

Answers to frequently asked questions on the African Peer Review Mechanism

1. What is APRM?

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is an instrument voluntarily acceded to by African Union member states meant to function as an African self-monitoring mechanism. Its primary purpose is to foster the adoption of appropriate laws, policies, standards and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development, and accelerated sub-regional and continental economic integration. This goal is achieved through sharing of experiences, reinforcement of successful and best practice, as well as identifying deficiencies and assessing the needs for capacity building.

2. How are countries judged?

The APR process is designed so that countries at different levels of development and governance can join—countries will not be judged against a hard pass-fail system. Rather, the review intends to candidly assess the country's biggest problems, identify needed actions and secure commitments from the country under review for fixing those problems.

3. What are the objectives, standards and codes, questions and indicators?

To measure performance and progress, key objectives, standards, criteria and indicators have been identified in the four key areas of review: Democracy and Political Governance, Economic Governance and Management, Corporate Governance, and Socio-Economic Development.

The *objectives* define the essential elements of the overall goal that must be achieved in a measurable way.

The *standards and codes* are those approved by African countries, individually or collectively, with regard to 'how' they govern themselves and manage their societies, economies and socio-economic development. The standards and codes are meant to give guidance and reference. Countries will not be marked against whether they adhere to these or not, instead the purpose is to ascertain their familiarity with these standards and codes, and the extent of their application.

The *questions* serve to focus on what the country has done with regard to the objectives and the codes, how it does it and with what results.

The *indicators* are the type of evidence that is expected in the responses of countries. They serve to highlight aspects of the objective, standard or code that are generally recognised as measures of performance.

4. **What are the stages of the process?**

The APR process follows five broad phases:

Stage one begins with an initial consultation between the APR Secretariat and the country to be reviewed. This consultation should provide an overview of the process and work out the terms of a memorandum of understanding governing the review. The country under review is required to create an **APR Focal Point** to co-ordinate with the APR Secretariat. The 2004 Kigali meeting of the APR heads of state also adopted recommendations that “participating countries immediately take steps to identify or establish broad-based and all-inclusive APRM National Coordinating Structures where they do not already exist.” This structure would be responsible for sending the Self-Assessment Questionnaire to a wide variety of stakeholders. Once its structures are in place, the APR Secretariat and the country under review simultaneously (but independently) compile preliminary documents. The APR Secretariat must prepare a **background document** assessing the country to be reviewed, drawing on up-to-date information from national, sub-regional, regional and international organisations. The APR Secretariat also prepares a document outlining the nation’s major issues. For this work, the APR Secretariat will require the country focal point to gather relevant laws, treaty ratifications, budgets and development plans and forward them to the APR Secretariat.

At the same time, the country must complete the **APR self-assessment questionnaire** and gather broad input from civil society. In addition, the government must also draft a paper outlining the nation’s big issues and a **National Programme of Action** containing clear steps and deadlines for how the country intends to conform with APR codes and standards, the African Union Charter and UN obligations. (See Appendix A, List of APR Standards and Codes)

Based on the above documents, the APR Secretariat then writes a report outlining the central issues upon which the review process will be focused. In **stage two** an expert team visits the country, meeting with government, business, academics, parliamentarians, the media and other members of civil society to assess the draft national Programme of Action. Team members are

not permanent staff and are appointed only for work on a given country visit and report.

The country visit is to last three weeks. The visiting team will consist of one member of the panel of eminent persons, one administrative person and four experts drawn from partner institutions, including the UN Development Programme, UN Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank and African Union bodies.

During **stage three**, the country review team drafts its report, sharing its findings with the government being assessed. Government responses are then appended to the team report and, if needed, the national Programme of Action is modified according to the team's findings.

The Panel of Eminent Persons takes over the process in **stage four**, writing recommendations for policy reforms based on the review team's findings. The heads of state in the APR Forum then discuss the panel's recommendations with the leader of the country under review.

In **stage five**, which must be completed within six months of the start of the review, the final report is made public and tabled in the African Union, Pan-African Parliament, Peace and Security Council, Economic, Social and Cultural Council and other relevant bodies. The APR Secretariat also follows up on commitments made, holds regional workshops to share best practices identified in the reviews and offers technical support to assist countries in fulfilling their APR plans.

5. Which countries signed up?

Twenty-five countries have so acceded to review by June 2006: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Cameroon, Gabon, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, Egypt, Benin, Malawi, Lesotho, Tanzania, Angola, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Zambia.

6. What is the Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ)?

The APR questionnaire acts as a template and a guide to analysing governance. Countries can modify it if needed. It asks whether the country under review has ratified the designated treaties and codes, and whether they have taken the requisite steps to give such agreements legal force by adopting them into national law or setting up the required institutions and systems to give the treaties effect. The SAQ is divided into four sections: Democracy and Good

Political Governance, Economic Governance and Management, Corporate Governance, and Socio-Economic Governance. Each section includes a list of relevant standards, major objectives, questions under each objective and indicators, which help flesh out the intent of the questions.

7. Why should African countries participate?

The potential benefits of the APRM will vary depending on the level of commitment of the participating country and the effectiveness with which the process is managed, including the degree of co-ordination with existing activities at the country level. By discussing policy challenges and options openly and thoroughly, the process can help build trust in the political system and identify and solve national problems that might otherwise be neglected. It gives Africa an opportunity to get its own houses in order and devise programmes of action to address deficiencies without Western conditionality. It also shows a commitment to improving governance and socio-economic development exists in specific countries and, more broadly, in the continent. A sincere review may also bring increased aid to support and implement envisioned Programmes of Action. Information sharing between countries will also increase trust and create opportunities for intra-country trade and investment, physical infrastructure, production systems and structures will also foster common African positions for negotiating with other regions.

8. What are the origins of APRM?

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) grew out of the New Partnership for Africa's Development and was formally launched by the African Union at its Durban Summit in 2002.

9. How do citizens and organisations participate?

They must be involved in the process from the moment the country signs up and should be part of the initial planning processes. Citizens and organisations would be active in appointing a governing council and lobby to serve on such bodies. They should play a watch-dog role to ensure the integrity of the process. All groups must make official submissions which can be fed into the country self-assessment report and should use the media to publicise their view. They should also make attempts to attend events organised by the Country Support Mission and Review Team and engage with them.

10. What is the APRM Secretariat and how does it work?

The secretariat is based in South Africa and provides secretarial, technical, co-ordinating and administrative support services for the African Peer Review Mechanism. The secretariat is funded by voluntary contributions from countries that have signed on to the process.

11. How is APRM organised at a national level?

There is no absolute blueprint for implementing APRM at national level, and the first few countries undertaking the process have developed a variety of models. The APRM Guidelines stipulate that each participating country must have an **APR Focal Point** in government, to act as a liaison between the continental secretariat and the national APR structures. This focal point is usually a minister or senior civil servant. Participating countries and civil society have asked for more precise rules on the role of the focal point, the extent and type of public involvement required and how the process should be governed. The Eminent Persons have advised countries to form an inclusive panel or council that should contain a majority of civil society representatives and ideally be led by someone outside of government. This council is responsible for producing a Country Self-Assessment Report (CSAR) and Programme of Action (POA) based on wide public consultation. It should take decisions on national and sub-national consultations on the self-assessment questionnaire, research for the report, advertising and publicity, and facilitating both country support and country review visits from the APRM Secretariat. Various countries have named the body a governing council or national commission. Mauritius assigned responsibility for the CSAR to an existing institution called the National Economic and Social Council to drive peer review at the country level and refers to the whole body as the APR Focal Point. Most countries have also established a small local **APRM Secretariat** to assist with administrative tasks.

12. How is APRM funded?

Countries are supposed to make voluntary contributions to the APRM Secretariat and fund the cost of their own national reviews, either through their own resources or funds from donors. The United Nations Development Programme and other donors have contributed to the process in countries like Ghana, Kenya and Mauritius. South Africa funded the process from its own revenues.

13. What is the APRM Forum?

The forum is the highest decision making body in the process and is composed of the Committee of Participating Heads of State and Government.

14. What is the APRM Panel?

It consists of the Panel of Eminent Persons who are appointed to oversee the review process and ensure the integrity of the process, to consider review reports and to make recommendations to the APRM Forum.

15. What is the Country Review team?

This team made up of independent consultants and led by the Eminent Person responsible for a country's review is responsible to produce the APRM report on the country and review progress on a country's Programme of Action.

16. What is a Country Support Mission

Once a country has acceded to the APRM by signing the accession Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the APR Secretariat will arrange a mission to the country with a view to negotiate the exact terms of the country review. During this visit the country and support mission sign a MOU on the Technical Assessment and Country Review visit. When the MOU between the APR Forum and the government is signed the stage is set for the APR process to start.

17. What does a Country Review Visit consist of?

Each country review is led by a member of the Panel of Eminent persons. The review team includes experts from outside the country under review. To prepare for the review the APRM Secretariat prepares a background paper and a paper outlining the major issues in the country. These guide the in-country activities of the review team. In the first few countries, the review visit was about two weeks in duration. The South African review was 16 days. During the visit the review team is, according to the official guidance, meet with the widest possible range of government, officials, political parties, parliamentarians and representatives of civil society organisations including the media, academia, trade unions, business and professional bodies. The purpose is to glean different perspectives on governance in the country and to clarify matters identified in the Issues Paper not taken into account in the preliminary Programme of Action of the country and to build consensus on how these could be addressed. After its visit, the review team produces the country review report. This draft report is first discussed with the country concerned to ensure

the information is accurate, giving government both an opportunity to react to the findings and suggest solutions. If government disagrees with its findings or wishes to comment, it has the right to append comments to the report as an attachment. At this stage the country also finalises its Programme of Action, taking into account the conclusions and recommendations of the draft report. When this is complete, the report and programme of action are presented to the ARP Forum of heads of state for discussion.

18. When are the reports made public?

Six months after it has been considered by the Heads of State and Government of participating member countries. Civil society organisations have called for the self-assessment reports prepared by governments to be released to the public at the same time they are given to the Country Review Mission, but several governments have been reluctant to do so.

19. How are the reports made public?

The report will be publicly tabled in key regional and sub-regional structures including the Regional Economic Commission to which the country belongs, the Pan-African Parliament, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the envisaged Peace and Security Council and the Economic Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) of the African Union.

20. Who do we contact at the Secretariat?

To find out more about the APRM in your country, contact the Secretariat in South Africa at +27-11-313-3828.