

# **Botswana APRM Popular Sensitisation (BAPS)**

## **Civil Society Training Workshop**

**Via Zoom, 20 May 2020, 10h00-12h30**

Report by Nhlakanipho Macmillan Zikalala

On Wednesday 20 May 2020, a civil society training workshop on the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and how civil society can become meaningfully involved in Botswana's APRM process was held via the online conferencing app, Zoom. The workshop was organised and presented by the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) and the Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (BOCONGO) as part of the Botswana APRM Popular Sensitisation (BAPS) Project in Botswana. It was attended by government officials working in the Office of the President in Botswana, a member of the continental APRM Secretariat, presenters from Namibia and Zambia, and over 20 civil society members.

**Botho Seboko, director of BOCONGO**, welcomed the participants and emphasised BOCONGO's support for this project.

### **Steven Gruzd, Head of the African Governance and Diplomacy Programme at SAIIA**

Mr Gruzd began his presentation by welcoming everyone and sending a vote of thanks to all participants. He went on to complement BOCONGO for the hard work in organising the seminar and making sure that CSOs were involved. He also recognised the presence of government officials from Botswana. Regarding the purpose of the workshop, Gruzd stated that it is designed to explain the APRM, entry points for civil society, and to encourage CSOs to start thinking about key issues to include in their written submission. He mentioned that the aim was to build the capacity of civil society and to tie the APRM it to existing work. There would also be presentations from CSOs in Zambia and Namibia, offering useful lessons to Botswana.

Gruzd proceeded to define the APRM in a nutshell and the role of CSOs. To summarise, he said the APRM was established in 2003, as Africa's premier governance self-assessment and promotion tool. APRM reviews focus on four broad thematic areas: Democracy and Political Governance, Economic Governance and Management, Corporate Governance and Socio-Economic Development. African countries accede voluntarily and after the review, the country starts to address identified governance challenges, through implementing its National Programme of Action (NPOA). The APRM is an example of a Multi-Stakeholder Initiative (MSI), in that it is not merely a government review, but a country review, which brings together different stakeholders, including government, civil society and the private sector to identify key governance concerns. The APRM currently has 40 member states, with 22 having been through the full review process (along with three countries reviewed for the second time, and three targeted reviews). See <http://aprm-au.org/>

### **Hugues Manzila, continental APRM Secretariat**

Mr Manzila started his presentation by saying that the Secretariat is excited about the APRM process in Botswana. In 2019 the Secretariat conducted an initial mission to sensitise the government. There was a scheduled sensitisation mission scheduled for April 2020, but this has been postponed indefinitely because of COVID-19 and Botswana declaring a state of emergency for six months. He does believe that

during this time, the government should work on setting up local structures. He acknowledged that the government has done a good job by setting up the focal point.

Manzila also complimented Mr Gruzd for his precise summary of what the APRM is. Adding on to that summary, he stated that the APRM is like a mirror that enables all stakeholders to reflect on the progress that has been made as well as the shortcomings in promoting good governance. For civil society organisations to be effective, it is important that they become actively involved with equitable representation on the National Governing Council (NGC). They must maintain their independence from government. He went on to state that the number of states joining the APRM is increasing. The Secretariat is working closely in monitoring progress around Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area.

### **Graham Hopwood, Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Namibia**

Mr Hopwood began his presentation by noting that both Namibia and Botswana were previously opposed to joining the APRM. Both countries were of the view that they had nothing to gain from the review. Nevertheless, it is a good thing that they have changed their approach. He stated that Botswana is in a good position because there is a functioning umbrella body in BOCONGO. The lack of an active umbrella organisation in Namibia made it harder to build cohesion among CSOs. Furthermore, since his organisation worked closely with selected organisations focused on human rights, it was difficult for his organisation to reach out to other organisations. Moreover, he stressed that the experience in Namibia was not inclusive of CSO outside the capital due to financial constraints associated with inviting CSOs from the countryside.

Hopwood also mentioned that inasmuch as the government of Namibia was welcoming, there were tensions with the Office of the Presidency because some officials seemed to think that CSOs as opposed to the government. This is inevitable and therefore CSOs in Botswana should prepare themselves for some bumps on the road ahead with the government. Another point to note is that the Namibian process in drafting a written submission happened organically, instead of happening in a structured way. Within this framework, it would be important for CSOs in Botswana to set up a committee that will oversee and facilitate the writing process.

In Namibia, the NGC was formed in late 2019 and from its inception it was overwhelmingly made up of people aligned with the ruling party. This was challenged by CSOs and more people were added to the NGC to ensure that all stakeholders were included. This is demonstrative of the fact that at some point, CSOs may have to stand up against inadequacies and this can only happen if they are well informed about the rules. In conclusion, Hopwood stated that there were many similarities in Botswana and in Namibia and this gives both countries an opportunity to spearhead the APRM in a new direction and become exemplary of best practices.

In response to a question about how tensions with government were navigated, Hopwood stated that it is important to try and develop good relations with the government at an early stage. To do this, CSOs must take the initiative to invite government officials in their workshops. This is not only good for building good relationships, but it is also inspiring to the government to see that CSOs are taking the process seriously. This results in the government gaining momentum in moving the project forward.

## **Susan Mwape, Director of Common Cause, Zambia**

Ms Mwape brought to the attention the fact that the Zambian process will go down in history as one of the longest in APRM's history. Zambia acceded in 2006 but completed the process in 2014. She also reiterated the point that it is a good thing that Botswana has BOCONGO as an umbrella of CSOs because coordination becomes possible. This will also enhance communication, especially in the formulation of the NGC. In Zambia, Mwape stated that prior to the appointment of NGC members, CSOs sent a list of recommended organisations because they had an agreement with all stakeholders that it should be composed of tripartite representation from the government, private sector and CSOs. To familiarise themselves with the rules, they used a guide provided by SAIIA.

Mwape stressed that the APRM process is rigorous and it does get tough. What is important is that people should not lose momentum, which caused the Zambian process to be lengthy. To keep the momentum going, CSOs should communicate with various media outlets and broadcast all initiatives so that all stakeholders are pressured to do their part. She noted that the biggest challenge thus far is monitoring the NPoA. At times, there can be a conflict of ideas or resolutions between the NPoA and the National Development Plan.

## **Discussion**

When asked if CSOs encountered resistance from the government, Mwape said that they did and the environment was sour from the beginning, especially with the Focal Point. There were times when the government did not provide enough funding because it prioritised other projects. But to deal with such resistance, they formed allies in Parliament that were able to ask APRM-related questions.

A question was asked about measures in place to deal with challenges posed by COVID-19. Manzila said that the Secretariat welcomes input from all stakeholders in terms of COVID-19. The Secretariat is busy discussing available possibilities, especially regarding country reviews as this is their responsibility. He noted that COVID-19 is an important point to raise in this workshop because there is a possibility that it could take time for things to get back to normal so it is important to start brainstorming about the future of APRM under the existing conditions. With Botswana declaring a state of emergency, it is important for all stakeholders to stay the course and keep the momentum going. SAIIA noted that it has switched all its activities online, to use conferencing platforms like Zoom for the BAPS project.

Another question asked about who is ultimately responsible for the constituting of the NGC. Manzila said there are guidelines that must be followed in the constituting of the NGC but what is most important is that the structure is inclusive. What is also important to note is that there should not be too many people within the NGC because that will create a stalemate. The CSOs should delegate trustworthy and proactive representatives to the NGC. The Secretariat is responsible for identifying loopholes and inducing the Focal Point to deal with them.

## **The way forward**

Gruzd went on to mention that SAIIA had revised the budget in light of COVID-19. It has budgeted for short inputs on 12 issues, as well as funding to commission a background study on governance in Botswana based on these issues. CSOs should identify issues that are of paramount importance to governance in Botswana. In identifying these issues, CSOs must act independent of government influence and they must collect and analyse the evidence that will be used to develop convincing arguments. In these submissions, it is important to offer constructive criticism and to circulate the draft

so that everyone can make comments. This will ensure that all CSOs jointly own the written submission. The final draft should be submitted at the right place at the right time. Gruzd also mentioned that the Namibian report is a good example in terms of what is expected of CSOs and SAIIA will guide and assist CSOs in the writing process.

In response to a question about punitive measures for government non-compliance, **Yarik Turianskyi, Deputy Head of the African Governance and Diplomacy Programme at SAIIA** said that unfortunately, there are none. There is a very vague throwaway line that says “measures” can be taken against a government or state that fails to uphold its NPoA. However, this has never been invoked. There was one incident where Mauritania was suspended by the African Union because it went through a coup d'état which also led to the suspension of all APRM activities.

In terms of developing a submission under COVID-19, there is no precedent. The reality is that there has never been a situation like this. Everyone is making up solutions as we move along. We are lucky that we are living in a digital age, so we have to rely on the technology to keep the momentum going.

**Luanda Mpungose, Programme Officer on the African Governance and Diplomacy Programme at SAIIA**, commented that the workshop seems to be laying a foundation regarding the APRM and therefore it is important to start thinking about a list of important issues in Botswana. What stood out for her based on her previous research on governance issues in Botswana was the issue of inclusion for women and the youth in high decision-making bodies.

The idea is for each subject submission not to be too long - ideally it should be 5 to 10 pages. It is up to the organisation and APRM Civil Society Working Group whether the focus is on one issue or multiple issues.

Gruzd then went on to thank everyone for participating. What is important is to start thinking about the key issues in Botswana and take them down to twelve. He also thanked all panellists and members of government for availing themselves in the conversation. He left everyone with a note saying that the BAPS is doable, even during COVID -19.