

ZAMBIA, WHERE ARE WE GOING WITH THE AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM (APRM)? SERIOUSLY QUESTIONS JCTR

"It seems Zambia is locked in a deadlock of international and local commitments that it does not fulfil but keep bragging about. These commitments include the international and regional treaties, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), national planning commitments like the National Development Plans, Vision 2030, the Indaba, fight against corruption, the never-ending Constitution-making process, and now the stalled African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The big questions are: Where are we really going with the APRM process? Why are Zambians in the dark on what is going on with the process? Why is it that the majority of Zambians still do not know about the APRM? Why can the public not easily access the information from the National Governing Council (NGC) housed at the Ministry of Justice under the Governance Secretariat? Will the APRM just end up like other national processes that have hefty budgets, big allowances, questionable personalities and intentions but never yielding satisfactory results?" questions Dominic Liche the Governance Officer at the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR).

Recently, at the official opening of the fourth session of the tenth National Assembly (September 2009), President Rupiah Banda asserted that "the APRM process is working effectively and is already assisting Government to enhance democracy and good governance." It would have been good to give Zambians more information on how effective this process is going and specifically how it has already helped Government in enhancing democracy and good governance. In the past two months, this was the latest information, the public got on the APRM.

Zambians should be tired of not getting satisfactory answers from Government on processes that are there to benefit the people. Zambians should, more and more, demand their basic right of having justifications and explanations for certain decisions, plans, use of public resources by our Government. The JCTR has always stressed that Government is elected by the people to deliver certain services. Zambians do not elect persons into offices for those persons' interests (like more money in their pockets and more personal opportunities) but to help people to live their lives to the full.

Although Zambia signed on to the APRM in January 2006 and made renewed interest in February 2009, there has been limited transparency, accountability, independence, and commitment to the process by Government. We expected the process to have realistic and representative numbers of persons on the NGC, NGC Chair, vice and spokesperson chosen by NGC members, realistic and doable roadmap, regular reports to the citizens about what is going on in the process, transparency about engagements of media and consultants in the process, more education of citizens on the process for reasonable participation. Most of these have been lacking in the process.

In the official roadmap that was presented in February 2009 at the signing of the MoU with Continental APRM Structures where Zambia officially began the APRM process, it shows that Zambia will be peer reviewed in January 2010. But up to now we have only managed to do minimal education of citizens on the APRM. It is not clear how far the consultants (so called Technical Research Institutions – TRIs) have gone in doing research in the four areas of governance that the APRM seeks to address (democracy and political, corporate, economic, and socio-economic governance). In the roadmap, it was indicated that by June 2009, we should have validated both the draft Country Self-Assessment Report and the Programme of Action report and in July we should have received a visit from the Country Review Mission team. Despite some sectors of society having expressed that the APRM roadmap is unrealistic very early in May and June this year, nothing has been done to revise the roadmap or if anything has been done, it has not been made public.

The APRM seems now to be following in the footsteps of staggering national processes like the Constitutional-making process, the national Indabas, and the so many good national plans and strategies that are highly questionable in terms of really bringing benefit to Zambians.

Mr. Liche further asserts that the "JCTR, therefore asks for some answers to where we are in the process, what is going on with this process, what the members of the NGC are doing, what their plans

are to ensure that Zambia is reviewed in 2010, and where we are in incorporating civil society organisations in the fulfilment of the APRM process. It is high time Government realised that they are there as servants of the people serving real people's needs and not their own and political interests."

It would be good to show through the APRM, a governance self-assessment tool, a difference in doing business in Zambia's national governance and development processes. It would be sad if the APRM remained stalled, never-ending, money gobbling like the national Constitution-making process (that began in 2003) that has no clear timelines and questionable transparency and decisions.

Our work as JCTR in 6 areas of Zambia and several rural areas across the country shows lack or very little knowledge by Zambians on the APRM and doubts on whether such a process will ever yield good results or even meet its intended goal of enhancing good governance.

"More accountability in national processes, such as the APRM, should be demonstrated. More transparency is needed if this process is to be successful. It would be very difficult for Zambians to meaningfully participate in the process when they do not know what is going on in the process. It is never too late to do more education of citizens on the process, to revisit the national roadmap, and to collaborate more with civil society organisations," asserts Mr. Liche.

As JCTR, we remain committed to seeing a successful APRM process in Zambia. And a few weeks ago we produced an updated APRM book to continue in our efforts of educating the citizens on the process, highlighting key issues that must be looked at, and giving some policy recommendations to Government, the private sector, and civic actors for a successful APRM. JCTR will not give up on this process for our *Vision* has always been to have a society where justice for all, especially the poor, flourishes.

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