

“IS THE MOMENTUM ON THE APRM SLOWLY DYING DOWN?” ASKS JCTR

“As we begin a new year, it would be good to see renewed interest, energy and commitment towards the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). This commitment should be from all major sectors that include government, civil society and the private sector. It is true that the primary driver of the process is the government through the National Governing Council and the National APRM Secretariat (Governance Secretariat). **However**, citizens, civil society, media, and the private sector should **also** play a very complementary role in making this process work successfully. As long as we all remain quiet on this important governance process or reactive to certain events on the process, there will be no incentive for the government and indeed the National Governing Council (NGC) to move this process at a reasonable pace,” asserts the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR).

Since 2006 when Zambia acceded to the APRM, we have seen an inertia from not only the government but civil society and media to propel this process forward by popularising it, educating citizens to participate in the process, building interest in the general population, and arousing more debates in Parliament that refer to the principles of the APRM. More than four years later, we are yet to see this momentum continue to build to satisfactory levels.

Lack of enough knowledge in the APRM somehow has affected responsiveness from citizens in data collection by researchers, validation of the research reports, and validation of the Country Self Assessment Report and National Programme of Action. In most of these interactions, it has become clear that even citizens living in areas with access to information (media), there is need for more information on the APRM.

This is worrying despite the National Governing Council's limited efforts to popularise this process. The NGC's efforts in sensitising groups in Provinces, government departments, setting up websites (www.aprmzambia.org.zm, and *facebook* interactive page branded “*Every Voice Counts*”) are commendable but more can and should be done. Educating citizens on such important processes should not only be a once off initiative but an ongoing one. This continuous education on the APRM, debates on the process, collection of citizens' perspectives on the process, should reflect in the plans and budgets of government.

The APRM, though a government initiative, touches all aspects of governance including political, economic, social and corporate areas. It is therefore important that the APRM, especially the National Programme of Action is taken seriously by government and some of the action points are considered for inclusion in the existing plans such as the Sixth National Development Plan.

It is sad that despite finally producing (in 2010) the Country Self Assessment Report and the National Programme of Action, not much seems to be happening to make sure that Zambia finalises the process. Completing this process will facilitate Zambia's peer review by Heads of States of African Union that have also acceded to this process. Peer review should be seen as a very important process because our Head of State will be made to account for some of the governance problems and successes that Zambians have highlighted in the assessment reports. Peer review is also a starting point for us Zambians to begin to reverse and end governance shortcomings and strengthen the best practices in governance.

If peer review is indeed the starting point to a promise of better governance, the JCTR strongly urges government through the National Governing Council to take positive steps to come up with a realistic roadmap that will sure that Zambia is peer reviewed this year even when it is an election year. “Simply because Zambia is having the tripartite elections does not mean that governance pauses and takes a break,” further asserts JCTR.

The JCTR remains committed to seeing this process successfully work to improve governance in Zambia.

Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR)

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