

Africa's Trailblazer Ghana and the APRM



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When Ghanaian President John Kufuor defended his country's African Peer Review (APR) report to 25 fellow African leaders in Khartoum, Sudan in January 2006, the West African country — the first to shake off colonialism in 1957, once again become a pioneer. Ghana was the lead guinea pig in Africa's latest governance experiment — the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Although Ghana had no roadmap to follow, its experience in successfully producing a credible and inclusive analysis of its own national strengths and weaknesses offers a valuable blueprint for others engaged in the peer review process.

Why was Kufuor so keen on APRM?

John Kufuor's victory in the 2000 elections marked the end of Jerry Rawlings' 22-year rule and Ghana's first peaceful transfer of power since independence.

Why then was a new president so eager to open his state to intense scrutiny in this untested and potentially risky peer review process, on a continent notorious for using sovereignty to hide widespread mismanagement, maladministration and systemic dysfunction? Kufuor quickly grasped the domestic, regional, international and symbolic advantages of being first in the APRM queue.

At home, Kufuor had embarked on an ambitious programme to strengthen Ghana's fragile democratic institutions. He had revamped the security forces; modernised the tax regime, court system and legal framework; and bolstered media freedoms. Kufuor committed his administration to clean government, increased accountability and diversified economic growth. APRM and Nepad were continental ideas that gave impetus to his domestic political and economic objectives.

"John Kufuor believes that he is a democrat, and APRM was a way to demonstrate his personal commitment

to promoting good governance in the country” said Dr Baffour Agyeman-Duah, Associate Executive Director of the Ghana Center for Democratic Development, one of the four think tanks that conducted research for the report. “He had already embarked on a policy of transparency and accountability in his administration, and APR was a mechanism to further this approach.”

Political analyst Grant Masterson at the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa suggests that Kufuor was in a no-lose situation — he had only been in office a short time, and could therefore blame any harsh criticism received in a review on his predecessors, or his short tenure.¹

Ghana is a relatively stable state in the troubled West African region, and faces fallout from the military, political and economic chaos of its neighbours, including refugees and rebel activity. Ghana has always strongly supported regional integration in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Undergoing APRM early offered Ghana the chance to positively influence West African states involved in the process, including Cameroon, Senegal and Burkina Faso, as well as draw closer to Nepad-originators such as Algeria and South Africa, to counter-balance Nigeria’s considerable muscle in the region.

Participation in the APRM would potentially win Ghana prestige and benefits from international donors, who had shown great enthusiasm for Nepad and APRM from its inception. Ghana remains a heavily aid-dependent state, with about 40% of its budget donor-funded.

“The president realised that APRM could improve governance in the country, as well as make Ghana more attractive for donors and investors”, said Dr Chris Stals, the member of the APR Panel of Eminent Persons responsible for the Ghana review, and former Governor of the South African Reserve Bank.

Agyeman-Duah agrees, “No doubt part of Kufuor’s thinking in being first

was to attract investment and aid. If Ghana was perceived to be open and transparent, it would be seen as a good place to do business. The G8 will use how a country does in peer review to influence its decisions, whether formally or informally.”

The final reason offered is symbolic, even romantic. “Ghana has always had a strong history as a pioneer” said Evelynne Change, Coordinator for Corporate Governance at the APRM Secretariat in Midrand. “It was the first independent country in Africa, it drove Pan-Africanism and the anti-colonial struggle championed by the likes of Nkrumah. I think this may have factored into its desire to be a leader in APRM.”

“Wanting to be first is something of a tradition in Ghana. The country likes the idea,” said Dr Stals.

Ghana could therefore develop the APRM precedent and set the standard for future reviews. It signalled its intent early. It was one of six countries to declare its desire to accede to APRM in November 2002 even before the plans for peer review had been fully formed.

“When Ghana signed up, they said ‘We’re ready’ even though the preparatory phases for the institutionalisation of APRM were still underway. The Panel had to be put in place and the documents for APRM implementation developed,” recalls Change.

It formed a Nepad Secretariat within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which later became part of a new Ministry of Regional Co-operation and Nepad, the first country to have a minister responsible for implementing Nepad. Ghana formally acceded to APRM by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the APR Secretariat on 9 March 2003.

Civil society pressure transforms the process

In its enthusiasm to drive peer review, Ghana’s government initially exhibited a tendency to dominate, a pattern that has been repeated in every other APR country. The president chose and

appointed the National APRM Governing Council (NAPRM-GC) to oversee the review process, and selected sympathetic civil society partners. At an APR workshop held by the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) in Accra in November 2003, many Ghanaian civil society groups were openly angry with their government, dismissing claims that wide consultation had occurred. They questioned the unrealistic timetable, perceived an urban bias, and denounced the undemocratic selection of governing council members who could be considered elitist and unrepresentative. Their outrage influenced the course of peer review in Ghana, as more extensive consultations were held across the country (especially in selecting the researchers), government ceded considerable space to civil society, and a more transparent and credible review resulted. The Ghanaian experience shows that civil society groups can exert strong influence by being informed and vocal at the start of the national peer review process.

Autonomy confers authority

Kufuor knew that APRM could become politically volatile in Ghana, and not just from disaffected NGOs. Opposition parties could use the report’s assessment of deficiencies as ammunition against the incumbent government, particularly as a general election was due in December 2004. To avoid APR becoming embroiled in politics — and possibly becoming derailed if his New Patriotic Party lost those elections — Kufuor ensured that Ghana’s peer review process was independent of him and his party.

“When we were there for the APR support mission in May 2004, the President told me that there would be an election at the end of the year, and rather than delaying APR until after the vote, Ghana would design a system that would not be affected by the election result,” said Dr Stals.

Ghana’s key APR infrastructure was therefore established not in the presiden-



President John Kufuor at a polling station in Accra, 2004

cy, a ministry or government department. While Dr Francis Appiah — a former senior technical advisor to Ghana's Nepad minister, Dr Kofi Konadu Apraku — was designated as the Ghanaian government's focal point (a communication conduit between Midrand and the governing council), the governing council was deliberately made independent of government, to preserve the integrity and autonomy of the process. The seven-member NAPRM-GC headed by Professor Samuel Adjepong comprised credible, respected individuals drawn exclusively from outside government, including prominent academics, retired diplomats, distinguished lawyers, international consult-

ants and senior religious leaders.

"To ensure transparency and openness, the governing council members were of impeccable public standing," said NAPRM-GC member Professor SKB Asante, "Its size made for economy, flexibility and effective decision making."

The NAPRM-GC was afforded the same status and legal protection from government interference as the Electoral Commission and Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice. Its members were not required to swear the customary oath of allegiance to the president or government. The governing council physically relocated from Nepad Ministry premises to

offices elsewhere in Accra to underscore its autonomy. The Council was supported by an independent National APRM Secretariat headed by an Executive Secretary.

"The president made sure that the governing council could do its work outside of the political world," said Dr Stals.

Strong think tank model

"We had no template," said Professor SKB Asante. "We were a fore-runner and so we had to break new ground and be innovative."

Confronting the complex demands of the peer review exercise — making the

self-assessment questionnaire relevant and accessible to Ghanaians; including the voices and views of a diverse population; ensuring that the report was robust, accurate, credible and independent — one governing council innovation was to turn to Ghana's top research institutions for assistance. Four Technical Review Teams were established in each of the four focus areas of the APR. The Center for Democratic Development headed the Democracy and Political Governance team, the Centre for Policy Analysis tackled the Economic Governance and Management material, Corporate Governance was analysed by the Private Enterprise Foundation, and the Socio-Economic Development section was the responsibility of the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research. Each of these respected think tanks eventually produced frank, rich, detailed reports of approximately 300 pages apiece.

"The four teams helped keep government at a distance," Professor Asante explained. "They all had strong track records, autonomy, expertise, capacity and integrity. Many had showed leadership in advocacy and lobbying in civil society."

Robust research

The researchers confronted tough questions. How does Ghana best evaluate itself? How should it adapt the often-vague and generic self-assessment questionnaire? How could they minimise speculation, allegation and bias? How could Ghanaians come to consensus on problems and solutions? And, most importantly, how would they keep the process transparent, fair and inclusive?

The Technical Review Teams developed a four-phase research process. The pre-field methodology entailed five strands: an education and sensitisation drive to inform and excite Ghanaians about APRM and foster a sense of national ownership; coordinating and harmonising the methodological approaches of the four teams; identifying stakeholders; adapting the self-

assessment questionnaire into a scientific survey instrument; and gathering information and data for the APR panel.

Ghanaians managed to popularise the complex, unfamiliar and somewhat obscure concept of APRM. The governing council issued widely-distributed monthly newsletters updating the nation, and held well-publicised meetings across the country. The questionnaire was translated into indigenous languages, and APRM songs became radio hits. Special seminars were held to educate the media on APRM.

Dr Stals singled out Ghana's effective sensitisation efforts. "Every time I landed in Ghana, I was met at the airport by several radio stations, TV crews and journalists," he said. "They used my visits to promote APRM, but they also used themselves. The governing council members and Minister Apraku were very active in the media."

The field methodology involved: elite surveys among experts with intensive knowledge about key governance issues in government, academia, the private sector and civil society; a mass household survey in all Ghana's ten administrative regions to gather representative views; and focus group discussions with targeted groups (such as women, youth or people with disabilities) on particular questions.

The in-house methodology covered the internal operation of the research teams. It involved extensive desk research to review existing literature, and internal peer reviews where the teams criticised each other's drafts.

Agyeman-Duah said, "We spent months putting the report together, day and night. You have to get the experts to gather the facts and analyse and get them to involve the people. There is no substitute for solid research."

Finally, the post-field methodology served to test the findings generated in the first three phases. The drafts were subjected to a reality check. Technical experts interrogated the four draft reports, and the draft went through a "validation workshop" in February 2005, where a wide array of stakeholders

- including government, unions, parliamentarians and businesspersons - compared the academic analysis to daily practice in Ghana.

"Ghana's self-assessment report was candid," said Change. "It had been developed by credible national civil society institutions. It was clear there weren't any no-go areas."

From self-assessment to peer review

Kufuor won a landslide in the December 2004 election, and with a renewed mandate, his government became more involved in owning Ghana's APR programme of action, the document outlining solutions to the governance weaknesses identified.

"In the end the government committed strongly to the programme of action," said Dr Stals, "and brought some practical sense to what was previously in some respects an ambitious, rather unrealistic wish-list generated by civil society. Government took full responsibility after the elections."

A year after the inauguration of the governing council (and two years after signing the MOU), Ghana submitted its country's self-assessment report to the APRM Secretariat, in March 2005. It consisted of a consolidated report, executive summary, the four technical reports as appendices, and a programme of action — amounting to about 2,000 pages. Government appended its comments to the national report, in accordance with APR guidelines.

Dr Stals led a 16-member country review team to Ghana, comprising mainly of people seconded from institutions such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, United Nations Development Programme and African Development Bank to Ghana from 2-15 April 2005. They interacted with government, opposition parties, parliamentarians, civil society organisations, the media, academics, and professional bodies across the country, and concluded that the self assessment was "technically competent,

credible and free of manipulation.”

The APR Panel then combined its own background paper, the country self-assessment and its country review mission report plus the Panel’s recommendations into its final report, which was presented to the APR Forum (the heads of state of all APRM countries) in June 2005 in Abuja, Nigeria, along with Rwanda’s APR report.

The final stage of the process occurred seven months later, in January 2006 in Khartoum, where President Kufuor defended the report for four hours to the leaders of the APR Forum. Interestingly, Ghana submitted a revised programme of action, where the price tag ballooned from \$2.9 billion in June 2005 to \$5 billion in January 2006 (including existing projects and programmes, and with more detailed costing on infrastructure requirements). Kufuor reported that 19 of the 159 recommendations were already being implemented.

Muratha Kinuthia, Public Relations and Communication Officer from Kenya’s Nepad Secretariat said, “The Kenyan Delegation was very impressed with the ease with which the Ghanaian President spoke on some of the key issues emanating from the report. We feel that the fact that the Cabinet retreat in Ghana was chaired by the President to discuss the report also speaks to the commitment of the Ghanaian government. We have taken up discussions with Ghana on their plans for the Programme of Action and we are hoping to learn a lot from their experience.”

Some observers expressed disappointment with this meeting: they said there was little discussion of best practices in Ghana; some heads of state seemed not to grasp the ethos of the peer review and spent time castigating Ghana for following (and the APR panel for supposedly endorsing) western-inspired neo-liberal policies; Ghana’s report was sufficiently candid that there was little for the peers to add; and there was no press briefing arranged for Kufuor and little media interest generated.

Disappointingly, the Rwanda report was not presented to the Forum, as

President Paul Kagame did not attend and his prime minister was not permitted to present on his behalf. Rwanda will therefore have to wait at least another six months until the next Forum.

Another frustration is that the Ghana APR report, now almost a year old, is yet to be formally released. There is some confusion over the reasons. The Panel feels that it should now be made public, having been presented to the Forum, but it may still take several more weeks or months to sort out protocol issues between the APRM and Nepad Secretariats and the African Union Commission, and to table the report at the Pan-African Parliament. Ghanaians and the world still wait to see what was written.

Ten lessons learned

1. Leadership matters: Ghana’s president was completely committed to APR, determined that Ghana should produce an honest report, and prepared to trust civil society to run the review.
2. Early civil society pressure delivers results: Although governments are usually better resourced and better prepared for APRM than non-governmental players, informed and vocal CSOs can exert most influence by lobbying early for a more inclusive and consultative process. Opportunities to change the dynamics diminish as systems solidify
3. Independence lends credibility: Ghana’s report will be taken seriously because of the autonomy granted to its researchers and governing council.
4. Governing council must command respect: By choosing competent, respected, media-savvy, independent public figures, Ghana’s governing council had the trust of the people. However, public nominations would have been preferable to presidential selections.
5. Prepare the ground for APRM: Ghana’s efforts to raise awareness of

and interest in APRM before embarking on the field research meant a more educated and receptive populace.

6. Sound methodology enhances quality: The mix of research approaches - combining education and sensitisation; eliciting expert views; undertaking broad household surveys; conducting exhaustive desk research; using focus groups; and validating and testing findings — ensured that Ghana’s report was accurate, fair and representative.
7. Participatory process fosters ownership: Ghana involved a wide range of its people in preparing and endorsing the country’s report. It advertised APRM events widely. People felt they owned the process.
8. Government must run with programme of action: While the researchers can sketch a programme of action, the line ministries affected must buy into the process.
9. Reconsider the peer review process at Forum level: The Ghana case shows that the APR Forum meetings need to be better planned and executed to make the peer review process more meaningful.
10. Reports must be released more quickly: The impetus and effect of APRM is lost when this crucial information remains out of the public domain for long periods.

Although Ghana has set high standards, not all of its experiences and methodologies will be applicable and appropriate in other countries at different stages of development. However, it does offer excellent models to others wishing their reviews to stand up to scrutiny. As SKB Asante said, “If you dare make APR a government thing, it won’t last. It won’t be believed, unless it’s truly a people’s APRM.” •

1 See Masterson G, *Governance Quality and Government Commitment to the Nepad African Peer Review Mechanism*, Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, Johannesburg, 2004, pp 50-60.