective POA.

7. **Revise the Questionnaire.** Having a standard Questionnaire is a valuable tool in helping countries plan their APRM research processes, in assisting citizens with factors to consider when making input, and in ensuring that the APRM process is consistently rigorous in its analysis. However, the current Questionnaire is long, awkward in structure, missing several crucial areas and repetitive. Several adjustments, as discussed in chapter 4, could significantly improve its ease of use and assist countries in managing the process more efficiently.

When the authors began researching the APRM system five years ago, it was clear that this process offered great potential to change the nature of debate within individual countries and within the African Union. It established a valuable ongoing conversation about how to improve governance. Taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the APRM has proven much

The APRM is part of a struggle to expand accountability, transparency and democratic participation. That struggle will not be easy, but it can be won.

more difficult than its proponents or the authors believed at the start. But even when the practical difficulties are accounted for, the system remains a very positive development in Africa. Like every institution, it will continue to face pressures from members wishing to pull it in particular directions. Some participants will want to sign up to pretend to embrace reform without really wanting to follow through with a robust review. The strength of the process and its ability to inspire thoughtful, durable reforms will depend on the commitment shown by heads of state and the tenacity of civil society organisations to insist on rigorous, fair, and transparent APRM processes. Civil society faces many limitations in its ability to influence the APRM, but evidence from the early countries shows that when civil society is determined, vocal and willing to stand its ground, it can make a difference. In this, the APRM is part of a broader long-term struggle to expand accountability, transparency and democratic participation. That struggle will not be easy, but it can be won. The enthusiasm and determination of the many thousands of participants in the APRM process has been an inspiration. If that spirit can be sustained, there is no doubt that the APRM can live up to its great potential and Africa will claim its rightful renaissance.