

THE AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM

A strategic overview presented by Dr. Chris Stals, Member of the Panel of Eminent Persons of the APRM at a Workshop arranged for the official launching of the South African APRM Process, Johannesburg,
28 September 2005

Your Excellencies, Mr Thabo Mbeki, President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr. Mbahazima Shilowa, Premier of Gauteng, Minister Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, other distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I bring you firstly the apologies of my colleague, Professor Adebayo Adedeji, the Panel Member who has been tasked with the responsibility of guiding the APRM Process in South Africa. I was informed yesterday afternoon that Prof Adedeji will not be able to attend this Workshop today and was asked to stand in for the Panel. Although the Panel decided that we as Panel Members will not actively participate in the Peer Reviews of our countries of residence, it is nevertheless an honour for me to bring you a short message on behalf of the Panel on this very important occasion.

I bring you good wishes from Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat, the present Chairman of the Panel of Eminent Persons and also from the other five Members of the Panel. We have looked forward with great expectations to the day that South Africa, being one of the founder members of the New Partnership for Africa`s Development, will embark on its own self-assessment in terms of the APRM Process. We shall all follow the progress you make in the process over the next few months with great interest.

In terms of a Resolution of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity adopted at its Thirty-eighth Ordinary Session on 8 July 2002 in Durban, the primary purpose of the APRM is: -

“— to foster the adoption of policies, standards and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated sub-regional and continental economic integration through sharing of experiences and reinforcement of successful and best practice , including identifying deficiencies and assessing the needs for capacity building.”

The Panel of Eminent Persons was appointed in June 2003 tasked with an oversight function over the review process, in particular to ensure the integrity of the process. After the initial work of setting up a small Secretariat, determining standards, norms, criteria and indicators for the assessment process, providing guidelines for participating countries and appointing strategic partners and outside consultants, the Panel and its support structure is now fully involved in the Country Review process. Twenty-three countries are now fully participating in the process and a few more have indicated their intention to join in the near future. Final Reports for Ghana and Rwanda were submitted to the Forum (the Heads of State and Government of the participating countries) in May this year, and reports for Kenya and Mauritius have reached an advanced stage. South Africa is one of about eight countries included in the second round of the APR process, and we hope to cover all of the remaining countries now participating in the APRM within the next two years.

Albeit only a few countries that have so far gone through the full exercise of the APRM assessment process, we on the Panel and the staff members within our Secretariat have learned a lot. All of us are still continuing on a steep learning curve. We shall certainly also learn from the experience of South Africa, and shall continue to improve on our procedures, our analyses and our assessments as we go from one country to the next. Let me nevertheless mention to you a few basic minimum requirements that we as a Panel regard as essential for the success (and integrity) of the operation.

1. Firstly, it must be understood that the APRM did not create or introduce a new external adjudicator that will come from the outside to judge, assess and rate the performance of a country on a pre-determined scorecard basis. No, we accept our function to be that of a facilitator and mediator with the task to assist each participating country in making its own self-assessment on the basis of Africa Union objectives, guidelines provided in the APRM Questionnaire and established norms, standards and criteria. The country itself must identify its own weaknesses, its shortcomings and its needs, and must come up with realistic proposals on how it intends to address the problem areas (in the country`s final Program of Action).
2. Secondly, because of the nature of the self-assessment process, there must be broad participation by all stakeholders within the country in the assessment process. It is not that easy to identify or define all stakeholders, neither is it an easy task to involve all identified stakeholders in the extensive assessment process. In the first instance, we look at the Government of the day, but also at other political groups and all Members of Parliament.

Obviously, all Government Departments must participate, as well as Government Agencies, Public Bodies and NGO`s. Looking at stakeholders in the private sector, it may not be that difficult to define sectoral representatives of the business community or labour groups, but when it comes to Civil Society and Community groupings, Religious groups, Youth movements and Academics, the task can be daunting. Nevertheless, without being prescriptive it is the view of the Panel that the country as a whole must take ownership of the self-assessment process, and must take up the task of improving the quality of governance in the areas of political governance, macroeconomic policies, corporate governance and socio-economic development.

3. It is essential that all stakeholders shall participate in the full cycle of the APRM process. This cycle begins in South Africa today with the launching of this first Workshop, and will go through a lengthy process of workshops, discussions, meetings with the APRM Panel Representative (Prof Adedeji) and the APRM Secretariat, desk research work, field surveys, analyses, filing of reports and producing a comprehensive self-assessment report that will comply with the requirements of integrity, impartiality, objectivity, professionalism and, above all, of a non-partisan and national character. Also, the APRM process does not come to an end when the Panel presents its final Report to the Forum, or not even when the Peer Review with Heads of State has been completed. It is an ongoing process of always trying to move forward on the road towards better, more efficient and more successful governance in our countries. The owners of the APRM process, i.e. all stakeholders within the country, must share in the responsibility over many

years to come for the implementation of the ultimate Program of Action that will be born out of this whole exercise.

4. The APRM assessment in its final form is not an analysis of the current stage of development of the country as such, but rather a critical view of what the country is doing to move forward from its present position. It is for the purpose of the APRM analysis of no importance whether South Africa is more advanced than some of the other countries on the Continent, or whether South Africa applies better governance policies in its corporate sector, etc. The vital question is rather: - What is South Africa doing to move forward from its present position in the never ending task of creating better governance in support of a better environment to secure a better life for all of its people ?
5. Fifthly, the APRM process must be an open and fully transparent operation. It cannot be broadly based and fully participatory if it is not visible, understandable and open for all stakeholders. At this stage, it needs a publicity campaign, a lot of sensitisation and the pronounced commitment of leaders at all levels of the community to make it work in the interest of a better South Africa for all of the people of this great country.
6. Finally, the APRM assessment is not only about failure, shortcomings, weaknesses and deficiencies. In terms of the AU objectives African countries must, through the APRM process, learn from the successes and good policies of other members. In our final report to the Forum, the Panel would therefore also like to be able to refer to examples of good and successful

governance in participating countries and to the reasons why South Africa is highly regarded by many other countries as an example to be emulated.

Mr Chairman, looking at the program of this Workshop for today and tomorrow, it is clear to me that South Africa is determined to make a great effort in producing a credible and a highly professional APRM self-assessment report that will make an important further contribution towards the unique Africa Peer Review Mechanism. I wish you great luck in this tremendous task. I have no doubt that my colleague, Prof Adedeji will at all times be available to provide you with good guidance and sound advice.