

When will Zambia be peer-reviewed under the African peer review mechanism (APRM)? Asks JCTR

“Despite the fact that Zambia acceded to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) in January 2006, we seem to be far from completing the first review (Base Review). Even when early this year we were assured by the National Governing Council (NGC) that Zambia will be peer-reviewed in June 2010, June and July (since the African Summit was moved from June to July 2010) have passed without being reviewed. What is worse is that we have not heard any official information from the NGC or from the APRM Focal Person for Zambia explaining what is the status of the APRM in Zambia and some of the reasons that have led to Zambia not being peer-reviewed. Zambians remain in the dark on this very important governance process,” explains Dominic Liche, Governance Officer at the *Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR)*.

If Zambia is failing in many national processes like completing the Constitution making process within the planned time, it would have been good for it to show that governance is working in Zambia by completing the APRM process in track record time. Early this year, representatives of many groups and provinces gathered to review and validate the four thematic reports and draft Programmes of Action following the highlighted gaps in governance. Since then, no official information has been given on how those reports have been completed after the submissions and suggestions that were made to perfect the reports.

The National Governing Council (NGC) that is spearheading the APRM in Zambia has continued to give sporadic information on the APRM to the general public and has by far failed to popularise the APRM in Zambia like in other Countries like Ghana and Uganda. The use of the media to disseminate APRM information has been minimal, actual workshops on the APRM mostly happened in urban areas (in Provincial towns), no billboards were done on the APRM, no major publication on the APRM was done. “How else would Zambians know about the process? And if citizens do not have sufficient information on the APRM and how to make their submissions, how can they participate in the process?” further asserts Mr. Liche.

Most of the research to come up with the draft APRM thematic reports was done in urban areas with limited sampled persons and groups. The reports were prepared without widespread research and consultation in all the districts of Zambia. This is sad especially because the APRM when done well is supposed to be a very widely consultative process using very credible and knowledgeable Technical Research Institutions (TRIs).

The failure by Zambia to complete this process in the recommended time of 18 months or even in 4 years (2006 until now) only highlights one key weakness of the APRM that it is voluntary to Member States and no sanctions can be administered on countries that fail to finish the process in the recommended time. Further, no sanctions are administered on countries that fail to implement the Programme of Action or the recommendations from other Peers (Heads of States of participating countries). Although we had faith that it is a strength to have the APRM as voluntary because it is hoped that there can be more commitment by African Countries that volunteer to go through it, experience in Zambia and elsewhere is showing that this is not the case.

The JCTR therefore calls for more information on the APRM to be made available to the Zambian citizens either by monthly press briefings or quarterly “State of APRM Bulletins” so that Zambians are aware of what is happening in the APRM process. Secondly, we call for more education of citizens by Government on the APRM process through greater use of the media. All media avenues should be used including newspaper ads, billboards, regular radio and TV programmes, and brochures explaining what the APRM is all about. Without information on this process it would be difficult for citizens to have a stake in the governance of this Country.