

CSO Engagement in the upcoming Peer Review for Uganda

*Presented to the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) Support Mission to Uganda
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Introduction

It is envisaged that the APRM will go a long way in determining whether countries like Uganda have conformed to principles laid out in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) including the rule of law and respect for human rights. We hope that these Peer Reviews will manifest the extent of commitment on the part of our governments that have acceded to the APRM, to take concrete steps to espouse the relevant values, norms and standards to which they have committed themselves in the Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance. All stakeholders in the process, including civil society actors, need to work towards the realisation of an effective Peer Review Mechanism. We know that this is not an easy task and achieving the benefits of the peer review will require public confidence in its credibility, entailing broad public and civil society participation. Civil society organisations will ensure that the process takes the debate to the community. Communities deep at the grassroots and indeed the wider public must have a clear idea about what the peer review means and what it involves. The role of civil society therefore must become central to the process for it (the process) to be seen to be **open, transparent and credible**.

Civil Society Engagement in the Peer Review for Uganda

Uganda National NGO Forum¹ and the Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA)² are working together to coordinate and mobilise CSOs for their participation and collective input in the Peer Review process for Uganda. NGO Forum and DENIVA are recognized by key development stakeholders and partners including Government as lead agencies for effective coordination of civil society input to key development processes at sub-national (district) and national level.

In this regard, we would like to inform the Support Mission and the key stakeholders in the process that a civil society coordinated process is already in place to strategise for constructive CSO engagement. A brochure on the process has been produced; CSOs have attended meetings in South Africa and Algeria. A number of meetings have already been held to discuss our engagement. Lead civil society agencies on the four areas of focus for the review (democracy and good political governance; economic governance and management; corporate governance; and socio-economic development) have been identified to provide in-depth evidence-based situational analysis on these aspects. In fact draft submissions from the lead agencies on these aspects have already been made and are

¹ Uganda National NGO Forum is a membership organisation national and international NGOs operating in Uganda. Its overall objective is to contribute to the development and implementation of public policies and plans so that they progressively reflect the views and concerns of the poor and meet their basic needs.

² DENIVA is a membership organisation of indigenous Ugandan NGOs and Community Based Organisations. DENIVA works to empower its member organisations and other civic organisations for democratic governance and sustainable development.

being synthesised into an early CSO draft submission. In addition, we shall also focus on the corruption and peace and conflict sub-components.

- ❑ In terms of our engagement in the review, we would like to constructively engage with the Review Team on setting the agenda of the review process through identifying and selecting particular areas of interest and concern to civil society that should become key focus areas for the review. Furthermore, we would like to engage with the Review Team on the outcome of the consultation process and findings in the Review Team's report to ascertain whether key aspects of our submissions have been considered in the report. We propose that, like Government, civil society also be allowed to comment on the draft report. Additionally, the Government response to this report should be made available to civil society for use in holding it accountable to its commitments.
- ❑ It is critical that CSOs are given an opportunity to fully participate in drawing up the National Plan of Action. It is here that civil society will ensure that the concerns and priorities of its constituencies are given due consideration. Specific mechanisms on how we will engage in this aspect needs to be clarified by the support mission.
- ❑ CSOs are prepared to undertake intensive public awareness campaigns particularly at the district level and below, about the purpose, objectives and process of the review. This will aim at keeping the review process in the public consciousness, mobilizing public support for the review for enhancing ownership of the review process and engendering wide and effective participation.
- ❑ It is important to note that wide consultations with our constituencies particularly at the grassroots level require sufficient time. We would wish therefore that stage 2 of the Review process be accorded enough time, be well managed and adequate resources made available for its implementation.
- ❑ We plan to build on the existing research and positions that have already been developed by CSOs, such as the CSO PEAP Revision Submission, the CS Minimum Agenda for the political transition and independent assessments on the specific issues under review.
- ❑ On an ongoing basis, civil society organisations intend to use the findings and responses in the report to demand that Government fulfils commitments to reform. Outcomes of the report should therefore be made public for civil society to continuously lobby and use them to demand government compliance with the recommendations.
- ❑ Lastly, civil society is aware that the meagreness of resources will disaffect its engagement in the review. We would require adequate resources to undertake our own assessments, reviews and consultations for input in the review. While we commit ourselves to mobilising additional resources to augment official ones, Government must make available adequate resources to enable them undertake their part of the bargain.

For the Review process to be credible, civil society would like the following issues carefully considered and/or clarified:

- ❑ **Government Commitment:** Under the APRM guidelines, each participating country including Uganda is required to financially contribute to the running of the APRM process. It is therefore critical that Government demonstrates unconditional commitment and political will to the peer review process by allocating adequate resources for its implementation.
- ❑ **Who is to be Peer Reviewed?:** At the experience sharing meeting recently held in Algiers, consensus emerged that the review process should encompass the entire body politic i.e. the Executive, Parliament (Legislature), political parties, CSOs etc. This is important in order to minimise finger-pointing. We wish to bring this to the attention of this support mission for serious consideration.
- ❑ **Neutrality of the National APR Focal Point:** National Planning Authority (NPA) is the APR Focal Point. It is important that NPA remains neutral in terms of ensuring the safe custody of the information provided during the review process particularly in the questionnaire.
- ❑ We are anxious to see the **independence of the Peer Review** made paramount and reviewers free of any Government and outside influence that would in any way compromise or undermine its integrity. The Review Team must assure us all that, “peer” reviews are not sham mechanisms for governments to close eyes to serious inadequacies by their peers. The report must have teeth and it must bite.
- ❑ **Composition of the APRM Commission:** According to information available, an APRM National Commission, supposedly to be composed of persons with good standing and high integrity, will be inaugurated sometime this week. Knowing that the Commission should be appointed after wide consultations with relevant stakeholders including civil society, we are concerned that CSOs have not been asked to participate in nominating members for the Commission. Therefore, Civil Society will pronounce itself on the independence, neutrality or otherwise of the commission when its members are revealed. There is need for political neutrality of the Commission particularly as this review comes at a time of heightened political activity (the transition debates). Since the Peer Review comes at this particular time when we are debating political transition as well as preparing for the next elections, we strongly recommend a model along the Ghana process to be adopted for Uganda.
- ❑ **Roadmap for the Review Process:** In order to ensure effective broad participation and engagement in the review process by all stakeholders, particularly civil society, there is need for a clear schedule and agenda for the process to be drawn and availed to all. The National Planning Authority should provide a clearly laid down and elaborate roadmap for the entire peer review process; this will enable CSOs to adequately plan for their input.

- ❑ **Access to Information:** While CSOs appreciate the infancy of NPA in the APRM initiative and are committed to working with it to ensure that the peer review process works as envisaged, it is critical that timely and correct information regarding the process is adequately and accurately provided to all stakeholders, particularly to CSOs. To illuminate the case in point, there was still confusing information until Friday last week on whether this was the actual peer review mission itself or a support mission to prepare for the review. The role civil society was expected to play at this stage was not clear. In addition, while information regarding this meeting (Working Session with the Support Mission) was provided and the meeting had earlier been scheduled to take place on 16th February 2005, information on change of date and venue for the same meeting was sent near to close of business last Friday. Such incidences, whether deliberate or not impede constructive engagement of CSOs.

- ❑ **Technical Assessment Lead Partners:** Relatedly, we understand that agencies have already been identified to provide the lead role in the self assessment process, specifically in filling the APRM assessment questionnaire. Civil Society Organisations have not been involved in their identification and are not among them. It is not clear how we shall participate in filling the questionnaire. If the questionnaires will form part of the APR report for purpose of authenticity, it is important that this issue is clarified.

- ❑ **More Space and an Enabling environment for CSOs:** Although CSOs appear in stage two of the peer review process, we wish to call for more space beyond this stage as already articulated above. Also we call on Government to enact a more liberal and partnership enhancing law to make the CSOs play their role in processes such as this review. For avoidance of doubt we are referring to the enactment of the NGO Act as proposed by CSOs.

Conclusion

This review is timely and could be of tremendous value in the democratization process, particularly if it is conducted impartially. CSOs commit themselves to playing their role to the extent possible. We look forward to getting issues that remain unclear clarified during this meeting.